



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **Council**

**21 July 2020**

### **Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees**

#### **Question 1**

**Councillor Osborn to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“At Cabinet on 8 July, the leader of the council stated that he was “very pleased” with the work of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) in responding to the climate emergency. Is he also pleased with the NALEP’s Local Industrial Strategy, which forms the underlying foundation for the NALEP’s Covid recovery plan? The Local Industrial Strategy celebrates the “significant benefits” of the government’s Road Investment Strategy – that is, the country’s largest ever road building programme and currently the subject of a legal challenge on the basis that it breaches climate laws and the Paris Agreement targets. The Local Industrial Strategy also commits to protecting the Bacton gas terminal until at least 2045 – that is, 15 years after the 2030 date that the national Labour Party committed to having a carbon neutral energy system during the last general election campaign, to say nothing of the many local councils that have committed to becoming entirely carbon neutral by 2030.”

**Councillor Waters, the leader of the council’s response:**

“For your information, Councillor Osborn, I was referring to the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (NALEP) Climate Change Adaptation and Carbon Reduction Action Plan commissioned from the Tyndall Centre at UEA.

The Tyndall report covers a number of sectors: domestic; transport, agriculture, food processing and energy. It’s a trenchant report, doesn’t pull any punches and is a necessary benchmark against which NALEP and the public, private and third sector partners, including all local authorities, must work with urgency to deliver on tight carbon reduction targets. That includes the industrial strategy which is framed around ‘good’(inclusive) economy principles.

To pick up one of the other points in your question. Yes, it’s a shame that the outcome of the general election did not return a Labour government. Norfolk and Suffolk are leading the way in delivering sustainable and low carbon energy solutions to help low carbon economic growth across the UK.

We already have 986 offshore wind turbines generating 3.75GW of renewable power directly off the region's coast, with an additional 1,000+ turbines generating some 14GW of offshore wind power to be installed over the next decade.

These numbers would have been much higher with a Labour government. This would have been welcome in the current economic circumstances. The energy sector within Norfolk and Suffolk has a current workforce of 7,800 which under Labour's plans would have been greatly increased.

Your question fails to acknowledge the crucial role played by central government in how quickly we are able to make significant advances in tackling climate change. One illustration is the underwhelming announcement by the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak to spend only £3bn to fund its new energy efficiency plan. According to an Institute for Public Policy Research report, it requires triple that sum each year up to 2030 to meet the UK's target to reduce carbon emissions. With a further £7bn a year, between 2030 to 2050, to meet the UK's legally binding commitment to create a net zero carbon economy by 2050.

Labour's manifesto planned for major investment to deliver on these targets and would have created over a quarter of a million jobs in England alone. The new leadership of the Labour Party in Westminster is committed to tackling climate change on an ambitious scale. Through our own policies – most notably the recently published Environment Strategy and the citywide Norwich 2040 Vision partnership we are seeking to match that ambition at the local level.”

## Question 2

**Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:**

“Last September in an article in the Eastern Daily Press, the cabinet member for sustainable development stated the city council’s intention to see roads closed for Car Free Day 2020 and to work with other groups on making Car Free Day bigger and with more family friendly activities. In the intervening months, covid-19 has seen an increase in people experiencing traffic-free streets and many other councils have committed to extending the benefits of that. Has the cabinet member asked the county council to implement road closures for Car Free Day 2020 in order to fulfil the commitment he made last year?”

**Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s response:**

Norwich has a proud pioneering record in creating space for people to walk and cycle in comfort, which puts us ahead of other cities. We have always argued that rather than simply close roads on Car Free Day, we should put on events on those closed roads to engage the public and explain what we have done and why we have done it. Without events it becomes an empty gesture that risks alienating the public who would not understand why they are being inconvenienced.

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown events run by this council have been cancelled, all the way to and including Halloween. We have not been alone in cancelling events; independent event organisers have also cancelled indoor and outdoor events throughout the autumn. Our events team has been redeployed throughout the lockdown to essential front line duties to help with the city’s Covid-19 response. Events need planning and in the middle of lockdown it was not clear – and it still is not clear – whether the type of events we had in mind could be held safely given the requirements for social distancing.

We have therefore concentrated our response to the virus on working with the county council to partially or completely close some roads, widen pavements and make provision for outside eating and drinking. This will be followed by other schemes to help cycling and walking using money from the Transforming Cities Fund. We will keep working with the county council to identify and deliver further enhancements for walking and cycling through the forthcoming review of the transport for Norwich strategy. This will be much more beneficial for the public and businesses than any single-day gesture.”

### Question 3

#### **Councillor Neale to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“At the council meeting last November, when we discussed Norwich Regeneration Limited, the Green group asked questions on the governance of that company. We felt that there was a conflict of interest in having two board members who were asking the council for financial support when they were also cabinet members. We were told there was no conflict of interest.

In June the topic was again on the council agenda and although the board had now been restructured to include independent non-executive members, as we had suggested, the cabinet did not agree to the removal of cabinet members from the board as we had called for. We again called for them to resign but they refused to.

A recent proposal was to create another wholly-owned council company to facilitate some of the council's operations. We note that it has been proposed to have a board consisting of independent non-executive directors and chair and no cabinet members on the board.

In light of this, I ask again: will the two cabinet members on the board of Norwich Regeneration Limited either resign from the board or resign as cabinet members?”

#### **Councillor Waters, the leader of the council's response:**

“Councillor Neale, I am pleased to see you and the Green Group have abandoned the misleading line that there was and is a lack of transparency around the operation of the company. That was inevitable following the detailed chronology I provided at the June full council meeting and the June cabinet, describing how the Norwich Regeneration Limited (NRL) was discussed over 50 times by either council, cabinet, audit and scrutiny between 2017 and 2020. So, now let me deal with the misleading suggestion about conflict of interest.

Councillors Stonard and Kendrick have always declared their interest as a director of NRL whenever reports relating to NRL have been heard at cabinet or council or any other committee.

As directors of NRL, Councillors Stonard and Kendrick do not receive any remuneration and fulfil the role of director of NRL on a voluntary basis and this helps to reduce the likelihood of any conflict of interest.

Norwich City Council as the sole shareholder in NRL is effectively a parent company and the interests of the council and NRL are aligned which in most cases will mean that, although directors of NRL who are also cabinet members will have an “other” interest to declare, they are unlikely to have any conflict of interest.

At the June cabinet and council meetings this year Councillors Stonard and Kendrick did identify a conflict of interest and as required, they both declared

this interest and removed themselves from the meeting while the cabinet and then council debated and voted on the paper with its recommendations.

Councillors Stonard and Kendrick have always done the right thing declaring their interests and balancing their roles as cabinet members and directors of NRL.”

#### **Question 4**

#### **Councillor Carlo to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:**

“The local press has twice covered the plight of a council tenant who was moved into a council flat suffering a damp and mould problem in February. The tenant was informed by the council that the flat would be repaired before she moved in. However, the work was not carried out in time and the lockdown has delayed it further. The tenant has chronic asthma and reports that her lung condition has worsened as a result of the damp and mould and she is having to take extra medication. Asthma is a life-threatening condition which is exacerbated if not triggered by damp and mould. As someone who is a lifelong asthmatic with many allergies, damp, mould and the spores produced are a major trigger for me. Asthma UK advises carrying out quick treatment of damp and mould in homes before problems get worse.

Will the portfolio holder ensure that all council homes, from now on, are fully fit for purpose before allowing tenants to move in, and, specifically, ensure that no-one moves into council accommodation showing unacceptable levels of damp and mould, let alone someone who has a respiratory condition, is elderly or has children?”

#### **Councillor Harris, the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:**

“Thank you for your question and comments and I am sure you will understand that I am not able to comment on any one particular case in a meeting of council.

Our tried and tested lettings approach ensures that we let properties quickly, in good condition and at good value to the tenants of the city. Our performance to let a vacant property of around 16 days is one of the best in the country and tenant satisfaction with their new property also remain high. But we can always do better.

The condition of a newly available council home is referred to as the ‘lettable standard’ and this is summarised in a leaflet called “Safe, Secure, Warm Home - Your new council home” published in February 2018. This details the minimum standard that we seek to achieve with all our lettings. All properties that are let will have been subject to an inspection firstly before a property is vacated by the previous tenants; again when the property becomes empty and a final time when any work required to bring the property to the lettable standard is completed.

Not all of our properties will require any works aside from a thorough clean.

Inspections are undertaken by housing officers and surveyors from NPS Norwich, who act as our client and who manage the contractor, Norwich Norse Building Ltd (NNBL), on our behalf.

The council operates a choice-based lettings policy which aims to give as much choice, in terms of location and property type, for tenants at, or near the top of, the waiting list. Tenants 'bid' on properties and in normal circumstances the top three prospective tenants are invited to view a property, usually when work, if any is required is still being undertaken. If the successful tenant is happy with the quality of the offer, then we will arrange sign up to start the tenancy.

Any defects identified that fall outside of the work required to get the property to a lettable standard, such as a kitchen or heating upgrades, would not normally be done before the property is let. In these cases, we will advise the incoming tenant what we will do and generally these repairs are completed in a timely manner. In some cases, this may include structural works like installing a damp proof course which may then be completed as part of a wider programme. Any visible or significant evidence of the effects of damp, for example, mould growth will be dealt with prior to letting.

The overwhelming reports of damp are not caused by any structural defects. Inspections invariably establish the cause to be a lack of air circulation causing the build-up of humidity. In most cases, a fungicidal wash will remove the condensation, and in others the council will install additional ventilation. In these situations, the condition will reoccur unless there is proper ventilation and/or activities such as drying clothes indoors is modified. It is essential that tenants work with us to get the required results.

When we let a property, we confidently expect the property repairs to have been completed in accordance with the lettable standard and this will include work to wash down and treat any signs of condensation. The lettings team have reported that when they view properties awaiting sign up, all meet the lettable standard and there have been very few, if any recent examples where there is visible evidence of damp or condensation.

In the recent example highlighted in the local press it is very unfortunate that the reported 'damp' was identified and highlighted after the property had been let. On the rare occasions this happens we will work with tenants to rectify the issue and provide ongoing support and advice through our housing officers as well as undertaking any works should any be required. New tenants will have the phone number of their housing officer and can call at any time. Housing officers will normally visit new tenants within four weeks of them moving into their new home and again will pick up any outstanding repairs and other issues. Housing staff and our contractors have been working tirelessly during the lockdown making sure basic and emergency services are delivered in challenging and changing conditions. They will redouble their efforts as we start on the road to recovery.

It is also worth noting that we are revising our lettable standard recognising that many tenants may need help with making their house their home for example by making it easier to decorate by plastering the walls, fitting curtain rails, renewing the flooring. This may include some damp proof and other works which do not form part of a programme and where the disruption caused by having this work done when the tenant is in occupation would be

significant. A checklist which guarantees the new 'Norwich standard' for letting will be issued to each tenant. Assurance that the property is free from damp forms part of the existing and this new standard.

Our pilot was due to start before Covid-19 and will start now at the end of the summer."



**Question 5**

**Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“Following the Chancellor’s Summer Financial Statement earlier in the month and additional announcement of £500m toward local government, can the leader comment on whether this will indeed provide the much needed and publicly promised support to this council and assist in the crucial recovery of our city?”

**Councillor Waters, the leader of the council’s response:**

“Thank you for your timely question Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister.

The latest tranche of government funding was £301,970 which takes the total for Norwich up to £1,818,177.

Last week we received a little more information giving the broad principles of how the income reimbursement scheme will work. From what we do know it doesn’t look like it will cover lost rental income or any other commercial income. The qualifying losses will be based on the net loss position and therefore things like losses from events may not result in compensation as we also didn’t incur the costs of running the event.

The table below shows the Covid-19 impacts as previously discussed but I have now incorporated the additional £300k of grant funding and a very preliminary estimate of the income compensation. The latter being predominantly based on estimated lost car park income which in itself is an estimate. When combined with the £2.7m of in year savings identified this stills results in a budgetary shortfall that we would need to look to reserves to fill. An improved position from last week but still not fully funded and with the caveat of a high degree of uncertainty as there has to be a lot of estimates in the figures.

Covid-19 expenditure	982
Income losses	7,296
Funding	- 1,818
Income compensation	- 2,500
Identified in year savings	- 2,700
<b>Estimated 2021 GF budget shortfall</b>	<b>1,260</b>

The figures above do not incorporate the impact of Covid-19 on our business rates and council tax collection - the impact of any shortfalls from these will be

seen in coming financial years so we need to be mindful of the longer term budget implications.

The guidance on Friday made no mention of lost income reimbursement for the HRA so it remains unclear if the government will be providing any assistance in this regard.

The calculations surrounding income are very complicated and we still do not know either the full impact of the pandemic or the full details of the government's scheme so all numbers are provisional and subject to change.

This answer should be read in the context of the question I answered at June council from Councillor Sally Button (page 13 of the July council agenda). The points about local government being not fully recognised for its vital role during the Pandemic (not over by a long way) and the funding model for local government being broken remain the facts on the ground.

Despite this we have an ambitious plans to help the city move into a recovery phase. A summary can be found in the Citizen Covid-19 special edition that has gone to every household in Norwich."

## Question 6

**Councillor Button to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“I am proud of this council’s record in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping over many decades. With special reference to the significant and ongoing work since 27 March to ‘get everyone in’ can the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment comment on the achievement delivered so far to house rough sleepers and provide them sustainable routes out of homelessness? ”

**Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“The Covid-19 outbreak and the requirement for us to accommodate all rough sleepers as part of the public health emergency, has brought about unprecedented challenges for this council.

We realised at an early stage that this wouldn’t be a static situation and provision of temporary accommodation alone wouldn’t, in itself, be a satisfactory solution. The key to maintaining capacity and ensuring positive, life-changing outcomes for rough sleepers was to ensure an onward route into settled accommodation. Our housing options team have been working hard with our partners to put this into practice.

Our approach has been successful. Since 23 March, 106 existing and newly arrived rough sleepers have been accommodated, with the vast majority already moved into settled accommodation so that they will not have to return to the streets. Services are continuing to support the small number remaining in emergency accommodation and any new rough sleepers presenting in Norwich. Of the remaining cohort, an accommodation plan exists for each client, with a key worker assigned to them to deliver tailored support.

Experience has shown that homelessness is rarely just a housing need and this is reflected in the strong infrastructure which we have developed in Norwich over the years to deal with rough sleeping. We were able to draw on this strong network of partners in dealing with the crisis, for example through the Pathways Norwich service, hostel providers and support agencies.

Increased cross-sector working has also been vital in order that we seek to address each client’s individual issues and we have worked in partnership with multiple agencies, voluntary groups and statutory services to support this complex and sometimes challenging client group into accommodation to keep them safe during the pandemic.

We are proud of our accomplishments and grateful to our valued partners. All have worked at phenomenal speed to get everyone accommodated, support those clients and develop sustainable plans to make sure those helped do not return to the streets. What we have seen is the best possible evidence of our ongoing commitment to delivering the best possible services to vulnerable clients in the city.”