NORWICH City Council

Council

27 September 2016

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Coleshill to ask the cabinet member for customer care and leisure:

"Over the summer I was pleased to learn that a new footgolf course - to compliment the one in Eaton Park - was opened at Mousehold, near Heartsease Lane.

Can the cabinet member for customer care and leisure give his opinion on the success achieved so far with footgolf, and the additional income generated for the council?"

Councillor Ryan, cabinet member for customer care and leisure's response:

"At a time when we are having to explore ways of increasing income, I am pleased to be able to report on the success of a new service that has not only developed a new income stream with low level investment, but has also brought a new sport to the city and a new opportunity for children and families to get active.

Footgolf caters for a different audience to pitch and putt and its introduction targeted low use periods of the course to minimise the impact on pitch and putt income and clubs who regularly use the course. The cost to develop and open Footgolf at Eaton Park in August 2015 was £5000. In the first 12 months of this new provision, 4,271 people used the facility, generating £26,000 in income. It is also pleasing to see the role footgolf is playing in getting children and families active, with the proportion of ticket sales for juniors and families playing footgolf being greater than for pitch and putt.

Following on from the successful outcomes at Eaton Park, and with a national decline in the number of people playing pitch and putt, footgolf was introduced at Mousehold in August 2016. In the first month since opening it has generated £3,350 in income. The course makes footgolf more accessible to residents living on the east side of the city; it has different opening times to Eaton; so footgolf can be played in Norwich every day of the week except Wednesdays during the summer sports season; and it provides a different experience and challenge to the Eaton Park course, which should maintain player interest and participation."

Question 2

Councillor Maguire to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"The summer 'Don't bin it, bring it!' event held at Norwich Airport Park helped raise more than £6,000 for the British Heart Foundation. Recycling unwanted electrical goods has

saved items going to expensive landfill and generated extra money for this important charity.

Can the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety comment on the success of the event and the chance for it to run again in the future?"

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"These events have proved popular with the public as they provide a convenient opportunity to donate waste electrical and electronic equipment in the knowledge that it will be repaired and then sold by the British Heart Foundation (BHF). So donating your electronic equipment avoids the environmental damage of landfill and raises money for an important charity.

At the last event a total of 273 items were presented, included TVs, DVDs, phones, vacuum cleaners, microwaves and even a domestic air-conditioning unit. Of these, 259 items were taken by the BHF for refurbishment and re-use and the value of these was calculated as £6,300. The remaining 14 items were unsuitable for re-use and were sent for recycling into their component parts. The total weight diverted from landfill was over 2.1 tonnes.

Another event is planned for 29 October and this will be publicised as soon as the date and venue are confirmed.

Later this year there will be a further improvement in the kerbside recycling service as Norwich will become the first council in Norfolk to provide collections of textiles and electronic equipment alongside the regular refuse and recycling service. A new fleet of vehicles will be phased-in and from December residents will be able to recycle small electrical items and textiles on both their refuse and recycling collection days. This means that electrical items such as kettles, irons, toasters, torches and batteries along with clothes, shoes, hats, coats and other textiles can be placed next to the recycling or refuse bin on collection day. Items must be contained in a standard-sized carrier bag - approximately 35 x 40cm. Details are available on the collection calendars provided to every household and will also be published on the council website and in the winter edition of Citizen."

Question 3

Councillor Woollard to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"Creating a safe and welcoming environment for cyclists, especially in congested areas, remains a priority for the administration.

Can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his views on the improvements achieved for cyclists with the changes delivered in Valley Drive, Little Bethel Street and the Tombland area?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"In the last few years cyclists in Norwich has seen some fabulous improvements to cycling facilities across the city with many more to come in future years. This is primarily thanks to our great success in being chosen of one of only eight cities nationwide that have been awarded Cycle City Ambition grant funding from the Department for Transport. However it has not stopped there with significant investment in cycling measures forthcoming from the Local Enterprise Partnership as well.

You asked for my views about three specific schemes. Let us look first at Valley Drive. This was once a muddy track linking Gurney Road to Heartsease Lane. It was a very convenient route for kids attending the schools in the local area and for leisure walkers, but not at all an attractive or inviting route, especially after dark. Today we have a smooth, surfaced route wide enough for both pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy. And the icing on the cake is the motion sensitive lighting that we have installed, which lights the path in the hours of darkness when it is being used. The beauty of the scheme is that when there is no one around the lights dim down, reducing light pollution in the area and saving energy. Norwich has been one of the pioneers nationwide in the use of motion sensitive lighting on public routes and I'm sure we will see this innovative idea adopted more widely. Valley Drive is now a great routes for cyclists and pedestrians alike and best of all it offers a traffic free environment for those less confident cyclists.

Little Bethel Street - I recall the many long hours I have sat in the Norwich highways agency committee debating what could be done about the traffic in Little Bethel Street. It used to have very narrow pavements and very tight junctions with Bethel Street and Chapel Field North and which was, for many years, a route HGVs regularly used to access the Chapelfield Mall. Look what we have now - a traffic free route for cyclists where they do not have to squeeze past HGVs and, where they do encounter HGVs on Chapel Field North, cyclists have priority via the new parallel zebra / cycle crossing. This is a brilliant example of a major traffic improvement in the city centre that has benefited everyone, particularly cyclists.

Lastly Tombland – I think it's fair to say that we all are aware of the challenges we faced in Tombland when we decided to funnel key elements of the pedalway network through it. But I hope you all agree that the pain of the road works a year ago was well worth the effort. In Tombland we have taken away redundant carriageway space and given it back to pedestrians and cyclists, while at the same time retaining the capacity for buses, deliveries and cars. What's more all this has been done at the same time as enhancing the setting of this historic area of the city.

Three schemes have been highlighted today. These are just three of 70 projects that have benefitted people on bikes since 2011 or are under development. Ones to look out for in the future are along the length of Newmarket Road, Lakenham Way through to All Saints Green and Magdalen Road. This is showing in the number of extra cyclists we are counting. I really hope that Norwich can continue to be successful in securing funding to improve cycling infrastructure.

To cap it all on Friday night I was honoured to attend the National Cycle Planning Awards in London. We were one the three shortlisted for the award for the best cycling network

strategy in the country. All the officers and members who have supported the work on the city and county deserve thanks and praise for all their hard work.

Question 4

Councillor Fullman to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"I was pleased that 'The Sports Factory' has taken over the Russell Street Community Centre as part of a community asset transfer.

Given the importance of maintaining - wherever possible - valued community assets, is the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety hopeful that this template can be used again, where necessary, in the future?"

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"Following the cabinet decision in June to community asset transfer Russell Street to the Sports Factory, the lease arrangements are being finalised so that the Sports Factory can take occupation and start to develop the centre as a real community asset and run the exciting range of activities it has proposed.

This includes activities for children and adults, including meals, health and fitness sessions, community entertainment as well as support services for local residents. The group also indicate that the community centre will be open and available to hire by local residents, which was a requirement of the community asset transfer policy.

On completion of these final stages, the process to community asset transfer the building will be reviewed with the Sports Factory themselves, officers from NPS Norwich who have managed the process and the community enabling team. This will ensure that the community asset transfer policy and procedure is robust, as well as flexible, to achieve the desired outcomes.

On the basis of progress so far, and with the Sports Factory's plans, I am very hopeful that the community asset transfer policy will be a useful template for the future and in particular retaining and enhancing community use of community assets."

Question 5

Councillor Beth Jones to ask the cabinet member for council housing:

"As autumn approaches, I am aware that the issue and consequences of rough sleeping and homelessness will become more ever more apparent.

Can the cabinet member for council housing comment on the support and advice offered to prevent homelessness but also assist those who do become homeless within the city?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for council housing's response:

"Our view is that the most effective way to deal with homelessness is to prevent it from happening and we place great emphasis on this approach through the provision of specialist housing advice and assistance to all those facing homelessness or in housing difficulty in the city.

The housing options team provides a range of options and advice to such clients, including a homeless prevention fund, a private sector leasing scheme, mediation, legal advice and referrals to supported accommodation. Over the past year, this pro-active approach has directly prevented over 600 households from experiencing homelessness and assisted many hundreds more in resolving their own housing issues.

The council's approach has been recognised as best practice and a recent peer review of the service, reinforced this, praising the high quality, accessibility and effectiveness of the housing options department in preventing homelessness in Norwich and the innovative range of options available to our clients.

As well as performing our statutory obligations regarding homelessness, we are also aware that Norwich, as the centre of a wide rural area, is a magnet for those facing homelessness or rough sleeping in the region. Since 2010 we have employed a dedicated rough sleeper co-ordinator and funded an outreach team to work intensively with individual rough sleepers in the city to find pathways into accommodation and support.

The perception of rough sleeping in Norwich can be quite different to the reality and our last street count showed we have 13 verified rough sleepers in the city. While this is 13 too many, there will always be a number of individuals who refuse our assistance or who are already accommodated but choose, for their own reasons, to rough sleep and this group makes up a significant proportion of current rough sleepers. Be assured however that we and colleagues in the police and voluntary sector are making every possible effort to address the underlying issues which are causing some rough sleepers to refuse our offers of assistance.

While these remain difficult times, with external pressures and ongoing welfare reforms continuing to affect vulnerable people, I have confidence that this council's commitment to innovation, our ongoing work with partners and our focus on providing a client centred service will continue to provide the best possible support for people facing homelessness in Norwich."

Question 6

Councillor Button to ask the cabinet member for council housing:

"The now famous Norwich Big Switch and Save is open once again, offering homes and business in the city the chance to switch energy providers and secure real savings.

Can the cabinet member for council housing update council once again on the successes achieved so far with the scheme and how residents can be encouraged to join in?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for council housing's response:

"Thank you for your timely question. With the recent change in weather our citizens will be thinking about energy bills and considering their affordability. Thankfully we are helping our citizens reduce their fuel bills via the switch and save.

We are currently running the tenth round of our successful collective energy switching scheme. Through the power of collective purchasing we work to secure the lowest energy prices for our registrants: therefore helping to reduce the cost of energy and offset rising energy prices. The previous round of the Norwich Big Switch and Save has delivered average savings of £230 a year per household.

In the last nine tranches overall 16,000 people registered for the Switch and Save. Norwich has repeatedly had the highest national conversion rates, with over 2,000 switches in total. Overall the average saving per household is £230. This means Norwich residents have saved a total of £460,000.

If all homes took up the offered savings a total of at least £3.5 million would be saved on energy bills by Norwich residents.

Norwich City Council has engaged with fuel poor households to ensure that they are aware of the scheme. This has been done via direct mail outs, leafleting in fuel poor areas, roadshows, energy workshops and working in partnership with charities and relevant organisations.

In addition to this, the small fee we receive from the Switch and Save goes back into affordable warmth work. This has been invaluable for vulnerable residents, as it has provided urgent heating need for them in the winter.

Residents can be encouraged to join by talking to them when canvasing, handing out leaflets and talking to relevant partner organisations, encouraging them to cascade the information to their service users. Register at www.bigswitchandsave.co.uk"

Question 7

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the leader of the council:

"Like many members of this council, I was particularly pleased to learn that the historic 'Roll of Honour', designed to commemorate those who fell during World War I, will be installed in the City Hall main foyer.

Will the leader of the council agree that the transfer of such an important and poignant reminder of human sacrifice to City Hall – so close to the Lutyens War Memorial – is a fitting tribute? Will he also thank those involved in the project to secure its restoration, transfer and the important funding required?"

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"Thank you for your question which gives me the opportunity to pay tribute to the 3,544 Norwich men who gave their lives in World War I and to welcome the project to move the the Roll of Honour, which has been in Norwich Castle since 1931, to be on display in City Hall.

The Roll of Honour was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens when it was clear the Norwich War Memorial which he also designed would not be large enough to contain so many names. It consists of an oak case with doors containing 12 double-sided hinged and four fixed single-sided panels painted with the names and units of those killed.

Over the years the panels have suffered structural damage when being viewed. Now thanks to this wonderful project initiated by the Norwich War Memorial Trust and involving Norwich City Council and Norfolk Museums Service, it is being fully conserved before going on permanent display in the foyer of City Hall, just across the road from the main memorial. One of the key aims of the project is to make it more publicly accessible and people will be able to book viewing appointments via the council's website and City Hall reception.

Its official opening will take place on 11 November to coincide with the time of remembrance and marking the centenary of 1916, a pivotal year in World War I.

I would like to thank the Norwich War Memorial Trust for championing this project; officers at Norwich City Council and the Norfolk Museums Service who have worked on the technical aspects and grant applications; Richard Rogers Conservation and the following organisations and individuals who have generously provided financial support:-

- the National War Memorials Trust,
- Town Close Estate Charity,
- Geoffrey Watling Trust,
- RG Carter
- Homes & Communities Agency - Restoration Project Fund
- Diana Benoy, granddaughter of Walter Burridge, who made the original oak doors for the Roll of Honour. "

Question 8

Councillor Davis to ask the leader of the council:

"I have been contacted by a number of constituents regarding the spiralling cost of school uniform. Many schools, particularly those which have become academies, have begun limiting the choice of uniform providers. Parents and carers are often forced into buying from one, two or maybe three specified shops, which all have very similar price structures.

Furthermore, the choice to buy reasonably priced uniform from supermarkets has been all but abolished in many cases. This is putting families under an incredible amount of pressure – with the average high school uniform costing over £150.00. Children grow quickly and often a uniform will not last a whole school year. Under this present

government, the issue will become even more problematic as more primary schools are forced down the route of academisation and high schools (all of which are already academies in Norwich city) branch into grammars and comprehensives – creating a two-tier education system and stripping democracy and local accountability from education. I have sent the Leader an open letter from the Competitions and Markets Authority from October 2015 to all head teachers, governing boards and uniform suppliers, which states:

> 'There is strong evidence that this practice has increased the cost of uniforms significantly - by as much as £5 to £10 per item - and this is a real concern to large numbers of parents and carers across the country, who have to foot the bill. Head teachers, governing boards and school uniform suppliers are all in a position to influence the arrangements which schools put in place for the supply of uniforms to help ensure that prices are competitive and deliver good value for money.'

Given the significance attached to the priority of financial inclusion this administration rightly gives I am interested in any steps that might be taken to ensure that schools are offering competitive prices and good value for money.

Can the Leader comment whether he thinks it fair that due to the inflated uniform costs in Norwich, local charities (such as Norwich Consolidated Charities which work closely with the City Council), are by default funding exclusivity deals between schools and selected retailers and given these multiple concerns would he ask Clive Lewis MP to also raise this question in parliament?"

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"One of the benefits of schools that have a uniform for its pupils is to diminish economic and social barriers between students which is a commendable aim. However, the increased use of a limited number of suppliers can, by its very nature force costs up, which can be an intolerable financial burden for a family on low income who has a child at school and which can be compounded when several children may be of school age. This becomes particularly acute with the introduction of overelaborate uniforms. I am grateful to Councillor Karen Davis for the price comparison work she has done which shows that, were parents able to shop around and if school uniform requirements were more standardised, the costs would be between a third and a quarter of the costs of using uniform providers specified by schools.

The city council has limited opportunity to influence this itself, but through the advice services it commissions, income maximisation and budgeting advice are two of the outcomes to ensure people have more money in their pocket.

The council works very closely with Norwich Consolidated Charities and work is in progress to ensure that front line officers are aware of the grants available from the charities to support residents who are in financial crisis and the types of needs that Norwich Consolidated Charities can support so that the right referrals can be made.

Budgeting Advice is available to all city council tenants to maximise income and the money advice team can also advise on grants.

These initiatives can help mitigate the financial burden of school uniforms, but I would urge head teachers to make sure that costs are kept to minimum and where appropriate

review school uniform policy to allow parents to find the best deals from a range of different outlets. In the city there are over 20,000 households earning below £15,000 a year and the median household income for Norwich is £22,825. Low household incomes mean that expensive school uniforms become barriers to social and economic inclusion and that is not acceptable.

I shall certainly ask the MP for Norwich South to raise this issue in Parliament."

Question 9

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"I am pleased that the council has recently introduced more 20mph speed limits in parts of north Norwich. I have made several requests over the last four years for 20mph limits to be brought in on Wolfe Road and surrounding streets, but nothing has changed, despite the fact that nearby Britannia Road and Vincent Road have recently had 20mph limits introduced. Rat running is common in the area around Wolfe Road, and with Lionwood infant and junior schools in the neighbourhood, there are significant safety concerns among residents.

Will the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development support Thorpe Hamlet councillors and residents by using his position on Norwich highways agency committee to call for speed limits in the Wolfe Road area to be reduced to 20 mph?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"I am sure that Councillor Price is aware that it is the corporate aim of this administration that all residential streets – aside from the main road network – are subject to a 20mph speed restriction. Therefore of course I support the introduction of the speed limit in Thorpe Hamlet.

However the challenge we face is funding these measures. In many areas 20mph signs are sufficient but in others we have to look at introducing traffic calming features to ensure that the limit is adhered to. Traffic calming is expensive, but signed only schemes also incur significant costs given the consultation that we are legally obliged to carry out before implementing a speed restriction, alongside the sheer number of signs that we need to put up.

As you have heard me say repeatedly since 2010, funding for highway improvements works has been cut severely and the Norwich highways agency committee no longer has budgets available to carry out ad hoc speed management schemes. Currently the only mechanism we have for funding the roll out of the 20mph speed limits is on the back of other transport investment schemes.

Through the City Cycle Ambition funding that I referred in response to an earlier question, we are looking to ensure that all residential routes with 400m of a pedalway have a 20mph speed restriction on them. This means to date we have introduced the limit in the vicinity of the pink pedalway and thereby taking in the Heartsease estate, the

Britannia Road area, the city centre and the area around the outer section of The Avenues.
Looking forward to next year we will be implementing the 20mph restriction around the blue and yellow pedalways. This will include much of the Catton Grove, Sewell, Town Close, Lakenham and Eaton Wards.

The green pedalway runs through Thorpe Hamlet. Therefore if funds become available for this route, we would look to introduce the 20mph restriction in Councillor Price's ward when that pedalway is implemented. At present there is no funding for the green pedalway, however, so I am unable to say exactly when this could be.

Of course in the meantime as well, should an alternative source of funding become available officers will do their best to secure it."

Question 10

Councillor Grahame to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"I submitted an enquiry to officers on 9 September about extending the current no-drinking zone, but am still awaiting a response. Would the cabinet member be happy to support an extension of the alcohol-free zone currently in operation to the parts of Thorpe Hamlet around Rosary Road, St Leonards Road and Gas Hill where street drinking is consistently reported?"

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"Whilst the control of alcohol zones is designated by local authorities under powers contained in the Criminal Justice and Police act 2001, designation is based on evidence of street drinking related anti-social behaviour reported to the police who enforce such zones. The police have powers to respond to street drinking and this area does not currently appear as a hotspot on reports shared with the council. Control of alcohol zones do not in themselves become alcohol free. The powers enable a police constable to require a person to stop drinking alcohol in a designated place. It also allows a police constable to seize any opened container of alcohol if problems are occurring.

Any extension to the current zone covering the city centre would be in response to an evidenced based request from the Constabulary and progressed via a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) due to change in legislation. The council would also need to be certain that issues could not be resolved with existing powers.

I would support any intervention that resolves anti-social behaviour caused by street drinking if it can be evidenced to be an issue. I will ask officers to raise this area with the police to establish what the issues are and what intervention could be best considered.

In terms of the question you have submitted to officers, I will find out why a response has not been provided and ensure you receive a reply."

Question 11

Councillor Jackson to ask the leader of the council:

"At the sustainable development panel held on 25 May this year, Councillor Grahame expressed concerns that Norwich would not be sufficiently represented on the Greater Norwich Development Partnership as it works on developing a Greater Norwich Local Plan. The chair assured the panel that "the partnership arrangements had worked well in the past with each authority co-operating and being represented on an equal level". He did not consider that people in Norwich had been disadvantaged.

At the meeting of the Greater Norwich Development Partnership on 5 September, only one of Norwich's three representatives was present, with two absent and no substitutes provided. Green councillors would have been happy to substitute – indeed, two were in the public gallery – but they were not asked.

Does the leader of the council agree that this unnecessary underrepresentation does in fact considerably disadvantage the people of Norwich?"

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"I would like to reaffirm the previous assurances made by the chair of the sustainable development panel with regard to Greater Norwich Development Partnership Board that "the partnership arrangements had worked well in the past with each authority co-operating and being represented on an equal level."

The terms of reference for the Greater Norwich Partnership Board show that the board advises the decision making of the individual partner authorities with regard to matters relating to the preparation and monitoring of the Greater Norwich Local Plan. In practice this means that any recommendations arising from the work of the Greater Norwich Development Partnership have to be agreed by each of the three councils in the first instance. We are at the initial stages of the review of the Local Plan and as the work develops the sustainable development panel and the cabinet will be fully engaged in ensuring that Norwich's best interests are fully served.

It was unfortunate that the Greater Norwich Development Partnership Board meeting on 5 September was called at relatively short notice which meant that two of our representatives were unable to attend due to prior engagements. The number of representatives attending the meeting is not an issue as the process requires that all three councils reach agreement on the review of the Local plan before it can be taken forward."

Question 12

Councillor Carlo to ask the leader of the council:

"I wrote to the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development on 6 September to ask which cabinet member had authorised the removal of the ironwork bollards from the alleyway in Clarendon Road. My email was passed on to officers, and Councillor Waters then replied. However, I have still not had an answer to my question about who took the decision to have the bollards removed.

Which cabinet member authorised the removal of the bollards, and did the member concerned take into account the Heigham Grove Conservation Area Appraisal which describes the ironwork in Clarendon Road as an important element in contributing to the heritage value of the conservation area?"

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"This council, unlike some, has not delegated any powers through its constitution to individual cabinet members and decisions are either made collectively by the cabinet or full council as a whole, or delegated to officers.

The decision made was not to remove the bollards but was about replacing the existing fixed bollards with removable bollards thereby allowing the council greater access to various alleyways and passages across the city. The assessment in removing these bollards was driven by practical considerations allowing access for maintenance vehicles; sweepers and gully-emptiers. The decision was taken as part of the day to day operational business of the council by officers, guided by council agreed priorities in the corporate plan.

Keeping this area free from flooding when gullies need to be emptied was a prime consideration for this work, and residents in the area had already expressed their concern about flooding.

Whilst the council's streetscape design manual encourages the retention of locally distinctive features, it acknowledges that this is not always possible. The replacement bollards are the so-called "Norwich Bollard" design which is used widely in the city and is the preferred bollard for installation in conservation areas in line with the streetscape design manual. This bollard type is common-place in the city centre being used both as a bollard and as part of post and rail cycle stands.

As Councillor Carlo mentions, the conservation area appraisal identifies "Several surviving cast iron railings along Clarendon Road [that] are particularly fine and rare examples of once common Victorian ironwork..." The provenance of the bollards is more recent, however. Whilst it is difficult to pin-point exactly when they were put in, historical mapping shows they were not there prior to 1928. It is likely that bollards were introduced in response to increased motor car use during the second half of the twentieth century.

The current bollards weigh 80 kilos, and I am sure that none of us would expect any refuse worker to even attempt to lift those if they were adapted to 'drop down'.

The new bollards are of a sympathetic design to the area in which they sit, and, like the current bollards, they pay homage to 19th Century iron work.

Be assured we always endeavour to reuse any removed bollards; for example they are sometimes incorporated into a design for a cycle rack or placed in an area which doesn't require a drop down bollard. In this case we would also be very happy to hear from the residents if they have any ideas for their reuse. "

Question 13

Councillor Tim Jones to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"Norfolk County Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications as lead local flood authority. I am concerned that planning officers nonetheless recommended a recent planning application for approval without a Flood Risk Assessment.

Would the cabinet member give his opinion on whether Norwich City Council is doing enough through the planning system to prevent flooding in the city?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development response:

"Through its up to date policies that identify critical drainage areas and provide clear guidance for developers the city council is doing all that it can to reduce the risk of flooding and minimise the harm done by it where it does occur.

As is pointed out it is the county council who is the lead local flood authority (LLFA) and a statutory consultee on "major development with surface water drainage", major developments being those with 10 houses or more. Notwithstanding the definition of 'major' developments and the statutory requirements placed up them, Norfolk County Council has indicated that it will normally not respond to consultations but rely on published 'standing advice' on developments of less than 250 houses or under 5 hectares, unless the site itself is at direct risk of flooding, or is major development on a 'flow path'.

The reason given by the county council for not providing site specific advice on all major developments relates to a lack of resources within the Flood and Water Management Team following the withdrawal of funding for LLFAs from central government.

This has created a degree of uncertainty for local planning authorities over whether they should consult the LLFA or if they do whether the LLFA will respond if they do. Such is the concern over the impacts of this that the matter was raised recently at the Norfolk Chief Executives Forum at which the county council agreed to meet the local planning authorities to discuss their concerns and take the matter forward.

This situation can create confusion in Norwich as the LLFA has confirmed that all developments within critical drainage areas identified in the Local Plan do not meet the criteria for consultation as they are not necessarily on flow paths or at direct risk of flooding. The LLFA have now agreed to provide further information with regard to flow paths and areas at direct risk of flooding to provide greater clarity on when they wish to be consulted.

However, irrespective of whether the LLFA will comment on an application, the city council as a planning authority has a duty to investigate flood issues and consider them as they would any other material planning issue. In order to do this it does insist on a flood risk assessment for a far greater range of applications that the LLFA will comment on. The validation framework requires flood risk assessments for the following types of application:

- all operational development involving sites of ≥ 1 hectare or creation of ≥ 10 dwellings or creation of ≥ 1000sq.m of new floorspace;
- all operational development < 1 hectare unless in flood zone 1;
- non-residential extensions with a footprint of less than 250sq.m unless in flood zone 1;
- a change of use resulting in development which is defined as highly vulnerable or more vulnerable, as defined on page 6 of the NPPF Technical Guidance;
- a change of use from a water compatible use to a less vulnerable use, as defined on page 6 of the NPPF Technical Guidance;

This effectively leaves the planning authority assessing flood risk assessments on a number of developments without any support or comment from the LLFA.

So I can assure you that the city council is doing all that it can to prevent flooding in the city and working in strict accord with the legislation and I would encourage Councillor Jones to ask the same question of the LLFA."