



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **Council**

**23 June 2020**

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

#### **Question 1**

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

“Having discussed this important issue with officers at the city council and the county council, I would like to ask the following question: responsibility for highways, apart from civil parking enforcement, has moved to Norfolk County Council, with some input from the city council to the Joint Committee on Transforming Cities and the Joint Norfolk Parking Committee. City councillors are now required to report small highways issues via the county’s online reporting system. Limited responses are coming back from unnamed officers via the County Customer Service Centre, disallowing any follow up discussion with the officer concerned. In addition, the Joint Committees lack any slots for members of the public and ward councillors to table questions and petitions, in contrast to the now defunct Norwich Highways Agency Committee. Although the County Infrastructure and Development Select Committee sets a 15-minute slot for public questions submitted in advance, the committee covers county-wide strategic issues and it is an inappropriate place for residents to ask about local highways matters concerning their street. The effect of these new arrangements has been to disenfranchise Norwich citizens and city councillors from being able to take up local highways matters of everyday concern. Will the portfolio holder take up this matter with the relevant elected members and senior officers at County Hall and ask for arrangements to be put in place which will ensure democracy and accountability for Norwich citizens”

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

“The county council decided to terminate the Norwich Highways Agency agreement, with effect from the start of this civic year. Throughout the termination process, the city council made numerous representations to the county council about how city councillors could continue to have a say in highways matters in the city, both at councillor and officer level. However, the county council chose not to change existing ways of working and continues to deal with highways matters only through their divisional members. We have

recently raised this matter again but they are clear that this is a matter for them and they are the body to lobby through county councillors."

## Question 2

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

“At the last cabinet meeting I raised concerns about the lack of a proactive strategy from the council to drive the start of a local green economy. Unfortunately, my question was not answered at that meeting. I have highlighted that I was concerned to hear that the leader of the council appeared to rely on central government to kick-start a local green economy. Can the leader and cabinet commit to producing an action plan that establishes how the council can *drive* a new green economy rather than hoping central government efforts will do it for them?”

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

“I am rather surprised by the assumptions underpinning Councillor Bogelein's question. May I take this opportunity to clarify what the council is doing to support the greening of the local economy. The city council has been proactive over many years; for example, via its home retrofitting, house building and innovative energy programmes. This work has progressed regardless of the ongoing reduction in central government funding for such low carbon activities.

Theme 7 of the council's Covid-19 recovery plan and the council's new Environmental Strategy provide further details on the council's approach to supporting and growing the local green economy. Our plans aim not only to support the green economy but also support many equally important economic and social issues which are tied into supporting the most vulnerable as well as harnessing the city's social capital. These plans will be delivered within the financial constraints of the authority.

As I outlined central government will need to provide the levels of funding needed to deliver the clean growth agenda outlined in their UK's Industrial Strategy. While the current Covid-19 pandemic will lower UK economic growth, as the economy recovers, the low carbon economy could provide a solid foundation for better economy and give rise to a better global future by accelerating and prioritising investment in the UK's low-carbon sector. Retrofitting energy inefficient homes, helping citizens and businesses to take advantage of new technology and electrifying travel will clearly need enough central government funding if we are to succeed. It will require close to 28 million homes and the premises of 6 million businesses to change the way they use energy via the installation of energy efficient measures, microgeneration, and new low carbon heating systems. It will require retrofitting programmes at a scale never seen before as well as a revolution in transport and energy. The pace of change in the UK economy will need to quicken if net zero is to be achieved by 2050. Hopefully sooner.

To conclude I would refer to the new Environmental Strategy and the actions within the council's Covid-19 recovery plan for further details around how the council will continue to support and develop this critical aspect of our local economy.

We continue to ask central government for the resources and powers to do more. That is a point unanimously endorsed, as Councillor Bogelein may recall, when we passed a council resolution in late 2019 declaring a 'Climate Emergency' which included an action point calling on the Government to play a full role in tackling climate change."

### Question 3

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

“Eaton residents have been in touch to say how much they have enjoyed walking and cycling in the safety of the quiet streets during the 'Lockdown'.

Covid-19 has delivered unusual environmental benefits such as cleaner air, lower carbon emissions and safer streets for cyclists and walkers. Covid has delivered an accelerated change in behaviour that both the city and county councils have been aiming for - more active travel and a decrease in the use of the car.

Norwich could emerge from this crisis in a more inclusive and sustainable way by improving access to public transport, introducing safer areas to walk and cycle and reducing air pollution. However to do so the city needs to introduce more cycle lanes, on a temporary basis if necessary, widen footpaths, create low traffic neighbourhoods by blocking off streets to through traffic, and above all reducing the speed of traffic to 20 mph to keep walkers and cyclists safe.

Other cities such as Bristol, Sheffield, Leicester, York and Brighton have already shown how innovative they can be. For example using the opportunity of 'experimental road closures and cycle lanes' for up to 18 months which do not need Traffic Regulation Orders to bring about changes immediately and at low cost.

Will the cabinet member comment on what the city council's plan is to bring such changes about?”

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

“I agree with Councillor Lubbock that it has been good to see the increase in cycling and walking since March and I share her desire to see this result in a more enduring change in people behaviour when economic activity properly resumes. The ending of the highways agency agreement in March means that the County Council has assumed a more dominant role in determining what happens to the transport network. Nevertheless, we are striving to work closely with them to agree measures that can be taken to create better infrastructure. Positive examples of this are the consultation on changes to Exchange Street and St Benedict's Street using temporary traffic regulation orders and the Transforming Cities Fund submission that, if supported by the DfT with funding, will result in a large amount of investment in walking and cycling across the city over the next three years. We will continue to use our influence with the County to promote the importance of active travel.””

#### Question 4

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

“The vital role of local government in responding to this Covid-19 crisis was publicly requested and acknowledged by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government at the start of the pandemic. Indeed, the minister promised to fund ‘whatever it takes to get communities through this pandemic.’ On 22 April the leader wrote to the Prime Minister to remind him of his government’s public pledge and the vital necessity of support to this council. Can he comment on whether he has received a reply and what support central government has offered to meet the potential £14m loss of income to this council?”

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

“The good news I can share with Councillor Button is that while the Prime Minister was obviously otherwise engaged, I did receive a letter, on May 19th, 2020 from Simon Clarke MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government.

Beginning ‘Dear Alan’, the minister was very positive about local government:

“I am very grateful for the hard work of elected members and officers across the country in responding to this unprecedented national emergency. Local government has mobilised to help keep the country moving, protect the NHS and save lives, whilst delivering social care and other vital public services”

So far so good; but the focus in Simon Clarke’s letter has focused on the immediate pressures created by the pandemic, with little said about the longer-term financial sustainability and repair of local government finances to take us beyond this phase of the COVID19. Health emergency.

More recently the language coming out from MHCLG has been more conditional and speaks of “burden sharing” with Government the costs of COVID19 and signals about not re-reimbursing councils fully for the expenditure they have had to commit to. In parallel with familiar shades of continued austerity has been further examples of the Government’s reliance on local government to tackle the pandemic. Shortcomings by private sector providers and the weaknesses of an over centralised Whitehall approach has resulted in councils being given – through their Public Health functions - responsibility for the delivery of local Test and trace services. This is the vital foundation for controlling and mitigating outbreaks of the virus. Better late than never.

On the funding there are strong hints that a tranche of money will be given to local councils. How much is not clear, and the announcement needs to be made very soon. Many council’s across England are preparing in-year budgets as a necessary response to steep shortfalls in income and additional service pressures. On current projections, Norwich needs to find approximately £7million in year savings and over the medium term around £14 million. A growing number of councils are on the verge of issuing Section

114 notices. This means that a council will be unable to reach a balanced budget and continue to deliver services beyond its statutory responsibilities.

The current circumstances are set in the context of ten years of deep cuts in local government funding which has hit poorer and less well-resourced councils hardest (the majority are Labour controlled). It has exposed, as COVID has done in so many aspects of our lives, deep structural inequalities in society. Frankly, the model of local government funding is broken, it's wobbly a pack of cards about to collapse.

This is not a technical resources argument between two tiers of government. The simmering issues and the deep flaws in the system, unless fundamentally changed and rebuilt will seriously undermine our democratic institutions. The Government's reward for our local communities battling through the challenges and the emotional trauma of COVID19 will be cuts to the services they value and their right to a decent quality of life.

Time for Boris Johnson's Government to do "whatever it takes", to make sure that local government and above all the communities it serves, gets a fair deal for the long term."