



NORWICH
City Council

COUNCIL

25 November 2008

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Tom Dylan to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

‘Can the Executive and the Premises Review Group please investigate funding options for the installation of solar panels on the City Hall roof? This would be a great investment for the Council and a good way for the Council to help promote renewable energy.’

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

‘Renewable energy for City Hall is a key feature of the corporate objective to finalise the assessment of the development opportunities for the City Hall site. This review is overseen by the Premises Review Group. The outcome of the review would be expected to bring forward a comprehensive programme that would create many opportunities to really make a difference, and measures to reduce the ‘footprint’ of the building will be a key part of the recommendations.

There are a number of opportunities where the Council can take a step forwards in increasing use of renewable energy, and there is a developing programme that will enable the Council to step through measures that enable the ‘quick wins’ to be prioritised. We are aiming to achieve the 6% year on year reduction target we have agreed as part of the Carbon Trusts Local Authority Carbon Management programme.’

Question 2

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

‘What progress has the Executive made in promoting a Living Wage for the city? I believe the next stage in the process is for a study to be conducted to establish the hourly rate of pay for a Living Wage in Norwich. When will this study be completed?’

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

'The Executive has identified financial inclusion as one of its key priorities. It is one very important strand of the Labour administration's strategy to sustain the local economy in these very difficult times. I'm sure Councillor Ramsay will also be supportive of major building and infrastructure projects like completing the dualling of the A11 and the Northern City Centre Action Plan as a means of strengthening the Norwich economy and providing much needed employment during the economic downturn.

Members will be aware of the financial climate which is not only affecting the residents of Norwich, but people across the world. There are significant challenges in Norwich.

The number of people experiencing Income deprivation has increased between 2004 and 2007, the date that the Norwich needs analysis was undertaken. The figures below show the number of people experiencing income and employment deprivation.

Income and Employment Scale in 2007 and 2004

Number of people experiencing deprivation

	2007	2004
Income Scale	24,239	21,460
Income Deprivation Affecting Children	6,501	6,413
Income Deprivation Affecting Old People	5,257	4,720

Source: OCSI (2008) from IMD 2007 and IMD 2004

- In 2007 there are more people experiencing income deprivation than in 2004.
- The number of people in income deprivation is 24,239 in 2007 and was 21,460 in 2004.
- Young children experiencing income deprivation have increased from 6,413 in 2004 to 6,501 in 2007.
- Similarly the number of old people experiencing income deprivation has grown from 4,720 to 5,257.
- The number of people experiencing employment deprivation has increased marginally. There are 9,539 people experiencing deprivation in 2007 as compared to 9,339 in 2004.

The Executive is quite rightly investigating the role the City Council has as a service provider but also in its city leadership role to work with existing and new partners to promote and support financial inclusion.

There are a number of needs that are likely to require addressing, not all of which are in the control of the council however the Executive will be working with partners with the aim to address them:

- Increased access to financial services
- Increased access to free financial advice
- Increased access to affordable credit

Officers are looking at best practice from across the country to help shape the Council's response to these issues.

If I can give some examples of current work:

An officer financial inclusion group has come together to identify gaps and barriers to the Council's service provision and this will shortly extend to the work of our partners.

Through this work officers are now ensuring that the Council's delivery is better linked. One example is to ensure that the money advice team who provide advice to tenants are able to provide information on the services available from credit unions.

We are working with the local credit unions to evaluate their work to identify what is needed to extend and develop their activity

Councillor Ramsay refers to the living wage which I am a passionate advocate of and we are aware of issues faced by our residents who suffer from in work poverty.

We do know that:

- Resident weekly earnings in Norwich District are below county, regional and national averages. Norwich is among the 10% of local authorities in the country with the lowest median earnings
- The lowest earners in Norwich earn only one-fifth the median national wage.

Here the Council has a role as an employer, as a purchaser of contract work and as a community leader.

Some early calculations of a Norwich living wage have been undertaken but further refinement is required so that the Council and partners can make use of it.

We know a number of national businesses are committed to the living wage and we are investigating how we can work with them at the Norwich level to champion and promote the concept of the living wage.

The Executive has requested that a "fair wage" is one of the social and environmental areas that should be explored in relation to the service provision procured through the re-let of the Council's contracts.

I very much hope that Councillor Ramsay and the Green group will not only support the Living Wage Strategy which I have outlined but the broader range of initiatives for the well-being of the city which are featured in the Council's Corporate Plan.'

Question 3

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'All parties supported the principle of introducing alternate weekly collections to significantly increase recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste being sent to landfill. However, the details of how such a scheme is introduced are crucial. Green Councillors have raised with officers problems on a number of roads in the phase three area where wheelie bins have been left on pavements since they were distributed, blocking pedestrian access. But these problems affect many streets in the phase three area, so please could it be a priority for officers to conduct a walkabout on all streets in the phase three area and speak to residents who are permanently leaving their bins on the pavement to find out why and address any problems (such as requests for smaller bins not having been actioned).'

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

'All parties on the Council signed up to the Integrated Waste Strategy which laid out how the Council would increase its recycling rate by introducing AWC in all possible areas. The whole document was fully supported not just in principle and in affirmation of this support was signed by all four political leaders.

The Council has recognised that in some areas there would be problems in Stage 3 with bins being left on pavements. When the bins were delivered clear guidance was given at the same time asking residents not to set-out their bins before 18:00 on the day prior to collection and no later than 07:00 on collection day. These receptacles should be returned to the property as soon as possible after collection and no later than 09:00 on the day following collection. Collections are a kerbside service from the front of the property.

As areas have been brought to our attention officers have visited and have taken action. York Street, Gloucester Street, Carlyle Street and Grosvenor Road come to mind where work has taken place to remove unwanted bins from the streets. This work has involved door knocking and letter drops advising residents of the need to take in their bins.

For those that are unable to get their bins out due to incapacity the Council does offer an assisted collection service whereby the bin will be picked up from its normal storage point and returned once emptied. I would urge those that are having such difficulties to contact us and we will visit and assess peoples needs.

I have raised the issues with the appropriate officers who will visit where possible to ensure all unwanted bins are removed. If, in the mean time there are areas that need to be visited urgently please let us know so appropriate action can be taken.

Finally I note with regret that whilst all parties are signatories to the Strategy the Leader of the Green Group recently refused to sign a letter intended for all Group Leaders to sign for publication explaining the current position and seeking to reassure residents that problems were being addressed positively. It does not

suggest much substance to the commitment of Green Councillors when it evaporates on the first occasion their Leader is called upon to demonstrate some shared leadership’.

Question 4

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

‘While fully supportive of the AWC and delighted at the resulting increase in recycling rates, many locations have experienced problems with its introduction. To take one example - at the time of writing, parts of Regina Road have not had any sort of waste collection for a month. Despite calls from residents prompting an emergency collection, only some of the bins were emptied. Multiple bins have been placed in various locations around the site but residents have not been consulted on these arrangements nor informed as to which particular bins are for their use. The door-knocking that officers have been doing appears to have omitted Regina Road and residents have not received the AWC booklet or the full list of collection days. Confusion has also been caused by twice altering the collection day within the space of three weeks and misleading information as to the colour of the glass bins. In the light of this, can the council ensure that residents are fully informed and consulted in respect of the new arrangements, that concerns about the siting and form of the bins are adequately considered and, where appropriate, acted on and, finally, that waste and recycling collections of all bins take place on the specified day?’

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

‘When implementing the AWC service it has always been stressed that there will not be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach especially when considering how best to provide our services to residents of flats, such as those on Regina Road. As a result individual solutions are tailored for each location and these solutions can include weekly collections, communal facilities, individual bins and various combinations according to the volumes of waste produced and any operational issues (such as access restrictions). In the case of Regina Road it was determined that the most appropriate solution would be for communal refuse and recycling facilities using 360 litre wheeled bins.

Since the Council has adopted an individual approach to areas where flats predominate, they have been deliberately left out of the door-knocking programme. The AWC literature is specific to one solution (i.e. a blue recycling bin and a black waste bin) and is therefore inappropriate and potentially confusing to residents of flats.

Instead officers wrote all residents of Regina Road explaining the new service, explaining the service to replace the existing arrangements and detailing collection days for waste and recycling. This letter was dated 6th November and explained that the first collections under the new service would occur on the following Wednesday, 12th November.

The collection day has always been a Wednesday and, whilst the collections have changed to alternate weeks for waste and recycling the collection day has remained as Wednesday. This information was clearly stated in the letters sent to all residents.

Confusion may have been caused by a slight delay in the siting of the glass recycling bins, however, as soon as officers were aware this was rectified. The site has recently been inspected and I can confirm that the bins are being emptied regularly on the specified day.

No record can be found of any missed collections having been reported for the months of October or November. Likewise there are no records of an emergency call-out to empty the bins. I am concerned about the discrepancy in the records and what Councillor Little says in his question so if he would like to provide details of dates and times when contact has been made I will ensure that they are followed up.'

Question 5

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Leader of the Council:-

'Last year Councillor Gledhill asked a question about the timing of the switch-on of the Christmas Lights. Brenda Ferris replied that the date was decided by a "compromise" between the Council and other partners, some of whom were presumably in favour of "switching on" on an earlier date. Did a similar negotiation take place this year, and if so, what was the Council's preferred option?'

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

'The timing of Christmas Switch On has been agreed as the third Thursday in November each year. This was agreed two years ago and has remained so since then.

It is disappointing that Councillor Stephenson seems to be looking for conflict between us and our partners. I hope she does not feel too let down that at this time when we both need to support business in the city and when people are starting to get in the mood for Christmas the City Council is supporting business and making the city look festive.'

Question 6

Councillor Howard Jago to the Leader of the Council:-

'A number of titles of Council Executive members' portfolios are far from self-explanatory. For example, a member of the public looking at the Council's website and trying to find out which Executive member is responsible for, say, Norwich Market will not find many clues from the list. Could the Council produce and publicise a list of Executive members along with an easily understood list of their responsibilities?'

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

'I thank Councillor Jago for his helpful suggestion which has already been taken up. Information clarifying the areas covered by each portfolio holder has been produced and the website has been updated accordingly. This isn't an exhaustive list as it can't cover every single aspect of Council services but it highlights the main areas the public will be interested in.'

Question 7

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Housing, Adults and Older People:-

'Given the apparent openness of central government to councils building their own homes, and given - following difficulties - the stalling of Norwich City Council's plans to do this, what are officers doing to petition government to legislate for a clear and feasible process by which we can build our own homes again?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing, Adults and Older People's reply:-

'In 2007, the government enabled councils to apply for partnering status with the Housing Corporation (HC). Officers put a proposal together to enable the council to bid for grant in their own right and potentially build their own homes. In July 2007, NCC subsequently became the first stock retaining local authority with the ability to do so. Over the following months, housing officers worked with colleagues in financial and legal services to build on the proposal and create a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), by which new affordable housing could be delivered.

Whilst it is recognised that the route the Council would need to take to set up the SPV was a complex one, this was by no means the deciding factor in our decision not to pursue this project at this time. Building new Council Homes has been a manifesto pledge for this administration and remains so.

Because Housing Corporation grant rates are so low, at around £41k per unit, it would be necessary for the Council to build both shared ownership and even market housing in order to cross subsidise any rented units. In the current economic climate there is a real risk that these units would not sell, therefore placing the Council at considering financial risk. Nationally some 9,000 housing association shared ownership and first time buyer homes are sitting unsold.

Officers have been very active in lobbying the Housing Corporation to increase grant rates, not just because of the Council's intention to build new Council homes but because our housing association partners have been struggling to make schemes viable because of these low rates. This is particularly pertinent in Norwich where many of the schemes being brought forward on Council owned housing land are expensive because they are small and in many cases the land requires considerable remedial work before building can start.

Council officers are dedicated to increasing the supply of affordable housing in the city and as such will continue to explore every opportunity to achieve this. This week an announcement has been made that some 1,000 new affordable homes have been enabled in Norwich since this administration came to power. This is an achievement of which we are understandably proud. Officers will continue to hold an open dialogue with their colleagues at the Housing Corporation and from the 1st December, the Homes and Communities Agency on the future of councils building again. We are confident that whilst the credit crunch is impacting on our ability under the current regime, there may well be a role for local authorities in kick starting the struggling housing market.'

Question 8

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Housing, Adults and Older People:-

'Green Councillors have become aware of a number of instances where tenants have been promised improvements to their homes and later told that the improvements will not happen for a couple of years. For example, although some windows have been replaced at Godric Place, some residents who were initially told that their windows would be replaced were subsequently told that they would only be fixed and then replaced in a couple of years, and some tenants in the Old Palace Road area have told us that promised replacement of their kitchens or bathrooms has been delayed. How many tenants have been affected by delays in improvements to their properties, and have there been any delays to the date that the Council expects all its homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing, Adults and Older People's reply:-

'There have been no delays to the original window replacement programme which was agreed in 2005. Indeed this administration felt that the original replacement programme was going to take too long and so invested a further £7million into the work in order to bring the end date forward from 2015 to 2012. In revising the programme decisions were taken to focus the additional spending on areas of deprivation but that in doing we would ensure that no tenant was worse off in terms of having their windows replaced. This was achieved with many properties being brought forward in the programme and others remaining the same. The bringing forward of some properties this year has resulted in a slight delay due to the length of the normal planning application process for flats. Normally planning applications are made in the year prior to the work being carried out in order to ensure a seamless programme of work. However, as outlined above, the timing of the decision to bring properties forward from this year onwards has meant that the planning applications were not made last year and in some cases have resulted in a delay of up to 6 months to the revised drafts.

There have also been a few instances recently where tenants were under the impression their windows were being replaced earlier than programmed. These instances seem to relate back to conversations with officers in 2005 before there was an agreed window programme in place. In the few instances where this has occurred an apology has been offered but it has also been made clear that the

programme drafted in 2005 is the only programme the council has had for window replacements, and as mentioned above this has for some been accelerated and for others has remained the same.

Similarly the programme to replace kitchens and bathrooms as part of the decent homes programme has not been delayed. As with the windows a survey and works programme was drafted in 2005/06.

To identifying properties that require replacement kitchens or bathrooms in order to meet the decent homes standard involves a survey is carried out by one of the council's asset surveyors. These surveys are undertaken during the year prior to the work being carried out. So this year asset surveyors have been surveying properties that may be in next years programme of work.

All properties in a neighbourhood are surveyed in order to identify whether they need any work carried out to meet the standard. In some cases even though a tenant may think they need a new kitchen or bathroom their homes meet the required standard and so we will not undertake any work. At the survey stage it is made clear that this is not an indication that work will be carried out. The surveyor makes it clear that until all properties are surveyed we will not have a clear picture of what work is required. Prior to a survey a tenant receives a letter informing them that a survey will take place. This letter informs them that a survey does not mean work will be carried out.

It would appear that some tenants are becoming confused and assume that as a survey is being carried out they are definitely having their kitchen or bathroom replaced. We will therefore be reviewing the letter we send so as to make the process clearer.

The Council is on target to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010. I receive monthly reports and quarterly progress reports are supplied to Go-East who are satisfied that we will meet our target.

However when tenants choose overwhelmingly to stay with the council, welcome as it remains, it also poses us problems as a landlord into the future beyond just decent homes standards. What replaces that standard is as yet unknown but we are clear the decent homes standard does not reflect tenant's aspirations or the quality of homes we would want to provide for our tenants. Inevitably much of the stock that has gone under the right to buy is the more desirable property in better condition leaving a lot of older and more demanding stock. Some of the stock is reaching the end of its life and we will have to balance the costs of extending its life against the opportunities for regeneration that this could open up. Work is underway to examine how to approach this challenge for the next 30 years and we are about to start a preliminary dialogue with the City Wide Board as the first stage of including tenants in deciding the way forward.'

Question 9

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

'What measures could the Council take to encourage shops, food outlets and other business premises to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act?'

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

'The DDA came into force on 1st October 1994.

It applies to all employers and anyone who provides a service to the public.

The Act is not enforced by the Council and any aggrieved person pursues the matter through the Tribunal process.

Although the Council has no statutory duty to enforce or seek compliance with the legislation by other employers or service providers, during the normal activities of the food safety and health and safety inspection programmes advice is given which supports the principles of the Act.'

Question 10

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'In June I asked when the Council would be carrying out maintenance work to, and then re-opening, the footpath that leads from St. Leonard's Terrace to Gas Hill. This issue remains a key concern for local residents. What progress has been made in addressing it?'

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

'Further investigations have taken place; however, this has been recently stalled due to a staff vacancy.

The issue is not about maintenance so much as ground movement below and adjacent to the highway. As this is a structural matter it also necessarily involves Norfolk County Council. Restoration of the footway is a potentially contentious matter involving engineering difficulties, significant expenditure and potential litigation to apportion any liability.

Officers are developing options to resolve the matter and hope to update local Members early in the New Year.'

Question 11

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

What work has been done by the Council to implement its Lifelong Learning Agreement with its staff?

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

'The Steering Group for Lifelong Learning has been set up and has had its inaugural meeting and will be meeting on a monthly basis. The steering Group is made up of equal numbers of Council representatives and representatives of Unison.

A Chair and Vice Chair have been appointed by the Council and Unison to the Group for the coming year.

Employees have completed a lifelong learning questionnaire which identifies learning needs and preferred learning styles and this information is being analysed to focus on what learning employees would like.

The Steering Group have identified that funding is required to deliver lifelong learning initiatives and a bid is currently being made for budget allocation as part of the normal budget round.

A number of potential areas of learning have been identified by the Steering Groups as a starting point such as English and mathematics modules, languages, personal first aid, health and fitness and personal stress management workshops.

The Steering Group have been discussing how to raise awareness of lifelong learning and a report is being prepared for leadership group around this.'

Question 12

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'Is the Executive Member aware of the current situation with the Catton Grove Tenant Residents Association (TRA) in that they feel so let down with the lack of support that they are very near to folding as an organization and what does the Executive Member propose to do the prevent this happening?'

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development's reply:-

'Catton Grove Tenants and Residents Association is a group which I am very familiar with through my involvement with the group as Chair of the Mile Cross / Catton Grove SNAP panel and as volunteer at the Catton Grove Community Centre. I have attended a number of the TRA's meetings and I am aware of the frustrations that the group have at present and sympathise with their situation.

To address concerns such as those raised by the Catton Grove TRA, a new Community Engagement Team has been developed which combines the functions of the previous Community Development and Tenant Participation teams. The Community Engagement Team will have a number of objectives to fulfil including –

- To strengthen, develop and sustain opportunities for local people and groups to influence what happens in their communities
- To provide opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of services and policies which reflect local needs and priorities
- To manage and co-ordinate engagement activities to ensure consistency, quality and partner participation
- To ensure that community engagement activities provide opportunities for participation for all sections of the community
- To listen to communities and ensure feedback to participants about the outcomes of consultation and engagement

The new Community Engagement Team will consist of seven Community Engagement Officers and one Community Engagement Manager. Each Community Engagement Officer will be responsible for geographic 'patch' and will work closely with all community groups operating within this patch, this will ensure consistency, facilitate networking between community groups and will enable community volunteers to gain support from an appropriately skilled officer.

The Community Engagement Team will go 'live' on 1st December and one of the first tasks for officers will be meet with community groups and assess what support they need. In the case of Catton Grove TRA this may include additional support and training for those officers who will service the meetings to enable them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively, work with members of the TRA to help establish aims and objectives for the group, work to raise community awareness of the TRA and increase attendance at meetings and work with partner organisations to ensure that the TRA is recognised within wider community networks.

Over the past few weeks I have spoken with several members of the Catton Grove TRA, they have shared their concerns with me and in turn I have shared with them the aims of the new Community Engagement Team and how they will be able to offer support to the group in future. I have advised group members not to consider folding the group at this stage as the Council is now able to offer the assistance they require and I would hope that Councillor Fisher will also offer the group this advice and supports their future development.'

Question 13

Councillor John Wyatt to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'When Clover Hill Road was resurfaced recently, some stones became loose as I understand is normal. Usually the road sweeper picks these up on their rounds but in some cases, where for example parked cars are, they are missed. Residents have since told me that their car windscreens have been damaged by these stones being thrown up by other moving vehicles. Shouldn't the council be doing more to avoid this happening in terms of clearing up the stones, or at least more to ensure that cars are moved so that the sweepers can do their jobs?'

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

'Clover Hill Road was surface dressed earlier this year. The process effectively seals the road with a thin polymer layer and small stones to help preserve its life. The stones are rolled into the polymer and the road is swept within 24 hours by the surface dressing contractor. A further sweep is carried out by request.

The life of a road can be prolonged by 10 years through this process and, with limited resources, it is a cost effective maintenance technique.

Clover Hill Road, a main distributor road at Bowthorpe is on the weekly beat for the mechanical road sweeper. This would be expected to ensure that any further loose stones are picked up. However, whilst this is generally effective, small pockets of parking at the same location may obstruct effective service delivery by our contractor. On one off occasions though officers will, together with the cleansing contractor, work to ensure that motorists are requested to move their vehicles prior to cleansing to address this problem.

The parked vehicles also prevent traffic movement over this new surface that would further embed the new layer of stone into the road surface and reduce displacement of loose stones.

Unfortunately there are no parking restrictions in place and residents cannot be forced to use the parking facilities provided to the rear of the properties.'

Question 14

Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Young People Services and Involvement:-

'Would the Executive Member explain clearly why the Executive opposed the Academy at Heartsease but now supports the one at Earham?'

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

'Our position on Heartsease Academy was informed by community feelings and the work undertaken across party lines in this council. I refer Councillor Little to the resolution in council of 26 June 2007 moved by Councillor Waters and seconded by Councillor Cooke, the meetings of Scrutiny committee of 30 and 31 July 2007 and Council on 8 August. Had Councillor Little attended either the Scrutiny meetings or council he may have better remembered that the Council's position on the Heartsease Academy was adopted by council after thorough cross party examination of the issues; evidence taken in Scrutiny Committee and debate in council. The administration has worked within the decision taken by council.

At a Scrutiny committee meeting on July 30th 2007, a number of concerns were raised about the possibility of a Heartsease Academy:-

- Concerns with the feasibility study process; particularly at the style of the questionnaire which, in the opinion of Professor John Elliot (a Governor at the school) defied all the normal rules of public consultation.
- The governors had initially been given the indication when considering their position on supporting the "expression of interest" that they would have the right to veto an Academy proposal in the future. It became clear that this right of veto did not exist so they felt they had been misled.
- Heartsease High was an improving school particularly in respect of "value added". In fact the school was doing very well in engaging and motivating pupils to learn in a disadvantaged area and was one of the top schools in this respect.
- The overall position of the Save Heartsease Campaign was that they have been confronted by "shifting sands", lack of detail and a feasibility study contaminated by promotional emphasis.
- There had been concerns locally about the Cambridge Education consultation process and issues had been raised with the County Council's Chief Executive Officer and in full Council.

This is in contrast to local reception for the proposed Earlham Academy. As I set out below, the public response has been very different, the sponsors are all education providers, and the major area of concern about the lack on community involvement in the Heartsease decision is something we are proposing to seek to rectify with our proposal for a Campus Norwich later on the agenda. That does not alleviate all the concerns but does encourage a more positive reception.

Local reaction to the proposal for an Earlham Academy:-

- Evening News - November 15th
- A survey has revealed overwhelming support for transforming Earlham High School into an Academy School - in stark contrast to the controversy which surrounded the changes in Heartsease.
- Last month, the Labour campaign team in the University ward in Earlham asked families to tell them what they thought of the move to turn Earlham into an academy.

Their survey showed 75pc wanted the school to become an academy, saying it could help raise the morale, esteem and aspiration and improve educational standards.

Less than 10pc said no. Of those who responded, 93pc said they wanted the UEA to get involved.

Cllr Bremner, who conducted the survey of 3,000 homes, said: "I think this sends a good message to the UEA that people want to see them more involved in the community."

Letter in Thursday November 20th - Evening News from Nick Francis (Chair of Governors):-

"It is our judgement that the academy programme offers an unmissable opportunity to create a school at Earlham fit for the 21st century that will inspire pupils and raise standards and attainment and deliver an iconic building for the benefit of all the community."

Local people want the UEA to get involved and recently we have learned that the UEA will indeed come onboard the partnership:

November 21st – Evening News

The university will work with the lead sponsor, City College Norwich, Norfolk County Council, and in close collaboration with the school's governing body and with Norwich School to develop an academy for Earlham School.

Prof Edward Acton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, said: "Our decision is the outcome of several months of very positive discussions with the county council and other partners about the role that the university can play in the academy. UEA is excited by the prospect of working with its partners on such an important local project. As good neighbours, we want to do all that we can to help young people in Earlham reach their full potential."

"It is particularly pleasing that we have the opportunity to work closely with City College Norwich on a project of such value to education in the city. Our two institutions already have a very strong academic relationship and we see this work as a natural extension of that valuable partnership."

The concerns about governance, parental and community involvement are still there and we feel it is the duty of this council to ensure we support them if local support for Earlham Academy is there. The administration will be consistent in listening to the wishes of the local community and in wanting to raise standards at Earlham High.

The two situations are vastly different and I believe that it is only proper that each situation be viewed independently. Would Cllr Little prefer that we take a blanket stance on academies and not review each individual case? We are committed to raising education standards in Norwich schools and academies can be an important part of that endeavour.

I look forward to the debate on our motion in due course as these are important issues for the city and cross party work initiated around the Heartsease Academy should be consolidated by our discussions tonight and hopefully developed within the context of the discussions on the proposal for 'Campus Norwich' with stakeholders.'

Question 15

Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

'Would the Executive Member please update us on progress towards delivering the Skate Park for Norwich, including details on the site, funding and estimated completion date?'

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

'A procurement process has been put in place which is progressing and potential suppliers have been shortlisted. A meeting was held with the shortlisted suppliers with a representative of the skateboard user group to inform the preparation of full tender bids. The deadline for the return of tenders is 28th November 2008 and then evaluation will take place to appoint a supplier. The tender requires the work to be completed by 15th May 2009.

Planning permission has been granted and officers will be considering how the conditions are progressed as part of the procurement process.

The skate park will be located adjacent to the existing multi-use games area. A requirement of the design submitted by the suppliers is that the existing skate facility is incorporated into the new skate park.

Once the tenders have been evaluated the successful proposal will be submitted to the Capital Programme Board for approval.'

Question 16

Councillor Evelyn Collishaw to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'Could the Executive Member tell us what plans, if any, there are to improve Pointers Field and when they might take place?'

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development's reply:-

'Norwich is fortunate in having a rich and varied range of parks, open spaces and play facilities and the Council is always seeking ways to improve areas such as Pointers Field.

Funding to improve these facilities comes from a range of internal sources including money from revenue budgets and the capital programme, along with external sources of funding such as those funds created by new residential development "commuted sums" and through applications to grant programmes such as those available through the National Lottery. All of these funding streams will have restrictions on what and where they can be spent.

An opportunity has recently arisen for a commuted sum for 'children's play space' that can be used the Catton Grove area. The Council is also waiting for the arrival of additional play space funding from another local development. Once the level of funding is clear and timescales have been agreed, officers will develop proposals for spending in Catton Grove based on the Council's Play Strategy in conjunction with local ward councillors and through consultation with the local community. This will then be reported to the Executive for approval.

As she was not present at the last meeting, Councillor Collishaw may also be pleased to hear that Pointers Field was identified as a SNAP priority at the Mile Cross, Catton and Fiddlewood SNAP meeting held on 10th November 2008. Members of the community raised a number of concerns around the Pointers Field area including poor lighting, dog fouling, litter, motorbikes using the park and damage to fencing surrounding the park.

Following the SNAP meeting, a walkabout was held in Pointers Field on 17th November involving Council officers, members of the SNAP panel and representatives from local TRA's to look at the area in more detail and discuss the issues raised.

On 21st November the SNAP panel met again to develop an action plan to address the Pointers Field issues. At this meeting it was established that concerns around the lack of lighting between Copenhagen Way and George Pope Rd will need to be addressed by the County Council as the pathway forms part of an adopted highway. Concerns around litter, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour in the park will be addressed through increased patrols by both the Community Wardens and the Police. The litter bins which have been vandalised will be replaced and park maintenance will be scrutinised to ensure that the frequency and effectiveness of the work undertaken meets agreed standards set out in the maintenance schedule. We will also be approaching Lidl's to see if the community noticeboard currently in the park could be relocated to the store entrance where it will be less vulnerable to vandalism. This action plan will be implemented over the next three months and results will be reported at the next SNAP meeting to be held February 9th 2009.'

Question 17

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'In view of the difficulties associated with some aspects of the latest Alternative Waste Collection roll out in the terraced streets of the Golden Triangle could the Executive Member clarify under what circumstances roads will be excluded from the scheme?'

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

'In February Of 2007 Members agreed to adopt the Integrated Waste Management Strategy 2007 – 2012 and the Action Plan which set-out how the new strategy would be implemented. Section D of the Action Plan states that the Council will "In all areas possible introduce alternate weekly wheeled bin collection of residual/recyclable waste. (Base service is intended to be edge of curtilage service using 240 litre wheeled bins)".

Officers carried-out a house-by-house survey to determine areas where wheeled bins could be deployed and to record the number of wheeled bins that could be stored at each individual location. The majority of properties have gardens or land attached, either at the front or back, or in many cases both. All of these properties have the physical space for storing bins.

There is no catch-all definition to determine which streets can be included or excluded from the scheme. Local topography, access issues and operational considerations mean that in some situations individual solutions are required. As an example, Mill Hill Road properties can invariably find space to accommodate bins but many have significant stepped areas which severely impede the movement of wheeled bins. As a result it was decided to keep these properties on weekly sack collections. As another example, the streets around Chalk Hill Road have steep, uneven cobbled alleys and high kerbs along with some stepped front gardens which meant the continuation of the existing black sack service was considered to be the most practical solution at present.

If there are issues with storage or access please let us know the specific details so they can be investigated. Where problems have arisen solutions have been found by working with individual residents.'

Question 18

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member of Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'St Andrew's & Blackfriars Halls are scheduled for regeneration, with work likely to extend from 2011 till 2013. What alternative venues are there for the events that normally take place in these halls, and in particular, the annual Beer Festival?'

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

'For existing users such as the beer festival and the Norwich festival we will be working directly with the organisers to ensure that the events can proceed, and we will be doing this directly with all current users. We are confident that whilst some compromises are bound to have to be made, as the Halls are such a unique facility, all events can still take place.

We are taking a slightly different approach for new bookings, by drawing up a list of alternatives, and working with those other venues so they are aware of our demand. It is again very important that these other opportunities for events are not lost.

To achieve the ambitions set for the Halls disruption is inevitable; however it is also vital for the city, and the new facilities, that no events are lost. A key part of the project planning is to ensure that we effectively plan and manage through any periods of disruption, and we receive great support from our partners HEART and our team on site in this process.'

Question 19

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Leader of the Council:-

'In light of the problems at the 'Sparks in the Park' fireworks event, can the executive member assure council that procedure will be put in place to ensure that these problems are not repeated next year, and could they outline the costs and procedure undertaken to resolve this year's problems.'

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

'The main problem was the weather and I wish the council had more control over that, so sadly, and given that this event always takes place at a time of year when the weather is even less reliable the options are limited. Our Events team does an amazing job behind the scenes at all our events and they are to be congratulated for making sure the thousands of people who braved the weather had a great display to enjoy. When I was up there I saw many of them drenched, bedraggled but full of determination. So my congratulations and thanks to the Events team and I am sure council will join me in this.

As a result of the heavy rain on Saturday there was superficial damage to Earlham Park. The Events Team did as much as they could to ensure the damage was kept to a minimum and this included closing the car park to vehicles at 6.45pm, as well as leaving some heavy vehicles while the ground remained saturated.

Whilst it is important for the Council to put on major events, which are enjoyed by thousands of people, it is equally important to ensure that the impact and any damage is kept to a minimum. After an event officers will always assess if any damage has been made and carry out any necessary works to get the site restored.

Works to repair the damage to Earlham Park have been identified, and will involve harrowing, levelling and dry rolling, followed by re-soiling where necessary and re-seeding in some areas.

Actually the damage and inconvenience was minimal and I think most people in the city understand that to organise a big event for the enjoyment of the city will lead to some inconvenience and consequence – especially where high explosives are involved. If the alternative is cancelling or not organising such events then Norwich would be a poorer place and I would not countenance it.

As we know, Norwich loves fireworks and the almost 100 events staged by the City council every year. The risk of rain, a bit of inconvenience and need for some reparation is a small price for the value these events add to the vibrancy of our city.'

Question 20

Question relating to Urgent Matters (Appendix 1, Rule 12.3 (ii))

The following question relating to urgent matters was taken with the consent of the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance.

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

'What is the Executive's assessment of how well the Council dealt with the snow at the weekend?'

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

'The weather conditions over the weekend were particularly challenging. However the Council has a well rehearsed and robust winter maintenance plan developed as part of the wider Norfolk winter maintenance plan. Both I and the Leader of the council asked for these to be rechecked when the weather forecast said snow was on the way.

During this weekend CityCare completed 9 gritting runs, spreading 237.25 tonnes of salt. In addition, about 2300 litres of brine was spread on City centre footways.

Each gritting run begun at:

Friday	18:45	40g/m
Saturday	02:15	20g/m
	05:45	20g/m
	16:00	20g/m
	20:00	20g/m
Sunday	02:00	20g/m
	09:15	20g/m
	11:20	40g/m
	18:00	20g/m

Snow ploughs were on stand by on Sunday though were not fitted as they only remove snow above 5cm depth.

The routes which are gritted are the main roads in the City, key pedestrian routes in the City Centre and bus routes. On other roads 215 grit bins are supplied at strategic locations (e.g. hills) for the public to use.

During mid-morning on the Sunday there was heavy snowfall over a relatively short period. As a consequence, whilst the roads had been gritted, it took time for the grit

to work into the snow and be effective at melting it. This led to problems for motorists on some of the hills in the City for a period.

With winter now on us motorists are now being advised to:

- Check the weather forecast and leave extra time for journeys in poorer weather conditions
- Consider if the journey is absolutely necessary in the most severe weather and avoid or delay driving unless absolutely essential until road conditions improve and we have had time to grit the roads and for that treatment to have effect
- Ensure their vehicle is properly serviced, paying special attention to tyre pressures and tread depth
- Reduce speed and take extra care when driving on both treated and untreated roads
- Allow more space between you and the vehicle in front and try to brake more gently

We would also ask members of the public to remember that the response plans for bad weather can only mitigate and try to prevent the consequences. We cannot prevent weather events or errors made by people not used to driving in challenging conditions or driving without the care these conditions demand.'