NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30 p.m. – 9.25 p.m. **27 September 2011**

Present: Councillors Lay (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Altman, Arthur, Banham, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Driver, Fairbairn, Fisher, Galvin, Gayton, Gee, Gledhill, George, Grahame, Grenville, Haynes, Henderson, Holmes, Jeraj, Kendrick, Little, Lubbock, MacDonald, Offord, Sands(S), Sands(M), Stammers, Stephenson, Thomas, Waters, Westmacott, Wright

Apologies: Chris Higgins (Sheriff), Councillors Makoff and Storie

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor welcomed a group of young people from 'future' to the meeting. They had been working with officers to involve other young people in the council's budget consultation. They had recently had a tour of City Hall and held a question and answer session with a group of councillors and had worked with officers to complete the questionnaire individually. One of the young people had interviewed the leader of the council for a radio programme that was broadcast on future radio. The Lord Mayor thanked them for giving up their time over the past few weeks and for attending the meeting.

The Lord Mayor said that since the last meeting she had opened the new eco park at St Clements Park. She said that council officers and the designers deserved praise for creating a play area made of natural materials, using waterways and archways to give it a natural environmental feel. She had attended the family fun day in Mile Cross and the Army oath of allegiance at St Andrews Hall. At the opening of Battle of Britain Week, officers from RAF Marham had paraded through the city. She had also attended the Battle of Britain service.

The Lord Mayor invited Councillor Brociek-Coulton to update the council on how the city had fared in the Anglia in Bloom competition. Councillor Brociek-Coulton said that six Norwich wards had achieved bronze or silver awards in the community categories and the city had received eighteen certificates including winning the bio-diversity award for Marston Marshes. She was delighted to say that the city overall had received a gold award which was a great result and recognition for all the hard work put in by the Friends of Norwich in Bloom, many community volunteers

and Norwich City Council. The Lord Mayor then presented Bill Webster of the Friends of Norwich in Bloom with the bio-diversity award for Marston Marshes. Bill Webster thanked the citizens of Norwich and Norwich City Council who together had made success at Anglia in Bloom possible.

The Lord Mayor invited Councillor Arthur to update council on the recent fire at Markham Tower in Mile Cross. Councillor Arthur said that water ingress from the twelve fire engines used to put out the fire had led to EDF having to cut off the electricity for the whole of the block of flats for safety reasons. Council staff, including senior management, had worked at last night helping to ensure that all families affected were rehoused in temporary accommodation. Some had chosen to stay with family but others needed temporary accommodation to be found. Supervised access to the flats had been allowed to pick up essential items but obviously safety is paramount and residents would be unable to return until all safety checks had been completed satisfactorily. She commented on the Silver Birches sheltered housing scheme nearby where residents had provided tea, coffee, biscuits etc for the residents during this difficult time. She said that the council would continue to do everything it could to look after those concerned and return them to their homes as soon as possible but patience would be required because of the safety aspects. She praised all council staff concerned and said this showed all that was good about those working in the public sector where people were always willing to "go that extra mile".

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Lord Mayor said that three public questions had been received.

Question 1

Mrs Marion Maxwell to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

"I refer the cabinet member to the petition raised by the Douro Place area residents, and my question to cabinet earlier this year which highlighted the need for dogs to be kept under control.

Whilst I was disappointed that my MP Simon Wright declined to sign the petition, I was pleased that because of our efforts a Dog Control Order would be put into place. This Order would initially apply to dog fouling because of the high number of complaints that had already been received. The intention was to monitor complaints about unleashed dogs and add to legislation should numbers or severity of complaints warrant the action

Would the cabinet member please update me as to whether there has been sufficient increase in the number of calls about owners not keeping their dogs leashed, to amend the legislation."

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods replied:-

"This was raised at cabinet in June this year and at full council in July. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act requires the council to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs and to be able to show that the order is proportionate to the level of the issue and is being implemented in a direct response to problems caused by the activities of dogs and those in charge of them.

The council has continued to monitor the enquiries and complaints about dogs over the course of the year. From 1 April this year the council has received 729 reports about dogs of which only 11 were about dogs off leads. A large proportion of the reports received were about:

- stray dogs (174 reports);
- barking dogs (330 reports);
- dog fouling (155 reports).

The council has acted in proportion to the reports being received and the evidence does not support a need for dogs on leads control orders at this present moment. However, we do encourage residents to report incidents of this nature. We will continue to monitor the situation and if a need does arise action will be taken.

Finally, I would wish to advise that attacks on animals and children by out of control dogs is a matter for the police. Such attacks on children may not be remedied by dogs on leads. They have a duty to deal with dangerous dogs and as such I would encourage everyone to report such incidents to the police."

Mrs Marion Maxwell asked, as a supplementary question, if reported incidents to the police were passed on to Norwich City Council. Councillor Westmacott said that she understood that they were but she would check with officers.

Question 2

Ms Jenn Parkhouse to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

"Would the council consider working closely with the local branch of the RSPCA to look closely at local animal welfare issues, particularly those concerning dogs, with a view to being eligible for Community Animal Welfare Footprint Awards?"

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods replied:-

"The council has worked closely with the RSPCA in the past and has been proud to receive the gold footprint in the Community Animal Welfare Footprint Awards for both 2008 and 2009. Norwich would welcome the opportunity to strengthen the links with the RSPCA to ensure our policies and procedures are developed to ensure a cost effective service is provided that has good animal welfare at its heart. I have passed on your details to the officers concerned."

Ms Jenn Parkhouse asked, as a supplementary question, if the RSPCA could be assured that they would hear further from Norwich City Council. Councillor Westmacott said yes.

Question 3

Ms Catherine Adams to the cabinet member for resources:-

"With reference to the proposed auction of the Britons Arms, Elm Hill, what incentive does Norfolk Property Services have to do the right thing to ensure that the asset management practices benefits the people of Norwich, including those who currently live in the property and several more who work there?"

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources replied:-

When the council acquired the freehold of the Britons Arms to add it to its commercial portfolio in the 1950s, the built heritage of the city centre was thought to be under threat. Today there are very strict controls over any development affecting listed buildings.

The Britons Arms, as part of the council's commercial investment portfolio, is retained solely for the income it provides to the city council. This money is then used to subsidise services. However, the property has a substantial repair liability and, in assessing its costs, the council has had to ask itself - is spending money on this property good value for money for the taxpayers of Norwich? The conclusion we have reached is that the repair bill would vastly outweigh any income that it could achieve in future, and that selling the property and reinvesting that money in Norwich would be a better approach.

In helping us reach this decision, the council completed a review of the asset following a process we have used on other properties, and that reflects best practice. In this case the outcome of the review recommended disposal and the tenants were notified of this decision and they have been given the opportunity to purchase the property but were advised that the fall back position for the council would be to sell the property at auction. We have yet to hear from the tenants on this matter.

While the council is mindful of the potential impact on the present tenants and their business the approach to such matters is addressed in various provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act and it is not unusual for the ownership of a tenanted commercial property to transfer in this manner. We are currently also in discussion with the Norwich Preservation Trust which has come forward with a different approach to address the issues associated with this property. A final decision on this matter will be taken by councillors at a meeting of the cabinet in October. Norfolk Property Services are not involved in this decision making process.

Ms Catherine Adams asked, as a supplementary question, if the portfolio holder could confirm that the existing tenants would be given the appropriate time to put together an offer as required under Section 25 of the Landlord and Tenant Act. Councillor Waters said that there had been discussions between the council and the tenants over an extended period of time and he believed that the council had acted in the spirit and intent of that clause.

4. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2011.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that 21 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members and committee chairs, of which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of Appendix 1 of the council's constitution. The questions were as follows:-

Question 1	Councillor Lubbock to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the community infrastructure levy.
Question 2	Councillor Stammers to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the national planning policy framework.
Question 3	Councillor Stephenson to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods.
Question 4	Councillor Grahame to the cabinet member for planning and transport on plans to relocate those being evicted from customary moorings.
Question 5	Councillor Jeraj to the cabinet member for housing on new windows for Plantsman Close.
Question 6	Councillor Haynes to the cabinet member for housing on structural concrete at various properties.
Question 7	Councillor Makoff to the cabinet member for housing on the repainting schedule.
Question 8	Councillor Offord to the cabinet member for planning and transport on gypsy and traveller pitches.
Question 9	Councillor Altman to the cabinet member for resources on research by the false economy campaign group.
Question 10	Councillor Gledhill to the cabinet member for planning and transport on road closures for play.
Question 11	Councillor Henderson to the cabinet member for customer services on responses to emails to the council.
Question 12	Councillor Little to the cabinet member for housing on anti-social behaviour log sheets.

Question 13 Councillor Holmes to the cabinet member for planning and transport on GNDP policy board meetings.

Question 14 Councillor Gee to the cabinet member for resources on the Standards Board for England.

Question 15 Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for housing on the review of community centres.

Question 16 Councillor Sands (M) to the cabinet member for resources on the retention of business rates.

Question 17 Councillor Gayton to the cabinet member for resources on senior officer salaries.

Question 18 Councillor Ackroyd to the cabinet member for resources on council assets.

Question 19 Councillor Wright to the cabinet member for housing on the home options scheme.

Question 20 Councillor Fairbairn to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the Lakenham Sports and Social Centre.

Question 21 Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for planning and transport on the community infrastructure levy and the northern distributor road.

(Details of the questions and replies together with any supplementary questions and replies are attached at Appendix A to these minutes.)

7. CAPITAL PROGRAMME – MID YEAR REVIEW

The Lord Mayor said that the following amendment to item 7 had been received from Councillor Stephenson –

> The sum allocated to the 'welcome to Norwich' signs in recommendation 1(c) be reduced from £30,000 to £15,000.

Councillor Waters indicated that he was willing to accept the amendment and with no other member objecting this became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor MacDonald seconded the recommendations contained in the annexed report.

RESOLVED to approve the following changes to the housing and general fund capital programmes –

(1) a revised public sector housing capital programme of £18,633,000 for 2011/12;

(2) to allocated £600,000 in the 2011/12 housing capital programme for the completion of the bin store construction programme;

(3) to increase the general fund capital programme by £551,000 to fund works to City Hall (£100,000), repairs to the city wall (£100,000), provision of tennis courts, Waterloo Park (£61,000), communal bins (£275,000) and replacement 'welcome to Norwich' signs (£15,000).

8. CONSTITUTION – REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Driver seconded the recommendations in the annexed report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to –

(1) adopt the revised financial regulations as part of the constitution as detailed in Appendix a;

(2) ask the head of law and governance to amend the council's constitution accordingly.

9. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS

Councillor Driver moved and Councillor Little seconded the recommendations in the annexed report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to –

(1) maintain the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations subject to -

(a) changing the polling station and polling district TC4 to the Sixth Form Centre, Norwich High School for Girls, Newmarket Road;
(b) changing the boundary of polling district TH5 to follow the river and adding the area south of the river to TH3.

(2) ask the Returning Officer and Democratic services manager to continue to keep the scheme under review to ensure that each polling district has the best possible polling station available for each future election.

10. MOTION – DANGEROUS DOGS

The Lord Mayor said that the following amendment had been received from Councillor Henderson –

To remove the penultimate word 'dangerous' and replace with the word 'unleashed'.

Councillor Lubbock indicated that she was happy to accept the amendment and with no other member objecting it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Lubbock moved and Councillor Wright seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to ask cabinet to consider introducing dog control orders requiring owners to keep their dogs on leads in areas where there are established problems with unleashed dogs.

CHAIR

APPENDIX A

Questions to cabinet members and committee chairs

Question 1

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

Members of this Council have received a briefing on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from officers. This is the replacement for the Section 106 money which is paid by developers to improve infrastructure and services in the locality of the development, expected to come into use in April 2012.

Whilst it is important that Councillors are kept up to date with policy changes and understand the implications of CIL it is also vitally important to my mind that communities are equally well informed.

Please would the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation give an undertaking that officers of this council will meet with community groups to explain CIL and the role that communities will play in the future in deciding how some of this levy will be spent in their area?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport's reply:-

"Community infrastructure level (CIL) is a means by which local authorities can secure funding through the planning process to support infrastructure needed to support growth in their area. It removes the direct connection with specific developments which exists under s.106 (which doesn't disappear and will continue to apply in a more restricted form alongside CIL). In Greater Norwich CIL is likely to be adopted in September 2012.

At its meeting on 21 September 2011 cabinet approved the CIL preliminary draft charging schedule for consultation. Members also agreed the list of consultees to be included in this process.

As Councillor Lubbock was there she will be aware that Cabinet agreed that letters will be sent out to voluntary and community groups in the city to ensure that they are informed directly of the consultation which starts on 3 October and runs to 14 November 2011. The consultation also includes developers, other businesses and statutory bodies. Copies of the consultation documents are also being made available in public libraries, council offices and on the internet.

Members of the council, which included Councillor Lubbock and her colleagues, were briefed in advance of cabinet so that they were aware of the forthcoming consultation. I should highlight that the consultation which is being carried out at this stage is purely on the rates of CIL which the council proposes to charge. It was highlighted to Councillor Lubbock personally at cabinet. Any comments on

the levels of CIL must be based on viability grounds. The focus of this consultation is therefore on the income side of the CIL.

It is when we know what money we have, how it is to be spent, how much to "local communities" that's when the real effective local consultation and debate must and will take place.

The consultation questionnaire does refer to the government proposals to consult on amendments to the CIL regulations which will ensure that a "meaningful proportion" of CIL revenue should be spent in the neighbourhoods where development takes place. This government consultation was originally due in the summer but is now expected in the next few weeks. It is understood that this will be a 12 week consultation. Until this consultation document is issued by the government it is unclear what role local communities will be expected to play in this process especially in areas like Norwich which do not have parishes. The council will be considering the government's proposals and making a response to the consultation.

When the government finally get their act together on this, when we know what they are proposing, then the council will wish to talk to community groups in the city, to hear their views and suggestions, to inform our response, as well as encouraging groups to respond in their own right.

The City Council Labour Team really believes in consulting for real with the community, with people on the street, and listening. We will do this in public meetings when we have something to talk about, when we have an idea of the money available, etc. This consultation is only about the possible level of charges. I am certain that the community groups sent this consultation will be able to understand that, even if Councillor Lubbock may not."

Councillor Judith Lubbock said that she was disappointed with the tone and content of the response and asked, as a supplementary question, if Norwich would, like Broadland District Council, engage communities and give advance warning of the change and enable them to consider the opportunities and did the cabinet member agree that this was essential. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said that yes, it was essential, but at the appropriate time. The council was waiting for details from government.

Question 2

Councillor Amy Stammers to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

Will the council be responding to the government's consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, and if so, could the cabinet member please outline the council's views?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport's reply:-

"As Councillor Stammers will be aware we will be considering a draft response to the National Planning Policy Framework tomorrow at the meeting of the sustainable development panel and I look forward to discussing the matter with her in more detail then.

Subject to the debate at the panel it is planned to agree the city council's response to the framework at cabinet on 12 October. Without wishing to prejudge the outcome of this consideration my views on this framework are as follows:

The coalition government is proposing serious, dangerous and significant changes to the Planning system. They are proposing this in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation.

The Conservative and Lib-Dem coalition say they want to streamline and speed up the planning process. They say they want to eliminate unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy which is supposedly acting as an impediment to growth. The coalition says they want to prioritise development of brownfield sites (previously developed land).

Norwich wants to get houses and jobs. Norwich wants to see changes to planning. We have ambitious plans for regeneration and growth. We have worked hard with neighbouring authorities to develop plans which, if implemented, will see the most significant and sustained period of growth in Norwich's history and result in an additional 40,000 much needed homes and 27,000 jobs over the next 15 years. Alongside these homes and jobs, which are so important for young people, families, and the whole community, will come environmental enhancements and the infrastructure needed, to serve the new communities, and improve quality of life of all those living and working in Norwich. Our ground breaking partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency also offers real opportunities to regenerate parts of our city bringing improved housing and more jobs top areas which need renewal.

Norwich has a mass of derelict sites, most with planning permission, waiting to be developed – it is not the planning system holding up these sites. Is it the owners, waiting too long for greedy profits?

But we do believe the planning system is too complicated and needs simplification. We agree with the need to reduce any planning holdups to sustainable development and the provision of homes and jobs. We need new rules that give local people and communities a genuine influence over development proposals that affect it.

But the NPPF won't give us regeneration and growth, new homes and new jobs and it will not give a simplified and less complicated planning system.

It will not give us what we want. It will not give the government what they say they want. The Conservative / Lib-Dem coalition proposals are ill informed and misguided. If the proposals stay as they are

- they are unlikely to speed up and streamline the planning process;
- they will create confusion about what is and is not acceptable in planning terms;
- they will add to the costs and risks faced by local planning authorities and therefore hold up any chance of development;
- and undermine the efforts of those local authorities who, like Norwich, are working hard to bring forward development on complex previously developed land – brownfield sites.

The Lib-Dem / Conservative NPPF proposals will exhort local planning authorities to do things which clash with planning law! They are proposing to exceed the Secretary of State's actual powers in relation to the content and primacy of the Development Plan as one example.

If the coalition government wants to rip up the existing planning system, then let them be honest and say so, and then the Planning Acts must be revised and proper transitional arrangement brought forward.

If the NPPF does survive as it is now, the lawyers will have a wonderful time and they will be the only ones to gain, and cost us vast amounts of money, hold up plans, and also lead to serious problems.

Here are a few examples;

- Brownfield sites being ignored and left derelict and undeveloped as they are more difficult and expensive to develop, particularly for housing and employment,
- A slowdown or even a collapse in City / urban regeneration
- More and increased pressure for development on greenfield land;
- Increased pressure to develop away from the City centre with a dispersed pattern of development.
- It will severely reducing the planning system's environmental role, to mitigate and adapt to climate change and move to a low carbon economy. The framework will result in dispersed development; spread everywhere, especially on green fields. It will increase car usage, make public transport unviable, fail to support a low carbon economy and undermine public transport resulting in an increased need to travel, especially by car.
- It will undermine existing centres, leading to the decline of the City centre, and other urban centres. The dispersed development this framework is likely to promote could undermine existing centres and promote development in less sustainable locations.

For these reasons the report to Sustainable Development Panel this week, and, subject to the debate at the panel, to Cabinet, suggests that Norwich City Council should strongly object to the draft NPPF and request that it not be issued in final form without substantial further thought and consultation.

Question 3

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

The council's budget consultation questionnaire suggests the council could save money by "cleaning streets once a month". What proportion of streets in the city are currently cleaned more often than once a month?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

"The total length of road cleaned by Norwich city council is 405 kilometres. Of this 224 kilometres are cleaned quarterly, 53 kilometres are cleaned monthly, 109 kilometres are cleaned weekly and 14 cleaned daily. The remaining 5 kilometres is the city centre which has a continuous presence. Roughly a third (32%) of our highway is cleaned more than once a month."

Councillor Stephenson asked, as a supplementary question, what streets would be cleaned only once per month to meet the possible saving in the budget consultation and shouldn't the consultation have made these details more clear. **Councillor Westmacott** said that the aim of the consultation was to get an in principle view on the possibility of streets being cleaned monthly. Final decisions on where and indeed if would be dependent upon the results of the consultation.

Question 4

Councillor Lesley Grahame to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

As new moorings will be eligible for the New Homes Bonus, where are the plans to relocate those being evicted from customary moorings in Thorpe Hamlet ward?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport's reply:-

"Councillor Grahame seems to be making reference to some specific action the council is taking. Insofar that this may affect both specific individuals and is subject to a legal process it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it in public. However, I will ask officers to brief Councillor Grahame on the latest situation.

As for the New Homes Bonus, the Coalition Government Minister of State did announce that houseboats could be eligible for New Homes Bonus. The council has been investigating ways to provide increased residential moorings, but we, and Cllr Grahame, must be realistic that in Norwich it is only going to have a marginal, very limited effect on housing need.

Notwithstanding the ministers announcements, it is not quite clear how the New Homes Bonus might work in respect of residential moorings and even less so in the case of moorings which are unofficial for whatever reason. However, even if they are unofficial and eviction is considered appropriate the council would wish to help those affected in finding either alternative moorings or alternative accommodation, as required under the housing acts."

Councillor Lesley Grahame asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could give an assurance that all who get evicted from moorings will get help. **Councillor Bremner** said this would depend on individual circumstances.

Question 5

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the cabinet member for housing

Window replacement for residents of 58-84 Plantsman Close has been identified as a top priority under the new contract. Due to the particular urgency of this work and the fact that they have been let down on several previous occasions, will the Cabinet Member for Housing give a personal guarantee that this work will be completed at the earliest opportunity and by December 2011 at the very latest?

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing reply:-

"The contract for new PVCu windows has only recently been awarded following a full (and lengthy) OJEU compliant procurement process. The contract is due to start on 10 October 2011 with surveys being carried out now.

The properties in Plantsman Close have been given top priority status but some blocks of flats include leasehold properties and, therefore, the statutory 60 day leasehold consultation process must be followed before we are able to start any window installations. Following the conclusion of the consultation period there is a 6 week 'lead-in' period for the survey and manufacture process (which cannot be started until the end of the consultation process as per the statutory requirements) which is likely to mean installations will not take place until the end of December/beginning of January (it should be noted that this will be reliant on there being no objections raised in the leasehold consultation process).

Unfortunately it is not possible to give any guarantees around programmes or timescales for this type of work as there are many variables that can affect progress such as adverse weather, labour shortages, consultation issues etc, however we are doing everything we can to ensure that the windows will be installed as soon as possible.

Naturally we will do our best as our windows programme is a political priority given that fuel poverty can only worsen with proposed changes in housing benefit. It is our desire to invest and improve our social housing contrary the perceived drive of central Government.

Councillor Samir Jeraj asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could provide a definitive response on the length of the consultation period as there seemed to be conflicting information in the consultation. **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said that she had always understood that the consultation period was 60 days. She would ask officers to provide a definitive answer regarding the properties in Plantsman Close.

Question 6

Councillor Ash Haynes to the cabinet member for housing

In response to previous questions to council in September 2008 and June 2009, we were reassured by the then executive member for housing that work to repair structural concrete in Regina Road, Holls Lane and other similar properties was being treated with the highest priority. However, stairwells on Regina Road, Grove Road and Holls Lane have still not been repaired and unsightly scaffolding has been in place now for at least four years.

Will the council be true to its word, prioritise these repairs and communicate to residents a clear timetable for the work to be completed?

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing reply:-

“Following surveys to all properties of a similar construction type to those in Regina Road and Holls Lane a 5 year investment programme was drafted based on a priority basis to ensure those in the worst condition were repaired first.

It has always been our intention to address the work at these properties but the circumstances around the contracts have impacted on the works.

This programme commenced in the last year of the Lovell contract (2009), however it was not possible to complete the first year’s programme within this contract (by April 2010) and the remaining work form this year’s programme was included within the Connaught term contract.

Following Connaught’s fall into administration the work could not be progressed as it was not considered to be of an emergency nature under the European procurement regulations and therefore a new procurement exercise was necessary.

A tender process earlier this year resulted in no fully compliant tenders being received (design and build type tender) and we are currently nearing the end of the statutory leaseholder consultation period (the end of this month) at which

point a new procurement process (fully designed and specified) will commence to complete the first year's programme.

Regina Road is included within this tender but Holls Lane is in year 2 of the programme and will be included within next year's programme of work (2012/13)."

Councillor Ash Haynes asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could assure her that this work would be progressed soon so that she did not have to ask the question again. **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said she could assure Councillor Haynes that she would keep her fully informed so that she would have no need to ask the question again.

Question 7

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the cabinet member for housing:-

Why has the programme for repainting council houses recently been changed from a 5-year rolling programme to a 6-year programme, and how many houses did the council fail to paint within 5 years under the previous system?

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

"Let me assure Councillor Makoff that the programme has not been changed. Instead the painting programme has been re-drafted following the difficulties in the last 18 months in the delivery of this work stream. However, the programme is still a 5 year cycle but this year (2011/12) is a "catch-up" year with the new 5 year cycle starting from next year (2012/13).

The programme has also been re-drafted in order to ensure that it continues to follow the PVCu window installation programme (following the award of the new contract) to avoid the situation of painting a property one year and then replacing the windows the following year.

If Councillor Makoff has an interest in a particular property then she should contact officers in the property services team who will be able to advise her on the painting programme."

Question 8

Councillor Peter Offord to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

How many new pitches for travellers have been identified in Norwich in recent years?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport's reply:-

"Cllr Offord might like to know as an introduction that as a teacher in Mile Cross for 33 years I have had many contacts with residents at the Swanton Road site, with many visits including taking pupils there simply to have tea and cakes. I feel privileged to have had those experiences.

As regards your question Housing and planning officers have been working together to try and identify new sites for Gypsy and Traveller provision since 2007. Since then a number of potential sites have been assessed as being unsuitable in terms of access/ infrastructure/ size/ location. However, permission was granted in 2010 for three additional pitches at the Swanton Road site, taking the number of pitches there from 18 to 21. These three additional pitches are due for completion in the next few weeks.

In terms of future provision the emerging development management policies (DM14) contain a positive policy to allow the Council to determine applications for further development should opportunities be identified.

If any councillors have any sites that they think would be suitable, especially in their own wards, then please contact myself and the officers."

Councillor Peter Offord said that the site allocations plan contains no proposals for travellers sites and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member agreed that these should be included in future plans.
Councillor Bert Bremner said that the council would continue to work with other local authorities to assess needs.

Question 9

Councillor Steven Altman to the cabinet member for resources:-

In August, the False Economy Campaign group released results of their research in which they used Freedom of Information requests to ascertain how many charities faced funding cuts from local councils. The data showed that Norwich City Council had not provided any information. Why not?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

"The article that Councillor Altman refers to suggests that the data was collected during March and July 2011, during which period the council did not receive a freedom of information request from the False Economy Campaign group. The research results do not include any data from Norwich but as no request was received it may be a conscious decision by the campaign group not to include Norwich. The False Economy Campaign does not make any comment as part of the research results that they did not receive any response to a request for data."

I would add that in the wider context the Coalition Government's whole policy is based on a series of false economies; sucking out demand from the British economy; ruinously expensive reforms of the NHS in the interests of private health corporations; Free schools and academies that drain money out of the local school system and the highest tuition fees in Europe for students going on into further education. After the enthusiastic response from the Liberal Democrats at their conference to the austerity and privatisation programmes of their conservative senior partners we can expect more 'false economies' in the coming year.

Question 10

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the cabinet member for planning and transport

In order to encourage more resident-organised street play sessions for children and young people in their streets, Bristol City Council recently gave permission for more frequent road closures in residential areas for a few hours after school by groups of neighbours and communities, without having to apply each time. If community groups set up such a scheme in Norwich, would the cabinet be willing to support it by allowing more frequent road closures on certain streets?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport:-

"The project piloted in Bristol is the Playing Out project, which involves closing a residential road at the end of the school day so that children can safely play out in the street. I understand that these tend to be one-off events in individual streets organised by the community with the support of the Playing Out project staff. A website detailing the project has been set up and can be found out at www.playingout.net .

As a child born in the late 40's, brought up in a cul-de-sac in Tuckswood (newly built on a greenfield site by a brilliant Labour Council!) I had the wonderful experience of playing in the streets with the mass of other baby-boomer friends. Joyful memories.

In terms of road closures the approach taken is very similar to the way by which a street party would be organised, using the same legislation. Members should already be aware that the process for street parties has recently been simplified and the cost of the road closure drastically reduced to £36 from the previous level of £850. This has resulted in a number of road closures over the summer for street parties or other community events, the most recent of which was couple of weeks ago in Bond Street when the Sunflower competition was judged and prizes presented.

I would suggest that if there are groups interested in taking forward a similar project in Norwich that they contact the network management team who would be happy to advise them and to keep the red tape involved to the absolute legal minimum."

Question 11

Councillor Jo Henderson to the cabinet member for customer services:-

Since being elected to the council, I have had many reports about emails sent to the council's info@norwich.gov.uk not receiving a response. Why can the council not respond to every email it receives?

Councillor Julie Brociek- Coulton, cabinet member for customer services' reply:-

The info@norwich.gov.uk is the councils generic email address, and all emails sent to this address will have an automatic acknowledgement sent to them. What then happens is that the emails are forwarded to the appropriate service or contractor to respond. If the email is a request for service the sender would not necessarily receive a reply, instead the email would trigger the service, for example collecting a missed bin. Otherwise we have a service standard of replying to emails in 5 days.

As we want residents to contact by emails we are currently looking at how the responses to these can be streamlined and improved.

At the shadow portfolio holder meeting for customer services last week we discussed this issue, and suggested that if people have particular evidence of this they pass it on to us so we can better understand customer concerns.

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Henderson, Councillor Brociek-Coulton** said she would investigate the possibility of sending an email to the enquirer when the service/action required was triggered ?

Question 12

Councillor Stephen Little to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

Many residents who have on previous occasions handed in anti-social behaviour log sheets have relayed back to me that they have never received a response from the Council and, in many instances; they have not kept up with filling in the sheets as a result. Can the Council assure residents that, in future, log sheets will be acknowledged and that they will receive an appropriate response to information they have provided?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

"The council understands the negative impact that anti social behaviour has on residents and therefore takes complaints very seriously. Our service standards commit to investigating all complaints of anti-social behaviour and following up within 5 working days and supporting complainants and witnesses until the case has been resolved. Where we have failed to meet these service standards residents can follow to the council's complaints procedure and an investigation will be carried out.

To ensure residents are not asked to keep log sheets unnecessarily, the council only issues log sheets as part of an ongoing ASB case investigation, through the abate team or warden service with an allocated case reference for a specific case officer. In these cases there will be a follow up contact from officers with the household who have has supplied the log sheets."

Councillor Stephen Little asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member was aware that people had been handing in ASB log sheets but had heard nothing back. **Councillor Westmacott** said that if Councillor Little could pass her details she would follow this up.

Question 13

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the cabinet member for planning and transport

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP), which has met behind closed doors since 2006, is intending to allow members of the public to be present at future Policy Board meetings, but has indicated that it will not permit the tabling of public questions. This is reminiscent of the old Victorian addage "children should be seen but not heard". Will Norwich City Council Cabinet members on the GNDP strongly press for the public to be given the right to table public questions, so that people can better scrutinise the GNDP?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport reply:-

The GNDP is a consensual partnership between, Norfolk County Council, South Norfolk District Council, Broadland District Council and Norwich City Council. It is a partnership where it is obvious we are in a minority and we must reach agreement with our partners about how it operates.

I am certain that you want to praise the fact that the GNDP Board will be holding their meetings in public, something you missed in your question. It is a step forward and one which was championed by Norwich City Council representatives on GNDP.

The GNDP board makes recommendations to the member authorities but it should be remembered it is not a decision making body. The decisions take place in each authority and each authority takes GNDP recommendations through their normal decision making processes. This will enables locally elected members and the residents of Norwich to ask questions, make comments and be heard. It provides an opportunity for members of the public and members to have their say on issues of concern in all four authorities.

That said, the new format for the revised GNDP board has only just been agreed as have the terms of reference and I am confident that they will be reviewed periodically. When this happens we will be keen to discuss with our partners whether it would be practical to increase opportunities for the public to input into GNDP processes.

Councillor Adrian Holmes said that the public could help to inform the debate and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could be more proactive rather than waiting for the review. **Councillor Bremner** emphasised that this was a partnership with four different local authorities that needed a consensus.

Question 14

Councillor Graeme Gee to the cabinet member for resources:-

Given the abolition of the Standards Board for England, can the Cabinet Member explain how the Council is intending to maintain and improve the standard of behaviour of Councillors?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

Councillor Gee is getting ahead of himself. If he had checked with his group's representative on the Standards Committee, or indeed re-read the Annual Report on Standards that had been presented to Council in June, he wouldn't need to have asked this question.

"Standards for England (it has not been called the Standards Board for some time) has not been abolished – yet. The coalition government's "Programme for Government" of 20 May 2010 contained the commitment to abolish the standards regime. This requires primary legislation and provisions have been included in the "Decentralisation and Localism Bill". Royal assent for this is anticipated to take place later this year. If successful, this could lead to the closure of Standards for England sometime between December 2011 and March 2012.

Like all interested parties, the council will need to establish what is included within the statute and any subsequent guidance from central government before deciding on the implementation of a local standards framework. Any future decisions regarding a local standards regime would need to be taken by full council, after consultation with the standards committee, and in particular, the independent co-opted chair and vice-chair.

It is important to emphasise and publicise that in general, Norwich city councillors behave themselves impeccably and treat each other, and those they come in contact with, with respect. Long may that continue. However, it is equally important to have a standards framework in place that is clear and transparent. It is likely that the monitoring officer will recommend council to develop a local framework on a similar basis to the statutory system currently in operation."

Question 15

Councillor Lucy Galvin to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

The council is currently engaged in a review of its community centres. Is the council/cabinet looking to close community centres, and if so, how are they planning to involve residents in these decisions?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

"Over many years, community centres have played an important role in providing venues for low cost leisure, recreation and learning activities for residents across the city, many of these activities being organised by communities themselves.

For this, council should thank the many volunteers that manage the centres on a day to day basis on behalf of the council.

Members will know of the considerable budget pressures that the council is facing in part from the continuing impacts of the recession and the reductions in grant settlement from the government. This has resulted in a significant savings requirement for the council with these savings being front loaded.

There are a number of service reviews in progress to identify the costs, outcomes and value for money of these services. One of these is of the council's 15 community centres. This review is looking into the repairs and maintenance costs, future repair and maintenance requirements over the next 10 years, as well as the range of activities run by and from the centres.

The results of this work will be used to shape the council's work in the neighbourhoods and specifically the support provided to community centres including:

- future investment decisions
- the centres and centre management committees which may require different levels of support
- opportunities for external sources of funding which might be accessed in conjunction with the management committees

- if the activities could be provided in a different way given that the council run centres are only one of a number of venues that are used for community activities.

It is hoped that this work will be completed during the autumn so that any discussions that are required with the centre management committees or views sought from residents can be progressed and investment decisions taken to inform the setting of the council's budget in February."

Councillor Lucy Galvin said that she was pleased that acknowledgement had been given to the work of volunteers but was concerned that there would be insufficient time for them to input into the consultation and asked, as a supplementary question, how many community centres might close.
Councillor Julie Westmacott said that there would be time for consultation for all those involved and she could not presume the results of the consultation.

Question 16

Councillor Mike Sands to the cabinet member for resources

In July the Coalition Government published '*Proposals for Business Rate Retention'* followed in August by seven technical papers fleshing out the key principles. The view expressed by Eric Pickles and Nick Clegg is that the 'relocalisation' of business rates will give councils greater financial freedoms. The consultation closes on October 24th 2011. What will be the Labour administration's response to the consultation and in the view of the Portfolio holder, will the Coalition plans result in a 'fair deal' for Norwich?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources reply:-

I am sorry that Councillor James Wright felt unable to bring forward his motion – held over from July council - congratulating the Coalition government on their proposals to 'relocalise' business rates. He is probably wise not to have done so.

The proposal for the retention of business rates locally, although in concept is fairly straightforward i.e. councils will not have to transfer them to central government to see them redistributed as part of the formula grant, but will retain the rates locally, enabling councils to directly benefit from economic growth in their area.

In practice the process will be more complex. The consultation document with its eight supporting technical papers is approximately 250 pages long. From our initial review of the proposal are a number of areas of concern:

1 In the technical papers it is stated that "the government intends to establish a fair starting point, so that no authority loses out as a result of its business rates base at the outset of the scheme."

This implies that government expects some authorities to be worse off financially as a result of the scheme. At the start of the scheme expected to be 2013/14 a base line will be set for all authorities and in some cases authorities will be better off (these will be known as tariff authorities) and these additional funds will be distributed by central government to authorities who are worse off (top-up authorities). After 2015/16 and beyond, tariffs and top ups will only be used in exceptional circumstances so some authorities may see a decline in income.

2 At present the government operates a principle that within the local government funding system, all forecast business rates income should be ultimately paid over to local government. The mechanism proposed under the new system will allow central government to set aside a portion of the forecast business rates for funding other grants e.g. the new homes bonus but it also introduces the risk that business rates could be used to fund central government expenditure.

3 The government assumes that in the future all local government expenditure will be funded by locally raised taxes. At present the mandatory revenue support grant which forms part of the overall formula grant will be made discretionary i.e. it will be possible to phase out this grant. An example of some of the impacts of this will be that areas with high student populations such as Norwich and Cambridge will be negatively affected as this forms part of the formula grant calculation.

4 Future volatility in business rates e.g. unexpectedly high increases or decreases in business rates creates a financial risk for authorities and the technical papers make proposals on how this maybe smoothed but even these proposal have risks attached to them.

5 A considerable part of the proposals are made up of technical issues including how the tariff/top up/levy system will work, measuring the base line, how pooling could operate with authorities and how the two tier arrangements will work.

6 At a recent meeting of East of England Local Government Finance Directors, the view was expressed that the methodologies being used to forecast business rates naturally will transfer forecasting risk to local government causing the need to increase contingencies and reserves.

These points illustrate the caution with which we should respond the CLG consultation. It is clear that these very detailed proposals are not the work of a few months in Coalition but are likely to have been worked up over a number of years while the Conservatives were in opposition. We should also be very sceptical of 250 pages of technical documentation that arrives in August. The Liberal Democrats in their Panglosian way (‘this is the best of all possible worlds’) have swallowed the rhetoric of greater local financial freedom through changing business rate distribution. This of course assumes you ignore 28% cuts in local

authority budgets over 4 years. This arithmetic remains unaltered by these proposals.

Tony Travers, director of the Greater London Group at the London School of Economics has raised concerns about the complicated nature of the redistribution system and the amount the government intends to siphon off. “Effectively the new system expects councils to try to fill a bucket that the government has drilled a hole in the bottom of. It’s asking can councils fill up the bucket quicker that ministers can empty it”.

I have a suspicion that these proposals are linked to the development a market model of funding for local government. There are a number of strong indicators that this is the direction Government is taking. So we must add to the severe reductions in public expenditure and plans to make the Revenue Support Grant discretionary (referred to above) the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) (itself dependent on buoyant economic growth) replacing infrastructure funding by the State and a new National Planning Framework which incentivises councils to go for development – maybe, in the future, at any cost – to get money to fund vital public services.

In the future we may be looking at a situation not uncommon in the USA, but at present unknown in this country, of local councils going bankrupt because their funding is linked to market fluctuations and a high level of sensitivity to macro and micro economic conditions.

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Mike Sands**, **Councillor Alan Waters** said that he would be happy to receive views from other colleagues on the council, including Councillor Wright who had raised the issue in the summer. He said that business rate retention should work for Norwich but he feared that it might not.

Question 17

Councillor Ralph Gayton to the cabinet member for resources:-

Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers, including those in the department for Communities and Local Government, have started the political conference season with a fresh attack on the salaries paid to senior council officers. Coalition councillors on the city council, particularly the Liberal Democrat wing have joined in these attacks with enthusiasm and have called for the *‘overpaid senior management team’ to be reduced by ‘50% - ending salaries of over £125,000 and saving a total of £339,000’.*

What is the portfolio holder’s response to this highly damaging proposal and does he share my view that the council gets extremely good value for money out of its senior managers at City Hall?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

I thank my colleague Councillor Gayton for his question. There is a very obviously orchestrated attack by Coalition politicians, both nationally and locally to undermine local government by attacking its senior management structures. The motivation is two fold: the first is a need for scapegoats.

Michael Burton, Editor of the Municipal Journal put his finger on in a recent editorial piece (MJ 01.09.2011). Attacks on senior local authority officers *'is nothing to do with council salaries and everything to do with the external agenda. The commitment to spending cuts is under fire due to the weak economy and ministers need to show that the public sector is over-indulged and ripe for cuts. Ministers are concerned that there will be a spate of negative coverage in the autumn as council cuts begin to bite- hence the cue for more planted knocking stories about senior salaries'.*

The second motive is to emasculate local government. The coalition vision of a market model for everything requires that public organisations like local authorities are broken up. Discrediting and undermining senior managers is a crucial part of the strategy. The recent Norfolk County Council Scrutiny Committee Report – 'The Role of the Chief Executive' (10th May 2011) makes a number of important points equally relevant to the situation in the City Council about the vital role played by the head of paid service.

2.3 role of the head of paid service is to 'hold the ring' to ensure that the various functions and activities of the council are co-ordinated and directed at achieving the directives and priorities identified by the political leadership (true also for the whole senior team at Norwich)

2.4 Another key role is to ensure that staff remain engaged and motivated during periods of change and transformation and 2.14 re Chief execs pay (but applies to senior staff too) 'we recognise that it is essential to attract the most highly skilled and experienced people to lead our public sector organisations'

The Senior management team is made up of a very lean structure a chief executive two directors and the Head of finance as section 151 officer (the CLT is attended by the head of communications and culture and the head of policy and programme management the are not full members of the senior team) Within the last year we have removed a Director and two Assistant Directors taking the senior staff from 7 to 4. It is worth mentioning that salaries were benchmarked at the time of appointment. The appointments were made by all parties. There are, incidentally heads of private state academies in the Norwich area who earn more for running a medium sized secondary school than the chief executive of Norwich City Council.

To put a figure on the costs of our leadership team - the Council's gross expenditure shown in the Statement of Accounts for 31 March 2011 was £254 million (the cost of the corporate leadership team is approximately £500,000 which represents 0.2% of gross expenditure.

The corporate leadership team is running an organisation whose net worth as of the 31st March 2011 was £653 million which compares with a large public company. A small team carries on its shoulders a wide range of responsibilities in meeting the complex needs of the city and the collaboration and innovation that involves. Politicians of all parties on the city council are ambitious for the city. We demand a lot of our staff (at every level) and innovation and strong direction from the chief executive and her leadership team.

So it is worth reminding ourselves of what has been done over the past few years and particularly since the start of the recession in 2008:

- Innovation through the HCA partnership – to deliver homes; refurbished war memorial; eco retrofit; skate park etc
- Shortlisted for the City of Culture 2013
- Collaboration through the Greater Norwich Development Partnership to bring vital homes and jobs to the Norwich area.
- Improved services - recycling, housing; planning; finance and HR.
- Leading edge in our efficiency and transformation work saving some £13.5million since 2008 when the recession had a £6million impact. A further £4 million already identified for 2012/13.
- Organisational and service changes to bring a neighbourhood focus to the work of the council.
- Playing a crucial role in ensuring that we have a buoyant economy and the city remains a top tourist and retail destination.

This will be familiar to most councillors in the chamber this evening and I could have drawn up a list twice the length. But there is enough here, I hope, to convince those that indulge in what amounts to an English variant of Tea Party politics to stop their attacks on our senior officers and by extension the entire staff of the council.

Councillor Ralph Gayton asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member agreed that at this time of staff anxiousness over job security, reducing salaries and the threat to pension rights, staff should be congratulated on continuing to work so well despite these pressures. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that the “extra mile” that staff had gone to on the issue of the fire at Markham Tower, as discussed earlier in the meeting, was illustrative of what the public service ethos was and how it is reflected in the work of the city council staff. He hoped that when issues of pay and conditions of service were debated by council around the budget, contributions by councillors would be based on principle and fact rather than being “fine tuned” by the views of Eric Pickles MP and the government.

Question 18

Councillor Caroline Ackroyd to the cabinet member for resources:-

In light of the government's recent announcement that it wants all public sector organisations, including councils, to publish registers of all buildings and land owned. Could the portfolio holder tell me when the full list of assets (with all necessary details) owned by Norwich City Council will be made available to the general public?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

There is no requirement on the city council to publish the full list of assets in the manner requested by the secretary of state. Notwithstanding this I have asked officers in the finance and city development services to look into this matter and assess the financial implications.

The Secretary of State's announcement was intended to ensure that councils are making the best use of their assets to help provide their services. The way the city council is approaching this task is by having a sound asset management strategy together with a robust method of appraising assets. This approach seeks to ensure that the assets we wish to retain are fit for purpose and either meet the needs of service provision or provide income to the council. In doing this we also work with other organisations to maximise the use of our assets for the overall benefit of the community, an excellent example of this is our partnership with the HCA which is already delivering new homes and jobs in the city as well as funds for important regeneration projects like the refurbishment of memorial gardens.

Therefore a list of assets is no substitute for proactive asset management of the style the council undertakes; as for example, the review of office accommodation as outlined in recent reports to the cabinet.

Councillor Caroline Ackroyd asked, as a supplementary question, what were the financial implications and did the cabinet member agree that the public had a right to know what assets the council had. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that the council held a number of assets and there were commercial issues to be considered. He reiterated that the emphasis should be on continued proactive asset management.

Question 19

Councillor James Wright to the cabinet member for housing

A report by the consultants KPMG concluded that the 'Home Options' Scheme was wasteful, not good value for money and some people had so little chance of ever getting a home there was no real point them being in the scheme. A report put before Broadland Council highlighted "a level of duplication within the design of the current system that must not continue... (and) an alleged lack of financial

transparency". It also raised concerns over why the cost of administering the scheme, done primarily by Norwich City Council, was so much more expensive than the estimated cost. These reports led to South Norfolk and Broadland deciding to leave the scheme and have forced the City Council to abandon it.

Could the Cabinet Member for Housing fully address the following points:

- Has the City Council asked South Norfolk for a copy of the KPMG report and if so what is the Cabinet Member's response to the criticisms raised?
- What were the costs of administrating the scheme, what were the estimated costs of administrating the scheme, and why was there such a disparity between the two?
- Why were three separate housing registers used for so long (thus creating the duplication)?
- How can the residents of Norwich have faith in this Council's ability to administer any successor system after these damning reports and when it is clear that our neighbouring authorities have no such faith?

Councillor Victoria Macdonald, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

The Home options partnership board is a sub regional body which Norwich city council is a partner, along with Broadland district council, South Norfolk district council and local registered providers.

In answering Councillor Wright's question I think it is important to understand the context of the decision by South Norfolk district council to withdraw from this partnership.

All three local authorities were undertaking a review of the arrangements for registering a housing need and for those who want a property, how they apply for this. All of these reviews have indicated that the current arrangements could be improved.

In the case of South Norfolk district council they concluded that their requirements could be met in a different manner and as a consequence they notified the board that they wish to withdraw. Following this, Broadland district council decided that the partnership was no longer viable and therefore they would also withdraw.

For this reason cabinet has recently accepted that the partnership will end and has agreed to continue to use the choice based lettings system on the basis that this is fair, transparent and accessible for people in housing need. We understand a number of our housing partners who use our system support this view and it is anticipated that they will continue to use our system. The registered providers will also pay a fee for using our system.

The current cost of the service is £409,000 to run and since we let over 1100 properties per annum and maintain a housing register of over 10,000 applicants our unit costs are likely to be lower than partner authorities.

During the past 12 months our residents have made over 130,000 property bids via the Home Options website and 150,000 hits per week on the website. We have repeatedly recorded high levels of customer satisfaction. We will however continue to work with our partner organisations to improve the service and ensure it provides value for money.

Councillor James Wright asked, as a supplementary question, why three separate systems were used for such a long period and what was the cost. **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said that systems were already in place and you do not 'dump' what you already have. The council would continue to offer a good service with its existing system.

Question 20

Councillor David Fairbairn to the cabinet member for planning and transport:-

The prospect of housing development at the Lakenham Sports and Social Centre has met with near universal rejection by the local residents. They remember when the site was open to the public, and enjoyed it as an open green space. It is their clear wish that the site be preserved as that - an open green space with public access.

Acknowledging these sincere concerns, could the officers investigate negotiating a land swap with the owner, whereby we offer another site to be developed for housing, in exchange for this historic site, to be maintained as an open access green area?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport's reply:-

"I expect Councillor Fairbairn to agree that the consultation on this has been very good, with all the councillors for Lakenham invited to a special briefing, and of course the public meeting. Sadly I was away when the public meeting took place. I am pleased that the way the City has opened up the consultation has been effective in raising local awareness of the issue and allowing people to express their views. I am aware of the degree of public concern that has been expressed over the possible allocation of the site for development. I am pleased in the way that the local political parties also made sure that local residents were informed – well I know that the Lakenham Labour councillors at least were doing this.

This consultation does not close until the end of this week so I must take care not to pre-judge its outcome. I urge all those who want to have a say in this to get their opinions in to City Hall. After all, this is a consultation, and we need to have the views of all.

We will carefully need to consider the views expressed and the reasons for them before taking any decisions about how to proceed. Therefore, at this stage it would be wrong of me to rule in or out any option for this land.

But we must also be realistic about what we can achieve in the light of the budgetary pressures we face. This applies to Councillor Fairbairn, and any of those residents who are suggesting similar ideas.

Is Councillor Fairbairn really suggesting we gift valuable development land in exchange for this site? What would be the cost to the City residents in losing possible social housing, providing possible houses to those stuck in upper floor flats with children, giving flats to those paying through the nose with private landlords, providing a home for those sofa surfing, or stuck in the spare room with parents, etc.?

Where will the finance come in these straightened times, much of it caused by the cut backs from his own Lib-Dem / Tory government? If we took over this private land how would we pay to clear, layout and maintain it as public open space? I strongly suspect this will not be an option realistically open to us to deliver or one which people living in other parts of the city would support

Has Cllr Fairbairn thought of the local residents getting together to create the finance to offer to buy the land off the present private owner?"

Councillor David Fairbairn said that he was suggesting the council consider a swap/exchange not a gift. The former Cricket Ground was a historic site and part of the city's heritage. As a supplementary question, he asked again, if the cabinet member could ask officers to seriously consider this option.
Councillor Bert Bremner said that the site was privately owned and was a valuable site. Also, a large part had already gone to Lakenham Primary School. As the councillor had repeated the question he could only repeat his original answer.

Question 21

Councillor Denise Carlo to the cabinet member for planning and transport

Norwich City Council Cabinet members who attended the Greater Norwich Development Partnership meeting on 17 March 2011 agreed to support in principle the use of Community Infrastructure Levy of up to £40 million for delivering the proposed Norwich Northern Distributor Road (NDR) and related measures. Is it still Norwich City Council's intention to donate a significant share of Norwich CIL on a NDR proposed for construction in Broadland and if so what is Norwich's share of the £40 million which the City Council proposes giving away?

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for planning and transport reply:-

In adopting the Joint Core Strategy the Council has already taken a key decision on the arrangements for funding infrastructure to support development. Policy 20 of the JCS includes a provision that contributions towards strategic infrastructure from all residential and commercial development will be through the introduction of an area wide Community Infrastructure Levy. In this context it is not surprising that on the 17 March 2011 the Greater Norwich Development Partnership Policy Group agreed:
"… in principle, the use of a significant proportion of future CIL revenues to establish a shared investment fund to support delivery of priority 1 key infrastructure projects (including up to £40m of local investment for the delivery of the NDR and related measures)."

The estimated cost of priority 1 projects is £312m and only part of this sum will be funded from CIL. These projects include infrastructure which is "fundamental to the strategy or must happen to enable physical growth." This includes an extensive range of measures within the city including city centre bus enhancements, bus rapid transit schemes and other schemes.

This agreement by the Policy Group has allowed officers in GNDP to take forward work to model the infrastructure requirements and forecast CIL revenues relating to growth in Greater Norwich. As there is an overall infrastructure funding gap, it is clear that for some of these major items of infrastructure there may be a need to pool resources and potentially to borrow to forward fund the infrastructure so that it is delivered in time to enable the growth to happen.

At this stage the only decision taken by the Council relating to CIL was that made by Cabinet on 21st September 2011- to consult on the preliminary draft charging schedule. In that report it was made clear that "officers have also been progressing work on financial management. Options for the management of a pooled fund for strategic infrastructure are being considered and will be reported to Members at a later date"

Officers are now working with GNDP colleagues to develop a more detailed business plan for the next three years so that infrastructure investment decisions may be taken. The GNDP Board, which will consider this matter, is not a formally constituted committee and it does not have delegated powers. Therefore all recommendations it makes in relation to the mechanism for the allocation of CIL funding will require endorsement through the Council's decision making processes.

Councillor Denise Carlo asked, as a supplementary question, why was the cabinet intending to give away £40 million towards the building of a northern distributor road. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said that the cabinet's recommendation would go through the council's normal decision making processes.