



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

14 July 2009

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

'After speaking with a local resident, I am deeply concerned that Norwich City Council is offering incentives to people who pay their rent on time rather than pursuing those who don't. Where is the money for your TLC scheme coming from and do you not think that offering clearly marked vouchers to people regardless of whether they want them might be seen as reintroducing a social stigma to those in social housing?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

'The Tenant loyalty card (TLC) scheme was introduced in 2008 after discussion with the Citywide Board and Executive approval. This is primarily a discount card, not a voucher system, and is funded from the housing revenue account.

Part of the Council's objective of encouraging good tenancy management the aim of the scheme is to 'give something back' to the majority of tenants who make less calls on housing management resources by paying rent regularly and not breaching tenancy conditions. This approach has been encouraged by the Audit Commission, as encouraging a rent paying culture, and the scheme operates in over 50 social housing organisations in the UK. It is a way of thanking our responsible tenants.

The organisation Countdown provides qualifying tenants with a plastic card which gives them access to discounts at over 25,000 outlets. These can be accessed either directly at local / national stores, through teleshopping or gift vouchers or by visiting Countdown's own website.

This scheme also benefits local economy as local retailers are encouraged to join the scheme and benefit from additional advertising and custom.

The card bears the logo TLC with the Norwich City Council logo on the rear. There is no mention of council housing or tenure status.

The scheme appears to be valued because in 2008, when it began, 9,460 tenants met the criteria for a card. In April 2009 10,035 out of 14,046 secure tenants, qualified for a card, the past year having seen a reduction in rent arrears and an improvement in gas servicing access. So far 6 tenants have chosen not to accept their cards.

As part of our ongoing improvement plan within landlord services we will review the scheme with tenants and leaseholders.

With regard to those who can't or don't pay their rents on time our welfare rights team works with tenants to help them claim all their benefits entitlement. In addition we have a team of rent arrears officers who work with tenants who do not pay. The approach is to look at how we can support individuals and help them retain their tenancies. However the team does pursue those who don't pay and indeed our current performance figures on rent arrears show that we are meeting our targets, quite an achievement given the difficult times we are living through.

You will be aware also of the money fairs which have been organised across the City and which have been welcomed by tenants and residents alike. I believe our approach of rewarding those who do pay their rent on time while working to enable those who don't to avoid greater rent arrears and possible eviction is a positive one.'

Question 2

Councillor Antony Little to the Leader of the Council:-

'How much does the Council pay to be members of external bodies such as the LGA? What tangible benefits does the Council receive from our membership and does the Executive Member believe one good way of showing fiscal restraint without impacting on front line delivery would be to abolish the local government magazines that we receive and mostly end up being recycled without being read?'

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'The cost of LGA membership is £13,486 and all except two councils in England, are members.

The LGA acts as the voice of the local government sector, advocating on the issues that matter most to councils. It does this by:

- generating positive stories about local government in the national and specialist media and working to rebut negative stories;
- initiating policy and debate about policy, based on the real experiences of councils and the communities that they serve;
- working with government to influence the legislative agenda and challenging the government where appropriate;
- influencing EU legislation and policy in Brussels and Whitehall;
- commissioning research, and identifying international best practice to provide evidence to support policy lines and to anticipate future developments that will impact on councils and the services that they provide;
- delivering a comprehensive programme of conferences and events to enable members and member councils to engage in all aspects of and to keep them informed of new and forthcoming developments.

The cost of LGiU (local Government information unit) membership is £3,100. It provides briefings on government white papers, legislation and best practice. It also provides an opportunity for membership of good practice networks where we share

best practice with colleagues across the country and from other cities, – for instance training on the new requirement to do economic assessments is being provided via LGiU and is better and cheaper than elsewhere because of the direct government input.

The LGiU provides statistics and data and assists with the interpretation of data, working with us to analyse the outputs relevant to Norwich and comparing Norwich to other similar cities enabling performance comparison.

The cost of EERA membership is £11,600. This provides the 52 local authorities in the region with access to a range of support and assistance including: -

- advice and support on employment law and management practice
- training and consultancy services
- sharing best practice through regional networks and conferences
- representing local government in consultation and negotiations with trade unions
- employment research
- support for local authorities in promoting employment and skills development in their localities

EERA has also aligned much of its regional employers work to improving efficiency and capacity within the region by working with Improvement East (the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership hosted by EERA).

The Corporate Management Team have recently agreed to reduce the number of Local Government Chronicles (LGC) and Municipal Journals (MJ) purchased to two, and these are made available for all to read.

The LGC and MJ have been provided in the group rooms of the three main parties for some time because councillors recognised them as a key source of information on issues facing local government. However, as there is considerable duplication between the two publications and the fact that much of the information is available online, the three main groups informed Democratic Services in May that they did not wish their subscriptions for the MJ to be renewed. The Green and Lib Dem groups have also decided that their subscription for the LGC is no longer required. If the Conservative group's copies have been left unread then you too could have taken the same initiative as the three main groups.'

Question 3

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

'With regards to the recent health statistics, can I ask what the Executive proposes to do regarding this issue in light of the fact that 10 out of the 32 indicators fall below the national average in Norwich, with special focus on the teenage pregnancy rate which is 50% worse than the average?'

Councillor Susan Sands, Executive Member for Children and Young People's reply:-

'Teenage pregnancy as I'm sure Councillor Fisher knows, is not just about curiosity on the part of our teenagers, but is linked to deprivation and low self-esteem and a lack of aspiration in life.

Whilst the City Council does not have a statutory role in either education or health services, it does have a duty to have regard to the targets within the Norfolk Local Area Agreement where these issues are being addressed in partnership and I am clear that the City Council has a part to play in tackling these issues.

The City Council therefore provides a range of services which complement the statutory providers. For instance, in 2008-9, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) funding was used to support a project that resulted in 40% of all teenage conceptions in the central area being tested at Mancroft Advice Project, where support and advice is then available. As a consequence in 2009-10 the NRF Board has agreed the following priorities:

- reducing health inequalities in particular teenage pregnancy and mental health issues
- addressing worklessness which will impact upon levels of poverty

Unfortunately our NRF funding ends in March 2010 and at present there is no prospect of any new funding for projects like this in 2010/11.

During the last recession, teenage pregnancies soared nationally and with funding cuts it is increasingly a case of doing more with less.

The Norfolk Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Unit (Norfolk County Council) has made a commitment to a 50% reduction in the number of conceptions in the under 18s by 2010 and to supporting young mothers and fathers to access education, training and employment.

As 2010 is not that far off, I would urge Councillor Fisher to make enquiries to County Council as to how they intend to achieve this and their progress so far.'

Question 4

Councillor Roy Blower to the Leader of the Council:-

'In the 1990's the Labour council introduced Community Power that was widely embraced by the city. Could the Leader of the Council remind us what happened to that scheme?'

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'We have today produced a briefing today called 'Strengthening Communities' which is a briefing that sets out the history and development of Community Power and the decisions taken on 3 December 2002 that led to its ultimate demise.

Community Power was the City Council's initiative to encourage greater involvement and strengthen local democracy in Norwich. It was launched in 1997/8, in three pilot areas, with Forums of elected local representatives acting to increase the communication between the Council and the community.

The Forums aimed to influence what happens in their local communities, consulting on local issues and services and look to improve the general well-being of the people in their areas.

The way that the Forums undertook this was through community planning. Community planning combined planning activity with a community development objective and was designed to be bottom-up. The Community Power Report 1997-98 set out a framework for community planning, though this has been interpreted in different ways by different Forums. These guidelines state that 'a community plan is a plan produced and owned by a local community which sets out proposals for the way in which that community wants to develop and respond to changes in the future'.

The guidelines emphasised that community planning was an ongoing and incremental process, rather than simply aimed at producing a plan and set out that the community plan belonged to the community and not the Council.

However, if it is to express the wishes and aspirations of the whole community then it must be arrived at through extensive local discussion and participation. If a comprehensive plan is produced, agreed by the whole community, then it will carry weight with agencies responsible for local services and can be used to influence decisions on the annual budget cycles of the City and County Councils, along with other agencies.

The framework set out what a plan should basically consist of and some suggestions for the process of creating one, such as community audits, surveys of local needs and community profiles. It was deliberately flexible so that community planning could be interpreted and applied in a way that made sense to each of the areas. Community plans should be living documents that are continuously updated. In this way they are not only an end, setting out the vision for a community, but also provide a means of achieving that vision. They not only identify local issues but enable Forums to set out how they might go about addressing them (action planning).

Community Planning in the Twelve Community Power Forums all the Community Forums undertook the development of community plans. In October 1999, the City Council compiled a list of the issues that were coming out of the Forums as a first step in the process of linking community planning with its own strategic planning. This list was considered at Senior Manager level and services gave responses to the issues raised.

Community planning was taken on board in the City Council's policy review and firmly links policy work with implementation. This was seen in the Area Forums input to the Community Safety Strategy, with community safety issues high on the community planning agenda.

Forums held regular public meetings to debate issues of local interest, campaigned on issues such as Anti Social Behaviour, education and public transport, had a

dedicated budget to spend on local environmental improvements (the spending process was a forerunner of participatory budgeting) and all produced their own area newsletters on a regular basis. Through the Volcaan Project the Council supported the capacity building of the community forums and demonstrated that such capacity building can lead on to work directed at specific issues (such as long-term unemployment, community safety).

Some examples of specific activity:-

- A training needs analysis was undertaken and from that set up a comprehensive programme of training, both for Forum Members and officers.
- Project work, as part of a Forum's community planning process, built the Forum's capacity in two ways. Involvement in designing, setting up and running projects develops the skills of Forum Members that can be applied across the range of their activities, including setting up and running such projects for themselves in the future. Secondly, all the projects are designed so that they build the capacity of Forum Members through the information they provide. As well as general, organising skills, Forums have also gained skills in.
 - Survey techniques and questionnaire design.
 - The auditing of green spaces.
 - Carrying out feasibility studies.
 - Consultation techniques.
 - Designing and holding 'Planning for Real' events.
 - Web page design.
 - Fundraising for future projects.'

As the report produced to inform the discussions at council demonstrates, the decisions taken in December 2002 dealt a fatal blow to Community Power. That approach was well ahead of its time and made Norwich a national leader in community engagement and empowerment. We now lag behind as a result and given how long it takes to rebuild the trust and capacity of communities that feel let down it will take some time yet to restore the position sacrificed in December 2002.'

Question 5

Councillor Michael Banham to the Leader of the Council:-

'Does the Leader of the Council believe it is possible to provide more affordable, social housing in the Norwich area whilst slowing down the growth agenda, particularly on green field sites?'

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'Norwich, like many places, has a shortage of affordable housing for its residents. The council are working closely with other partners and stakeholders from a range of areas, to maximise the number of homes delivered. We are always looking at innovative ways of packaging and using vacant sites in and around the City and are well known for our innovative and ambitious approach to providing new homes that has led us to deliver more than 1000 extra affordable homes in the first three years of this administration.

While it is inevitable that some housing will be allocated on green-field sites, within the council boundaries, officers are working to identify areas where previously-developed land can be utilised to bring forward more affordable housing where possible and that will always be a priority. An example of this is the recent review of garage sites owned by the Council, which identified a number of small sites that could be redeveloped for affordable housing. Despite the economic downturn the Housing Development team delivered 229 affordable homes last year, and anticipates delivering a target of over 300 this year, the majority of which will be on previously developed sites.

The total amount of land in all ownerships allocated for building new homes of all tenures in the city is already close to matching that needed simply to meet the council waiting list. It is simply untenable to think all housing need can be met by building on brown field sites unless the skyline was to be filled with high rise blocks or the trend to building homes on employment land continued. The latter would lead to the city becoming less and less of a place that people could run businesses and find work as there would be fewer and fewer sites for employment.

Another alternative is to demolish and regenerate significant areas of the city to create denser and better designed neighbourhoods. That is a desirable element of a future strategy but of itself would not resolve the problem and will cause significant transitory strain as families are relocated during redevelopment.

The idea that slowing down growth would in any sense help deliver affordable housing is fatuous. Developer contributions form the backbone of much social home provision through s106 agreements. It is glaringly obvious that if there is no development there will be developer contributions and so they are not available for affordable homes. Even our new agreement with HCA will anticipate developer contributions to help fund affordable homes and the infrastructure that services those homes and allows people to get to work. If the growth in demand is not met more people become desperate and that leads to all manner of social problems. It also increases the prices asked for property and squeezes many out of the market. A phenomenon we have been all too familiar with that could become even worse.

I note the wording in the question comes from the Green Party County Council manifesto. So let me through this answer issue a challenge to them to explain how it is possible to slow down growth and provide sufficient affordable new homes to meet the current need on brown field sites in the absence of developer contributions and enough brown field sites? Once they have discovered the basic premise of the policy is fatally flawed perhaps they could then explain where they anticipate the many individuals and families in Norwich desperate for homes are going to live and work?'

Question 6

Councillor Mary Cannell to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

'Could the portfolio holder give us an update on the progress of the work to improve our housing service?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

'Since the establishment of the housing improvement team and Housing Improvement Board we have seen a step change in the progress to improve our housing service. Our priority has been to improve our work with and for tenants.

While the Audit Commission's recommendations are challenging, the housing project team are delivering improvements across each of the action plans covering a range of activities. Significant improvements include:-

1. Placing tenants at the heart of the service. To this end we have:-

- Developed more effective ways of engaging and consulting with tenants including improving our working relationship with the Citywide Board and holding a number of tenant and leaseholder panels from which we will form a tenants panel.
- Had input from Tenants' representatives from the Citywide Board into the selection processes for both the new Assistant Director and Head of Housing.
- Listened to tenants and responded to their comments. An example of this is changing the telephone number.
- Improved the quality of our tenants profiling information. Clearly we need to know who our tenants are to be able to provide them with the service they want and need. We now know much more about ethnicity, gender, age and disability.
- Worked with the publications sub Group of the Citywide Board which has approve a "Tenant tick" logo which will in time appear on all the documents used by housing. This ensures that the publications are clear, concise and easily understood. The first of these documents to receive the "Tenant tick" was the decommissioning policy on which tenants made valuable comments.

2. Responding to the Audit Commissions inspection of the Choice Based Lettings Service.

- We are on target to have the work which the Audit Commission recommended in this area of work completed by October of this year. This will ensure even greater clarity and fairness in the Home Options process.

3. Ensuring we have the capacity and competencies within the workforce to provide a 2 star service.

- We have appointed a Head of Housing who has significant experience of working to improve services.
- We are developing an NVQ training programme for staff. This which will be starting in the next few weeks.
- There is closer working across disciplines and departments.

Key to our success is a sound working relationship between tenants, members and officers. This is growing and we all remain committed to delivering a 2 star service by April 2011.'

Question 7

Councillor Deborah Gihawi to the Leader of the Council:-

'What effect will the single conversation agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency have on the people of Norwich?'

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'The Single Conversation Agreement (SCA) is a new approach to strategic working to deliver homes, regeneration and sustainable communities projects in Norwich. The terms of the agreement are being finalised but represent a unique approach to developing homes, communities and new jobs for the city.

It involves an innovative long term partnership with Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) (which is the national housing and regeneration agency for England) based around using City Council assets and HCA investment to deliver benefits to new and existing communities in Norwich.

The objectives of SCA are:

- a. To accelerate the delivery of affordable homes
- b. To increase the supply of private homes
- c. To improve the quality of existing homes
- d. To maximise the opportunities for local employment
- e. To deliver early outputs
- f. To create sustainable communities
- g. To deliver strategic regeneration projects within Norwich, such as eco retrofit programmes or estate renewal.

In effect it gives us much more control over how the needs of the city on the future are met and the ability to influence the standards and rate of expansion to try to meet those needs.

Once legal agreements relating to the HCA are signed, £8M funding from HCA will be made available for Norwich to start to deliver these objectives. This funding will enable us to begin the critical priorities of our agree capital programme. The media unhelpfully suggested that I had 'hinted' that this money could be used for the war memorial refurbishment project. In fact I said the war memorial project is the top priority of the capital programme and an unassailable priority for the administration, and me personally. As soon as the funding is there the scheme will begin immediately and at the moment it looks like the funds from the HCA agreement will be the source of funding. However the council has been struggling with promises made without the funding being in place to meet those promises and that is a mistake this administration has no intention of making.

So, benefits that people of Norwich will see are:

- Affordable housing starting to happen on sites more quickly than would otherwise have done in the current economic climate
- Delivery of key regeneration projects in the City

- Almost 200 job opportunities created straight away - 160 in construction and the supply chain, with 26 full time permanent jobs in regeneration and community projects. Longer term, the number should exceed 1800 jobs to deliver 1300 new homes but the scope of the partnership will allow the acquisition of further land and development of further schemes that could increase the number of jobs and homes well beyond that number.
- The Partnership will ensure that local communities are engaged in plans for new developments and that these meet the HCA's current and future standards of design. We expect to be able to progressively increase the quality of the homes and environmental impact of the developments through working in this partnership.

One of the most exciting features has been the way we have been able to work with the HCA. Rather than seek a structure and then decide what it can deliver we have agreed with HCA what we are trying to achieve and what the partners can bring to the table, and then set out to find a means to deliver it. So rather than get bogged down in traditional bureaucratic snails pace progress, this agreement has happened at extraordinary speed. Apart from sensible innovative practice, it meets the need of the city for swift action in the teeth of the recession.

The vision of the administration has been clear that we want to build more homes local people can afford to buy or rent and improve existing homes, create communities they feel part of and safe in, regenerate areas that let the city down and create jobs and prosperity especially now when times are hard. This agreement makes a significant contribution to all those elements and will boost the confidence of others seeking to invest in our city and its future well being and there is already evidence of this.

Full credit is due to the staff the city council and the HCA for turning the vision into a reality with such competence and drive.

We expect to see things happening in the city almost immediately after the final agreement is signed. It is amazingly good news for Norwich.'

Question 8

Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

'The new community in Three Score, Bowthorpe, is still developing in many ways. One of these is in provision for dog walkers and many people have contacted the Bowthorpe Councillors requesting dog bins. I understand that there is no money within the budgets for these, but was money not put aside for this reason when the development was happening and could the funding be found any other way?'

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

'Cleanliness of our streets and open spaces is important for residents and something that the Executive takes very seriously.

Separate litter bins are not provided these days, instead all litter bins are dual purpose so that residents can use them for litter and dog owners for cleaning up after their dogs.

There is currently no additional funding allocated for the provision of and emptying of new bins, the financial implications being the cost of installation and the on going maintenance costs of emptying which is currently carried out by CityCare. However, Officers do monitor litter bin use and if a bin is not being used to full capacity it could be re-sited to a new location. Officers maintain a list of places where extra bins have been requested and the list currently includes sites in Bowthorpe.

An Officer will visit the area to assess the current situation and if appropriate we can work with dog walkers to raise awareness of the issues and highlight the responsibilities that dog owners have to their pets and to the local community. Information gathered can be used to help plan for future provision of bins in the city as and when resources permit.

We also do lots of publicity work with local groups, schools, the RSPCA and local vets to try and get the message across. The schools work has involved pupils giving their own time to help prepare assembly presentations and this work has proved very effective in raising awareness of dog issues amongst the younger generation.

New open space is often created through section 106 planning obligations or section 106 agreements. These are legal agreements negotiated by the local planning authority with the developer and/or landowner of a proposed development. They identify the specific local facilities, services or improvements necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms.

Where it is not possible to provide such facilities on-site, section 106 agreements can specify that developers make financial contributions, or commuted sums, to the local authority to enable it to provide the required facilities or services outside the site. The expenditure of commuted sums is normally very tightly specified in individual section 106 agreements.

The commuted sum made available from the Three Score development is an off site open space payment to be used towards the cost of providing and/or improving open space facilities on Bowthorpe Marshes. Its use is therefore restricted to Bowthorpe Marshes rather than more general use across the estate and is therefore not suitable for the provision of litter and dog bins across the estate.'

Question 9

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

'The number of people wanting allotments in the city is growing - a waiting list of 500 I understand. With this level of interest in gardening it is difficult for the council to provide allotments to all those who want them.

Would the council adopt a strategy of offering overgrown plots to those on the waiting list in a systematic way and also undertake a review of council owned land to identify areas which could be used for allotments or community gardens?’

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care’s reply:-

‘In April 2008 a review of the allotment service was carried out, to identify the areas of allotment management that were resulting in poor service delivery. An improvement plan was developed, identifying the short, medium and long term actions that needed to be put in place to improve the service, which includes offering overgrown plots to those people on the waiting list.

The allotment waiting list is a result of the current high demand for allotments, which is a national trend, reflecting the rising interest in locally grown food and an understanding that there are physical and mental health benefits associated with working an allotment. The waiting list is also influenced by a number of aspects of allotment management including:

1. The number of plots that an individual can work
2. Regular plot inspections to identify problems of un-worked plots and the remedy of these
3. Plots being re-let as quickly as possible once they become vacant
4. Dividing plots for those people who are not able to work a full plot
5. The number of plots that are historically unlettable because they are overgrown
6. Plots that have not been worked sufficiently and have become overgrown and people are unwilling to take on the tenancy, so they are not lettable

The improvement plan identified a number of key actions required to have an immediate impact.

Ensuring the waiting list is correct

In February 2009 all individuals on the waiting list were contacted to ask if they wished to remain on the waiting list and inform them that the way in which plots would be allocated had been changed.

People on the waiting list without a plot would be given priority over those people on the waiting list who already had at least one plot.

Prior to the review, the waiting list held 1769 entries (people could be on up to three lists and due to the way the report was run it was not possible to report on the number of individuals).

Following the review the list had 1053 entries made up of 511 different individuals.

Undertaking regular plot inspections

To pick up problems of unworked plots, the issuing of notices to remedy and evictions for those who do not do the work

Plots being re-let as quickly as possible once they become vacant

If a plot is overgrown the Customer Contact Team will contact the person at the top of the waiting list without a plot to see if they are interested in taking on an overgrown plot to reduce the time they are waiting on the list.

As a pilot, expressions of interest in clearing an historically overgrown area on Mousehold South was sought from the first 60 people on the list who did not have an allotment and were not waiting for a specific plot.

10 people responded and the plots they need to clear are now being allocated to four people according to their position on the waiting list.

Splitting plots for those people who are not coping with working a full plot

When a plot is identified during plot inspections as not being worked sufficiently a notice to remedy is issued to the tenant that asks them to contact the relevant officer to agree a way of resolving the problem. There are a range of possible solutions, including splitting the plot to make it more manageable with the untenanted half offered to the next eligible person on the waiting list.

Getting unlettable plots let

A range of initiatives have been used to get overgrown plots let including:

- Probation Service and the BTCV clearing plots
- Overgrown plots being offered to the first at the top of the waiting list who does not have a plot, with the second year of the tenancy being rent free if they accept it and get it into production in the first year.
- Volunteers from Elm Grove Lane allotment association recently cleared two unlettable allotment plots on the site. These plots are now tenanted and being worked.

These works have led to an increase in performance during the last year including: an increase in occupancy rate; a reduction of the number of individuals on the waiting list; more regular site inspections; a four fold increase in the number of plots allocated

The future

A site adjacent on the edge of Bowthorpe, has been identified which will provide approximately space for approximately 50-60 plots. The council will need to make provision for the demarcation of allotments and site services as part of the completion of the 3 Score site land sale.

The production of an open space strategy for Norwich will identify areas where there is a deficit of allotments and potential sites suitable for new provision.

There is also the potential for land held by other services that could be used for the growing of fruit and vegetable on a temporary basis. Whilst not formal allotments such land if found would provide additional opportunities.

The resource to take this forward will need to be identified through service and team planning during the course of the year.'

Question 10

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'Like many of my fellow councillors, I am extremely concerned that the Norwich Livestock Market has recently been closed. It is disappointing that the dispute over payment of a long-standing water bill has so far remained unresolved. Would the Leader of the Council please answer the following questions:-

- 1) Is it still the council's intention to seek a solution with the current tenants who manage the Market?
- 2) What level of interest in Norwich Livestock Market has been shown by alternative operators?
- 3) Can he clarify where the council stands with regard to the provisions of the Norwich Corporation Market Act 1860?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'The council had no alternative other than to repossess the site, so the previous occupiers have no rights now regarding the market. We have however had further discussions with them, but they have offered no solution, and nor have they applied through the legal process to challenge the council's repossession. They do have six months in which to make an application 'for relief from forfeiture' from the date when we took possession in early June.

Enquiries have been received from two other market operators, and from one other interest, and we are looking at these. There is an issue in that the previous tenant would have the right to reoccupy if an application seeking relief from forfeiture was successful. It is therefore difficult to find another user short term, especially as the market has been left in a poor condition and would require substantial investment before it could reopen.

The provisions of the Norwich Corporation Act 1860 were embodied in the Norwich Council Act 1984. The 1860 act was aimed at ensuring the inhabitants of Norwich would have local markets so they could obtain Meat, Fish, vegetables and so on - something in today's terms is like the council running a supermarket in Norwich!

The later act says that the council is empowered to provide, regulate, maintain and enlarge the Cattle, Fish and Provision markets, and any other market required. It also says that after consultation they can be closed - and the fish market has met this fate.

We are in a very different situation now than in 1860, and it is unlikely any inhabitants of Norwich will go to the Livestock market as it now is to secure an animal for slaughter for their own use - the market now serves the farming community and butchery business. We have been told that many local farmers use the markets in Newark, Colchester and elsewhere.

However this market is important and that is why we are seeking a solution so a market can be held on a regular basis, with all the advantages that brings to local producers, businesses, local employment and with reduced travel distances to the livestock and environment.'

Question 11

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Leader of the Council:-

'The 28th June marked the 90th anniversary of the signing of the Versailles peace treaty that concluded the 'war to end all wars'. The Norwich War Memorial was erected in remembrance of the soldiers that died in that conflict. In light of this anniversary, could the Executive Member tell council when work on the Memorial Gardens redevelopment will begin?'

Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'We have nominated a contractor, R G Carter, to undertake the refurbishment and improvement work to the Memorial Gardens. As soon as capital funds are available the agreed works to Memorial Gardens will proceed.'

Question 12

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'How much has it cost for the council to contract Deloitte to review and appraise council services and functions, and is there a possibility of duplication with the work of council officers?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'Deloitte were appointed as a result of competitive tendering process, in which 5 bidders submitted proposals. The range of the cost of submitted bids was between £50,000 and over £250,000. The cost of the Deloitte tender is in the range of £70-90,000. The Deloitte tender was selected against a set of Best Value criteria of cost, quality and experience of similar work. We are actively exploring whether the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) will help to fund this work.

The Deloitte project is a concentrated 7 week exercise, and they have placed a dedicated team on-site to work with us. The focus is to analyse the costs of City Council services, to compare these with similar city district councils, and to explore other service aspects such performance, staffing and customer satisfaction. This will produce a range of potential options for service improvements, and a range of

options for service efficiencies or service reductions to help close our budget gap for 2010/11. Deloitte bring a wealth of comparative evidence and experience from different councils that will ensure a strong rationale for the options that they put forward.

This work is complementary to the work of the City Council's small transformation team, and indeed the two teams are working closely together to develop coherent proposals for member consideration and decision. Part of the value of this is that the City Council's team will develop new skills from this joint approach, and will be able to utilise this in ongoing efficiency and improvement work in the future.'

It is worth remembering that we are attempting to close an £8 million shortfall in our budgets, largely due to the effects of the recession. The added value of the Deloitte's work is that it enables us to identify early savings to be set against the £8 million target.'

Question 13

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'In March, the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development informed council that proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act will be "reported to the Executive in June or July prior to submission to the LGA". Could she update council on this process?'

Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

"In November last year, this Council adopted a motion asking the Executive to submit proposals to Government, by the end of July 2009, on how it could make use of the Sustainable Communities Act. What progress has the Executive made with drawing up such proposals?"

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council to reply in the absence of Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'On 18 March 2009, the Executive endorsed an approach by which communities and community groups of interest would be able to submit issues to the Council which might be considered suitable for submission to Government under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.

The Sustainable Communities Act provides a channel for local people to ask central government through their local council to take action on specific issues to promote the sustainability of their communities. On 14th October, 2008 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government issued the first invitation to local authorities to submit proposals under the act. Local authorities have until 31st July 2009 to put forward proposals to the Local Government Association (LGA) who are acting as the "selector" for all proposals.

Guidance indicates that proposals should:

- be innovative and make a clear contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and link to the Local Area Agreement
- be something the government can deliver
- not be something that the council and its partners already has the powers to deliver e.g. the council needs to be aware that the “power of wellbeing” is widely drawn
- should command or be capable of commanding community support
- demonstrate that there has been engagement with “a panel of local persons” that are likely to be affected by or interested in a particular proposal.

There were no additional funds available for this work within 2009/10 service budgets and therefore the Executive agreed that:

- the work to scope proposals would be undertaken by the community engagement team and would need to fit with existing team priorities and workloads
- any new activity should add value to the current and forthcoming community engagement, neighbourhood development and unitary work streams
- that issues identified that met the criteria set by the Department for Communities and Local Government would be considered at a future meeting of the Executive for submission to the LGA.

As the community engagement team have been getting to know their neighbourhoods and meeting groups and residents over the past few months, they have gathered a vast amount of information on local issues that affect our communities, the team have also gained an insight into some of the aspirations that these communities also have. Whilst the issues and aspirations identified are considerable and vary across the City the vast majority of these were generally focussed upon the day-to-day delivery of Council services or were issues that could be resolved through localised partnership working and capacity building within the community. In these circumstances it would not be appropriate to progress these issues through the Sustainable Communities Act process as they would not meet the qualifying criteria and could be resolved locally in a more appropriate and sustainable manner. In addition to this the Council did not receive any independent submissions from groups wishing to submit their own proposals for the Executive consider.

The proposal made by the Older People’s Commission relating to a proposed power of care that meets the criteria laid down by government has been identified and the concept has already met with the approval of council and the Executive. This proposal along with a more detailed report of work carried out to date within local communities will be considered by the Executive at their next meeting due to be held Wednesday 22 July 2009.’

Question 14

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'A plan which incorporated the partial closure of Prince Of Wales Rd was published recently in the local press. Several residents have contacted me with their concerns. They feel that the plan is a further illustration of one law for the 'Night Time Economy' and another for the welfare of local residents. When and how will residents be consulted so that their concerns on this, and related matters, can be taken into consideration?

Residents related concerns include:

- taxis parking on double yellow lines day and night outside residential properties. Police say they can't do anything and "It's up to the council"
- inadequate public toilet provision in the area.
- poor control of anti-social behaviour which makes residents feel threatened if they are walking home in the area.'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'Firstly, can I reassure Councillor Divers that any possible plans for a partial closure of Prince of Wales Road are very, very much in their infancy and at this early stage it is impossible to tell if it will ever come forward as a workable proposal.

The idea was floated a few weeks ago at a regular liaison meeting between the Police, the Community Safety Team, business interests in the street, the City Centre Manager and highways officers from both the City and County Councils. There was a thought among some at the meeting that a partial closure of Prince of Wales Road could help address the public order issues in the street, particularly on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening. It was agreed at the meeting that officers would look at the full impact on the proposal before reporting back. It was also agreed in the meeting that given the sensitive nature of the proposal that the idea should not be made public until the implications of the idea could be fully understood. It is very disappointing that this agreement was not honoured.

Some initial work has taken place on assessing the impact and I understand that this has led to concerns about the effects on neighbouring residents.

There are also concerns about the:-

- enforcement of such a closure;
- number and nature of the physical measures required to close the road;
- amount of permanent signage that would be needed to pre-warn drivers of the closure to dissuade them away from the area on the 3 evenings in question;
- amount of temporary signage and cones that would be required on the night in the immediate vicinity of the area; and
- effect by the displaced traffic on the surrounding streets

However, these concerns need to be balanced against the potential public safety benefits that could be achieved in Prince of Wales Road

Discussions continue among officers on whether there is merit in taking this idea any further forward. I can assure Councillor Divers and the petitioners that such a closure would not go ahead without extensive consultation with all effected stakeholders, including residents, businesses, public transport operators and users, taxi drivers etc. Any closure would need to be supported by a traffic regulation order and this would have to be agreed by the Highways Agency Committee. As Vice Chair of that committee, I can assure you that we would look very closely at all arguments both for and against the idea, should we ever be asked to consider such a closure. However, I must stress it is something we are a long way from at the moment.

On a more positive note, as part of their work in looking at the implications of a possible road closure on Prince of Wales Road officers have identified some changes to the parking arrangements in and around the area that could assist with the public order issues, as well as trying to minimise the impact on the residents. Once the plans have been drawn up and funding secured these measures will be subject to public consultation before a final decision is made on whether to implement them. There are also proposals to look at the phasing of the traffic lights on Prince of Wales Road to reduce further traffic speeds and this is something officers will be taking forward in the coming months. This question raises issues that cut across a number of portfolios and I have asked colleagues and officers to take account of your comments. I know we are all keen to work with residents in areas that are central to the night time economy and to make sure those businesses who operate in these areas take seriously their role as good neighbours to those whose lives are affected by the behaviour of their customers.

Following a meeting only this morning the Safer Neighbour Partnership are to be asked to set up a multi-agency working group to look at all issues in the Prince of Wales Road area, and once they have a clearer idea of what these issues are they will be much better placed to suggest solutions.'

Question 15

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'Does the Executive member agree with me that the pot holes and flooding of Earlham House car park have reached a dangerous and unacceptable state which needs to be swiftly dealt with by the council in the interest of health and safety?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'Discussions with the landowner has taken place over recent weeks and the owner had agreed to undertake a drainage survey by early summer as a first stage in preparation for resolving the drainage issue and thence the surfacing. However, this has not been done.

A formal letter has been sent to the landowner specifying precise requirements and time limits for completing the necessary works and resolving the problems on the site. If this is not complied with then formal action under S.215 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 and is likely to involve the Council undertaking the necessary work and charging the works to the owner.'

Question 16

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'Could the Executive member tell me how many times the charity stall on Hay Hill has been hired since 25th June 2008 and whether any organisations have attempted, unsuccessfully, to hire the stall during this time?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'The Charity stall has been rented out 166 times since the 25 June 2008 to the end of June, 2009. Fridays and Saturdays are the most popular days.

The policy for letting the stall as approved by Executive on 25th June 2008 allows the use for all 'charitable purposes', and unless the use falls into that definition - as specified in the Charities Act 2006, and detailed in the Executive report - then the application will be turned down.

There are always enquiries to book the stall for other purposes, but if the use proposed does not fit the definition of a charitable purpose - for instance commercial or campaigning activities - then the applicant will be turned down for the charity stall and, where possible, directed elsewhere.'

Question 17

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'When a Parking Charge notice is issued and the car owner written to, can the council explain what information the car owner could provide to refute the charge?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

If a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) remains unpaid after 28 days, the Council will send a notice to the car owner. This is a legal document which gives the car owner either:

- another chance to pay the PCN at the relevant charge level or
- the right to formally appeal the issue of the PCN and provide any relevant proof of why you believe your PCN should be cancelled. You have 28 days

to do this by returning the Notice to Owner with the relevant sections completed.

The following is an extract from the Notice to Owner which shows the grounds for representations which can be made:-

"Making Representations

If you think one or more of the grounds below apply, please indicate which one(s) by ticking the appropriate box.

In all cases, please give details in the space provided.

- The alleged contravention did not occur – please explain why you think no contravention took place
- I was not the owner of the vehicle at the time – *if you sold the vehicle before the date of the contravention or bought it after the date, you must tell us the name and address of the person who bought it from you or sold it to you, if you know it. Please supply evidence of the sale / purchase (e.g. a sales receipt)*
- The vehicle had been permitted to remain at rest in the place in question by a person who was in control of the vehicle without the consent of the owner – *Please enclose evidence (e.g. police crime report, insurance claim)*
- We are a hire firm and the vehicle in question was at that material time hired under a hiring agreement; and the person hiring it has signed a statement accepting liability – *please supply a copy of the signed agreement including the name and address of the hirer.*
- The penalty charge exceeded the amount applicable in the circumstances of the case – *if you think you are being asked to pay more than you should legally pay*
- The Traffic Order was invalid – *if you believe the parking restriction in question was invalid or illegal.*
- There has been procedural impropriety on the part of the enforcement authority – *please describe the alleged impropriety*
- That the penalty charge has already been paid in full, or has been paid at the reduced amount within the specified period – *please provide details of the payment method, date and amount.*

A full copy of the NTO can be supplied."

I have to admit to being particularly baffled as to why this question has been asked because the only time anyone would need such information is if they were going to publish to drivers wishing to break the law the reasons they could give to get out of a penalty notice. Anyone unfortunate enough to park illegally is, as I have already stated, given the grounds for a formal appeal.'

Question 18

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"How is the council supporting residents in the King Street area who have difficulty receiving digital TV?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

'The King Street area is recognised as being a bad area for reception of TV signals as it is low lying. Unfortunately until the analogue signal is switched off and the new digital signal switched on (which will be a stronger signal) there is very little the council can do to help. The work the council is doing around upgrading all communal aerials will ensure that the equipment we have in place is capable of receiving a digital signal

An immediate solution would be for residents to purchase a 'Freesat' box, which would then mean their TV signal would come from a satellite as opposed to a mast and therefore not be affected by King Street being in a low lying area. However, we recognise that many of our residents will not be able to afford this cost despite the cost of 'Freesat' boxes dropping dramatically over the past few months. So we are discussing with the contractor carrying out the upgrade work whether there are any other measures we, as a landlord, can take to address this problem in the short term. Clearly we will discuss any recommendations with the local TRA, Citywide board and leaseholders.'

Question 19

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"Why is some of the housing on Knowland Grove and Bates Green being left to the end of the window replacement programme?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

'Some properties in the Knowland Grove and Bates Green areas are of a non-traditional construction known as 'Wimpey No-Fines'. It has recently come to light through work carried out by the Building Research Establishment, amongst others, that this type of construction should not be modified at all (including the mechanical fixing of replacement windows) as this could adversely affect the structural integrity of the property.

We have therefore suspended all window replacement works to 'Wimpey No-Fines' properties and we are working closely with our window contractor and manufacturer to try and identify an alternative form of fixing.'

Question 20

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

'The Norfolk and Norwich Association for the Blind recently raised with one of my colleagues the growing problems experienced with wheelie bins on pavements. Given the problems and even dangers that obstructions on the pavement can present, in particular to those with partial sight or mobility issues, do you consider that the council is proactive enough in ensuring that wheelie bins are not kept permanently on the pavements and that they are removed promptly after collection?'

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

'With the roll out of Alternate Weekly Collection (AWC) much publicity was given stressing the need for householders to take their bins back in after collection. Since then collection calendars, service information leaflets and Citizen have been used to broadcast the message.

It should be noted that residents are asked to put their bins at the curtilage of their property and not on the path and would urge all residents to be mindful of where they are putting their bin ready for collection.

The contractor has an equal responsibility to help maintain an efficient service and to avoid causing problems for residents, pedestrians and road-users. We are working with CityCare to improve performance and get the bins returned to the respective collection points. Norwich City Council has invested resources into a customer care training programme for CityCare collection crews and this included particular reference to the safe and sensible returning of wheeled bins.

At the end of 2008, the Council's cross-political Waste Working Party endorsed a process which empowers Officers to act against obstructions caused by bins left indiscriminately on pavements. This had a key message of education in the first instance followed by use of enforcement powers.

Alongside the communications material available, Officers from the Environmental Services Team carry out surveys and door-knocking as well as visits in response to information provided by Members and residents. So far this year over 1,500 properties have been visited and have received letters advising them of the correct procedures for setting-out and returning their bins. Where householders have persistently left bins out they have received second visits.

The visits have identified some residents who have had problems moving their wheeled bins. In these cases an assisted collection service has been provided, with the bins being taken from their property and returned by the collection crew. We have also been able to supply a number of smaller bins to some who have problems moving or storing the standard 240litre bins.

There is much work going on to identify and resolve issues where bins are left out on the streets. If any Member is aware of such issues please do let our Officers know so further action described above can be taken.

Can I also issue a plea to people to consider those who use footpaths – people with impaired sight and those who are less mobile including wheelchair users and those pushing buggies and prams. Obstacles left on footpaths are obstructions which make life difficult for others and shifting bins is a way of showing a little consideration for others as well as being a rule.'

Question 21

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-

'At this time of year many areas experience a particular problem of rubbish build-up outside houses as residences (especially student houses) are vacated. Has the council considered any specific assistive or preventative measures to deal with this problem, particularly to ensure it is not worsened due to the introduction of fortnightly collections?'

Councillor Brociek- Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's, reply:-

'The Council recognises that waste management problems often occur at households with temporary residents. This is often, though not exclusively, an issue with student households, and is usually the result of a lack of knowledge of local waste and recycling arrangements.

Environmental Services and Communications are currently working with the UEA to devise a comprehensive waste and recycling awareness programme to help to alleviate some of these issues. This will include targeting students' landlords as well as the students themselves in order to ensure that as much information as possible is provided to those who need it. This includes information about what goes in which bin, the collection calendar information, details of the household bulky items service and signposting to the nearest communal recycling facilities.

Street surveys and visits regularly occur in known 'hotspots' – areas with large transient populations. The Environmental Services have knocked on hundreds of doors, sometimes resolving problems on the spot and sometimes having to visit on several occasions. Officers are also working with the UEA to ensure that information is available to new students and to landlords. Once completed, we will use this programme to help inform students of other establishments in the city.

Officers don't just target students, as we recognise that letting agents and landlords also have a key role to play in encouraging their tenants to act responsibly. Regrettably we are not always successful, and it is the case that some agents are not helping the situation by continually clearing out properties and leaving large quantities of rubbish outside. We do have powers of enforcement and if we cannot persuade landlords and agents to properly dispose of waste we will treat this as fly-tipping and take appropriate action. We have also been successful in recovering

costs from some temporary residents who have left their rubbish behind when they have moved away.

I would also welcome suggestions and the involvement of Councillors in affected areas who can play their part in highlighting alternatives to those involved and reporting problems early so they can be dealt with.'

Question 22

Councillor Rupert Read to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'On 31 March 2009 I asked a question to Councillor Morrey about the average occupancy of cars coming into Norwich. I am delighted to hear of the success of car-sharing schemes in the Norwich area outlined in response. The final paragraph of his answer claimed that:-

"Car sharing was promoted and encouraged as one of the measures forming the recent EU funded CIVITAS sustainable transport project in Norwich. Evaluation of the measure as the EU project draws to a close shows that the initiative generated 2167 new members and has saved in the region of 1.4 million vehicle miles, 371 tonnes of carbon dioxide and £320,000 in fuel costs."

Upon further research, it would appear that many of these 2167 new members cannot be attributable to the work done by CIVITAS, but have joined Carshare Norfolk through other initiatives. Does the Council know how many of these new members joined as a result of CIVITAS' funding and promotional activity?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The data quoted in my answer of 31 March 2009 was taken from the CIVITAS Technical Evaluation Report for the specific car sharing measure. The work was led by the County Council, as I made clear in my previous answer and I would suggest that such detailed questioning is better aimed at the County Council.'

Question 23

Councillor Howard Jago to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'I am aware that some garages and other council-owned property areas are not covered for cleaning by CityCare, so are not regularly litter-picked, because the housing service has other financial priorities for its funds. Although I appreciate that contracts are being looked at again for 2010, can we come to some arrangement with the housing department in the meantime with a litter pick schedule?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'A number of garage areas were not included within the original cleaning due to other priorities, primarily the need to maintain public areas which were more visible and important to the local community. Where a particular garage area is in need of a litter pick we have arranged for this to happen and can do so for other areas if needed. A regular cleaning schedule for garage areas would be both expensive and not necessarily direct resources to the areas where it is most needed.

Garage sites across the City have been reviewed as part of an ongoing process to look at how they are managed for the future. Those garage sites not included at present and needing a permanent solution will be considered as part of the new contract for cleaning. In the meantime, as I said earlier, if a site is in need of a litter pick once it is brought to the attention of the relevant Officers a special pick can and is arranged'

Question 24

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

'What is the current status of the Mid-Lakenham TRA, and what is the Council doing to support Tenant Participation in that area?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services reply:-

'Mid Lakenham Tenants Residents Association (TRA) still formally exists but has not met during the last year. Attempts have been made to contact the chair and secretary but this has proved unsuccessful.

The TRA has equipment stored in and also has access to a room at Mansfield Lane area office but this has not been used for some while.

Until the committee of Mid Lakenham TRA meets to decide its future, there is currently no active group in the area.

If the group decides to close, the community engagement officer will, based on limited discussions with some of the previous members of the group, gauge interest from tenants in setting up a resident group or groups perhaps with smaller geographic areas that may be more meaningful to local residents.

These would operate along side other community engagement work being developed and discussions will take place with housing and other services about the roles those service may wish to contribute including the role the group may have in tenant participation.'