



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **Council**

**28 September 2021**

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

#### **Question 1**

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

“Having experience of teaching within prison and seeing the limited opportunities for education and employment, I read with interest that food manufacturers have called on ministers to alleviate labour shortages by allowing them to employ prisoners. This comes as other firms, from hauliers to supermarkets, are also finding themselves short of workers for reasons relating to the governments bungled Brexit, the pandemic, and the failure to increase wages. I believe, in certain circumstances, that prisoners could indeed help, if they are given the opportunity to do real work for a real wage. However, they must not be exploited as cheap labour to take on the roles for which companies do not want to raise wages. Prisoners must not be used to undercut or undermine working conditions. If this sticking plaster current idea develops any further, will the leader contact the prison governor to make him aware of such concerns?”

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

“A timely question. Labour shortages, resulting from the pandemic and Brexit, are a growing problem for the U.K. I share you concerns. The Howard League for Penal Reform have put it very well:

‘If prisoners are to be employed to work for private companies, then they should have workers’ rights, be paid the same rate for the job as anyone else and pay tax and national insurance. They must not be exploited as cheap labour to take on the roles for which companies do not want to raise wages. Public acceptance of such endeavours will depend on prisoners competing fairly with people in the community and not being used to undercut or undermine working conditions.’

I know the prison work hard to prepare prisoners with employable skills for when they finish their sentences. I will write to the governor to make the views of the council known.”

## Question 2

### **Councillor Giles to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:**

“I read with interest that according to homelessness charity Shelter fewer than one in four homeless people housed by the government's ‘Everyone In’ scheme have moved into permanent accommodation. Shelter's chief executive, Polly Neate, said "We're gravely concerned that with funding for Everyone In running out, and councils returning to 'business as usual', we will see people forced out onto the streets. It would be a travesty if we allowed rough sleeping to slide back to pre-pandemic levels". The charity has called on the government to provide ongoing, dedicated funding to local authorities to ensure its commitment to end rough sleeping can be met, along with more rough sleeping support and a "new generation" of social homes. Will the cabinet member for environmental services agree with this and comment on the successes of our Norwich scheme which has achieved so much in tackling rough sleeping?”

### **Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services' response:**

“I wholeheartedly agree with the comments by the chief executive of Shelter. Our work during the early days of the pandemic on the Everyone In initiative was hugely successful. We not only managed to succeed in providing self-contained accommodation for everyone sleeping on the streets of Norwich but in many cases successfully found new homes for them. Our housing first work coupled with the excellent work of our Pathways initiative continues to ensure that accommodation with support is available for people who have nowhere to stay both in the immediate and longer term. We are proud of our work in this area and will continue to work with our partners to achieve sustained success.

The council has already committed to building a new generation of council housing. Continued and sustained government funding and support will be critical to ensure that people have somewhere secure to live.”

### Question 3

#### **Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister to ask the cabinet member for social inclusion the following question:**

“Representing a ward badly affected by poverty with many constituents, both in work and unemployed in receipt of Universal Credit, the prospect of losing the £20 weekly uplift has been met with horror. It will not only affect the 15,048 people in the Norwich City Council area but will push an estimated 500,000 people into poverty. This will be imposing the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since World War II and pile unnecessary financial pressure on around 5.5 million families, both in and out of work. Will the cabinet member for social inclusion comment on the impact of this cut upon our city and ongoing work our city council will provide to deliver social inclusion, as part of our wider anti-poverty strategy?”

#### **Councillor Davis, the cabinet member for social inclusion’s response:**

“The council is strongly opposed to the proposed cut in income for many of our residents and is lobbying government on this.

A recent council needs analysis highlighted the financial hardship many residents are already experiencing, which has been exacerbated by Covid and would be made worse by the proposed UC cut.

The council has a longstanding approach to reducing inequality, which seeks to mitigate wherever possible the negative impacts of welfare changes:

- Commissioning and directly providing financial inclusion advice and support
- Supporting those on the lowest incomes through our Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Ongoing commitment to provision of social housing, including by building new properties for social rent
- Supporting individuals with complex needs and those at risk of homelessness through our specialist support team, Early Help Hub and commissioned Pathways programme
- Digital inclusion support to help residents get online
- Developing a preventative approach to reducing inequalities in targeted neighbourhoods.”

#### **Question 4**

**Councillor Peek to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:**

“The cabinet office has stated “Any voter who does not have an approved form of identification will be able to apply for a free, local Voter Card from their local authority’. However, there is no detail or clarity about how these free ID cards can be applied for or collected. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) raised serious concerns about the huge administrative burden that will be placed on already overstretched local authorities to deliver on such a technical administrative task. LAs will be expected to deliver photo ID cards alongside the added burden of registering millions of new overseas electors on top of the boundary changes. Given the repressive nature of this bill, which has been discussed before in this chamber, will the cabinet member for resources condemn it once again and write to local MPs to seek clarification on the above confusion?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:**

“We await the exact details of how local councils are to provide photographic ID and how this would be paid for. Despite the extremely tight timescales for implementation, government in typical fashion, has so far failed to provide any of the clarity or re-assurance around what will be yet another burden upon local government. Overall, the message on these reforms remains very clear. Firstly, the Government’s Voter ID plans will lock millions of people out of democracy - in particular the elderly, low income, and Black, Asian, and ethnic minority voters. The Conservatives are reversing decades of democratic progress and urgently need to rethink this pointless policy. Second, Voter ID is a total waste of taxpayers’ money. The policy is set to cost millions of pounds at every election. Lastly voting is safe and secure in Britain. I will make these points again to our local MPs.”

## **Question 5**

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

“I have long been proud of the very positive work this council has undertaken to provide accommodation and support to homeless people in our city. The partnership approach, over many years, has enhanced our capacity to deliver this vital service. I was particularly impressed by the recent work of the housing development team, working with Broadland Housing to build new supported accommodation for people who have experienced homelessness or rough sleeping at Webster Court on Lakenfields. With building work underway, can the cabinet member for social housing comment on the positive difference this scheme can provide?”

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

“Thank you for your comments. You should indeed be proud of the work this council does to help people and families who are in housing need. The work we do in this area has been recognised nationally and includes our Pathways initiative, and our day-to-day work in preventing, and reducing homelessness and meeting housing need. The project at Webster Court is a follow-on from the initial work at the beginning of the pandemic and is part of the ground-breaking housing first initiative which seeks to provide secure accommodation for those previously living on our streets. The best way to end homelessness is to provide homes for people. That’s why we are building new homes and why we are supporting people to live in existing council homes and new homes that we can enable with our partners at Broadland Housing and other organisations.”

## **Question 6**

**Councillor Maxwell to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:**

“Earlier this month the Evening News reported a rocketing interest in tennis following the sensational win by the U.K.’s Emma Raducanu earlier this month. For avoidance of doubt, can the cabinet member for health and wellbeing explain once again how the new all-weather tennis courts at Heigham Park will assist the city in further developing the tennis stars of tomorrow?”

**Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:**

“Alas, I cannot give any assurances that the all-weather tennis courts at Heigham Park will assist in developing a future US open winner. However, the council’s capital investment in three new all-weather courts at Heigham Park and two at Lakenham Recreation Ground, will ensure more residents from across the city can enjoy the benefits of Norwich Parks Tennis. The original objectives behind parks tennis, which started at Eaton Park, are still based upon wanting people, of all ages and ability, to get into tennis and be active through the provision of good value, high quality, accessible, all-weather courts for all year round. A household membership fee of £35 enables all members of a household to play for free if floodlights are not required. The model has been developed on a financially sustainable basis with all maintenance costs being funded by parks tennis income.”

## Question 7

### **Councillor Sue Sands to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:**

“Representing a ward where many of my constituent’s experience fuel poverty, I am concerned that the toxic mix of social security cuts, the end of furlough and rapidly rising energy prices will lead to ever increased hardship for many residents. It should be remembered that in the U.K., 4m households were unable to afford to adequately heat their homes even before the latest energy price crisis. Some 10,000 deaths a year are linked to living in a cold home, according to the charity National Energy Action. Can the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion comment on the positive difference our council run energy provider Roar Power has offered and the savings achieved by our ground beating Big Switch and Save initiatives?”

### **Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:**

“Sadly, many homes in Norwich will likely struggle to keep warm this winter with wholesale energy prices currently at a ten year high. Already several smaller suppliers have sadly failed.

The developing energy crisis is concerning. We are keeping track of developments but are reassured that Octopus Energy is a responsible, well-backed company, and are proud to work with them to deliver renewable and reliable energy through Roar Power.

As a council we are committed to reducing fuel poverty in the city, and helping our residents access the best energy deals, while providing advice to help them maximise their incomes. Our switching service has, over its lifetime, saved residents of Norwich over £650,000, and, like Roar Power, only offers 100% renewable electricity.

As we move into the winter, we hope those in need will take advantage of these services and be assured they are at no risk of losing supply.”

## Question 8

### **Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:**

“Several councils, such as Brighton and Hove and various London boroughs, have comprehensive written graffiti strategies. Despite a rise in graffiti in Norwich, especially affecting historic buildings, Norwich has no such strategy. It is good to know that Norwich City Council will explore and include best practice within its approach to graffiti, but can the cabinet member confirm whether a graffiti strategy will be produced in writing in order to allow residents, councillors and other stakeholders to examine this best practice and input into it?”

### **Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services’ response:**

“The council provides a graffiti removal service on council property, removing offensive graffiti within 24 hours and all other graffiti within two weeks.

There has been an increase in graffiti since the first lockdown. To address this we have worked with the Norwich BID team to identify hot-spots and allocated some of the Government’s ‘Opening-up’ fund to target graffiti in the city centre. To date there have been an additional twenty days of graffiti cleaning this Summer.

We do recognise the requirement for a joined-up approach and are examining the options for prevention, cleaning and enforcement in order to develop an effective long-term response to graffiti. Officers will be benchmarking performance at other councils, researching best-practice and working with NCSL to find the most efficient application of our resources in order to manage and reduce graffiti city-wide.”



## Question 9

### **Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:**

“The Marlpit Community Centre has Silver Carbon Charter status. This is partly thanks to its solar panels, paid for and installed by its community association, which give a 700%+ financial saving as well as cutting carbon. At cabinet this month, a report stated that the council had no current intentions to upgrade the EPC E rating of a number of community centres. The Marlpit Community Centre has demonstrated that there is a way to reduce emissions with no cost to the council. This is an opportunity that the council could take advantage of for every centre and generate significant savings as well as cutting carbon. Will the council work with other community centres to insulate them, and install panels or other renewable generation measures?”

### **Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:**

“Legislation requires a minimum E EPC rating to enable a move to lease agreements for community centres. Moving centres onto leases will help VCSE tenants take advantage of funding which is unavailable to the council for improvements that benefit them financially and improve environmental impact. As such, the plans set out in the report referenced are a first step, but not the final step in encouraging centres to be environmentally and financially sustainable. While Marlpit Community Association were in the fortunate position of having savings to fund their panels, not all charities are in the same position

The council remains committed to supporting community centres, and other groups within the city, to improve their positive impact on climate change. However, currently it is beyond the scope of the capital programme to be able to fund large scale improvements with the financial challenges faced by Norwich City Council and local government.”

## **Question 10**

**Councillor Youssef to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:**

“Work started on hard surfacing, fencing and floodlighting Heigham Park tennis courts on 6 September, the first day of the new school year. No local residents were forewarned, even those neighbouring the site. Ward councillors were promised, and in line with protocols, expected, advance warning of work starting which we did not get. We were subsequently told this was because officers themselves were not aware of when contractors would start until the day before. If this is true, can you explain how this is adequate and safe contractor management?”

**Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:**

“It is a positive thing that work has now started on the delivery of Heigham Park tennis courts which will provide a new and valuable facility for residents. Council officers and staff at NPSN were in regular contact with the contractor in the run up to the start of the works and confirmed that all regulatory consents and risks assessments were in place. The start date was confirmed with the contractor sometime prior to the commencement of works but there remained a risk of disruption and delay. The council had concerns of disruption to work after vandalism was caused to the Heras fencing, locks and metal sheeting protecting the site. Local members were informed once there was certainty there would be no further risks to the commencement.”

## Question 11

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

“In 2019, the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth recommended that the city council approve Norwich Airport's plan for expansion, with the objective of tripling its capacity. In the wake of the IPCC report that warned of a "code red" for humanity, many councils came in for criticism for supporting policies that would increase carbon emissions, including airport expansion. Can the cabinet member confirm whether he still supports the airport's plan for expansion?”

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

“The Airport's masterplan was endorsed by cabinet in October 2019 following a lengthy process of preparation which included the council seeking and getting amendments to greater recognise the challenge of climate change, a commitment to preparing a surface access strategy, and ensure that land at the airport is safeguarded for associated high value employment activity. The masterplan contained a projection of future passenger numbers although there was no physical expansion of the airport required to deliver it.

Clearly since the masterplan was endorsed covid has hit and passenger numbers have significantly reduced and may take a long time to recover. However, the airport is still pushing forward with the development of employment land and with bringing forward its surface access strategy. This is not the appropriate time to consider the council's stance on the airport's masterplan. This would create unnecessary uncertainty for an important local business.”

## Question 12

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

“Other councillors and I have recently received a standard message in response to complaints about grounds maintenance not being carried out. The message states that the programme is being reprioritised and that there will be disruption for up to 12 months. I understand that changes have to be made, but this is not the non-disruptive change that was promised when the council took services back in house. A standard message also does not clarify how residents’ concerns will be addressed and I am not comfortable with fobbing them off with a generic apology. Can you please ensure that residents receive specific responses to queries that they send in as a result of the disruption to services caused by reprioritisation of the grounds maintenance programme?”

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

“Following the creation of NCSL there’s an ongoing, wholesale review of resources, practices and schedules. This review is exactly the reason why NCC took control of these services in April – so that the council can better organise and allocate the company resources to effectively meet the needs and demands of the city and our residents. This has impacted on the timing of responses to non-Health and Safety issues.

It is necessary to inform people that this review is happening so that they’re aware we are developing and improving the NCSL services long-term. However, I agree that the standard message being used is not as helpful as it should be. I have asked it to be reworded to make it clear that the council does deal with all requests and complaints as they arise. We will engage with individuals, letting them know when grounds maintenance issues will be dealt with.

### **Question 13**

**Councillor Bogelein to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:**

“Some months ago, residents of Langley Walk endured weeks of communal black bins not being collected. The debris spilled everywhere, and rats were attracted. It was not clear why the bins had not been collected and Biffa did not seem to have informed anyone. After contact with several officers and weeks passing, the bin problem was finally solved, only for the same problem to appear again with the same bins in the same location. This is just one of the ongoing issues with communal bins on Langley Walk as a result of fly-tipping, problems with bin collection and under provision of black bins, Langley Walk residents constantly have to live with an area littered with waste. These problems are regularly reported to the council, but a comprehensive approach, not simply reactive measures, is needed for the area. Will the council review the situation at Langley Walk and address these problems?”

**Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services’ response:**

“Unfortunately, there are times when Biffa are unable to safely make collections due to fly-tipping at communal sites such as Langley Walk. On such occasions NCSL are contacted to remove the fly-tipped waste and Biffa will then re-schedule the collection. Communications and notification systems between Biffa and NCSL have now been reviewed and improved.

You are correct that such reactive measures are not always the solution here. Environment services, housing and communications teams work together to provide effective advice and support to residents so that they can safely and properly dispose of their waste and thereby help reduce fly-tipping in communal areas.”

## Question 14

### **Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:**

“Over the past year, I've been contacted by residents concerned by a large increase in the rat population around Prince of Wales Road, Tombland, and surrounding areas. I've been informed that city centre restaurants place waste out for collection on the public highway at the end of the day for collection first thing the following day. Clearly this is not an adequate solution. Apart from being unsightly, it is highly likely that leaving food waste out overnight has contributed to an increase in the rat population in the city centre. This is not the image of Norwich we want early morning visitors to see. Can the cabinet member tell me what long-term solutions will be developed to address the problem of waste left out overnight in the city centre to help reduce the ever-increasing rat population?”

### **Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services' response:**

“The majority of businesses in the Prince of Wales Road area are in historic premises many of which lack the facilities or space to store waste bins. In such circumstances they will be reliant on daily bagged collections and dependent on the punctuality and reliability of their collection contractor.

We proactively engage with business throughout the city to advise and support them and to ensure that they dispose of their waste safely and in compliance with all legislation. This engagement will be increased in the coming months.

Enforcement against commercial waste breaches is possible using Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act if businesses are failing in their “duty of care” and their waste is escaping their control. However, we are acutely aware of the challenges facing businesses at this time and will always seek a managed solution before considering any enforcement action.”

## Question 15

### **Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:**

“In March, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing tabled a motion on a strategy for promoting pollinating insects. Subsequently, a resident reported seeing city council contractors spraying wildflowers on council land which killed them off. Use of herbicides was confirmed by the council. I asked the cabinet member what action the council was taking to stop herbicides use and the reply came that he would speak to officers, but I have heard nothing further. In Spring, a former Sewell ward city councillor started a petition asking Norfolk County Council to ban the use of glyphosate herbicides and pesticides on our streets and council owned farms and other facilities. I would like to see a strategy produced by the council for promoting pollinating insects. Will the cabinet member commit Norwich City Council to stop using all herbicides and pesticides on council land?”

### **Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:**

“In June’s council meeting I confirmed that the council will continue working with the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) to ultimately lead Norwich to becoming pesticide and herbicide free. This requires a cautious approach while we evaluate the costs and effectiveness of alternatives. PAN recommends that councils should expect an effective pesticide-free strategy to take three years to full implementation.

The council is working alongside NCSL to consider the non-chemical alternatives available and designing a programme for trials to be held during the next growing season. Assuming that 2022 is not excessively wet, and the trials can therefore be effectively managed and assessed, reports will be prepared next Autumn evaluating the effectiveness and cost of these options.

At present many non-chemical processes are less effective, therefore introduction of such processes needs to be carefully considered.”

## **Question 16**

**Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:**

“A letter was sent to the Clare School dated 18 August, during the summer break, informing them of the decision of this council to withdraw the subsidised clinical waste collection which had been under review for some time (stated in the letter). The start of the term was 01 September.

Why was there not sufficient notice given to the withdrawal of clinical waste services from the Clare School for them to make an alternative collection possible following the last collection on 09 September?”

**Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services; response:**

“We recognise that in this instance we got things wrong and the notice we gave the school was insufficient to arrange an alternative supplier. The issue should have been discussed with the school much earlier.

We have apologised to the school for our error and reinstated their collection for the time being. Officers are due to meet the school in October to discuss how we can assist them in identifying appropriate alternate collection arrangement in due course.”



**Please note that the following questions are second questions from members and will only be taken if the time taken by questions has not exceeded thirty minutes. This is in line with paragraph 53 of Part 3 of the council's constitution.**

**Question 17**

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

“The city council's estates team use petrol leaf blowers, including in areas that are semi-enclosed such as Barnards Yard. As a result, fumes from the leaf blowers hang around in the estate and may enter residents' flats. Research suggests that petrol leaf blowers create more air pollution than an average car, and this is exacerbated by the fact that they are used in close proximity to residents' flats. Of course, this may also put the health of staff using the equipment at risk. This is in addition to the noise pollution caused by leaf blowers, especially when they are used in very close proximity to people's flats. Can the cabinet member confirm whether the council will end the use of petrol leaf blowers and invest in safer, cleaner alternatives?”

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

“We are aware of the issues that can be created by the use of petrol leaf blowers they are not used in enclosed areas. In semi-enclosed areas like Barnards Yard, due to the number of trees in the area, petrol leaf blowers have continued to be used.

The housing service are engaged with residents to mitigate any issues arising for their use and are also engaged with NCSL to learn from them and investigate whether electric hand tools may be a suitable alternative. NCSL have recently updated their risk assessments concerning the use of petrol leaf blowers, are using two electric leaf blowers and will continue to increase their use where appropriate.”