



# **NORWICH** City Council

## **COUNCIL**

**2 March 2010**

### **Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs**

#### **Question 1**

#### **Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

“How many pot holes were reported to Norwich City Council in the last financial year, what is the target in length of time to fill pot holes and what percentage of those reported were filled in this time? How many pot holes were "repeat fillers"; those which has been filled and had to be re-done later in that year?”

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

“Current monitoring is unable to detail how many pot holes have been reported; Comino logs such reports as requests for service or general correspondence along with a wide range of other reports and requests.

Likewise, contract reporting systems don't specifically say how many potholes have been filled, although they do give information on response times which I'll come to shortly.

The response time to fill potholes following discovery or notification depends on the depth and location of the hole. A pothole of say 80mm depth on a major road will be treated as an emergency to be repaired within 2 hours while a shallow pothole in the quieter streets could be repaired within a month. The response times are set out in Norfolk County Council's Transport Asset Management Plan.

I can say that of:

- 463 emergency orders to CityCare, 99.2% were attended to within one hour of the order being placed;
- 432 urgent orders, 99.4% were attended to within 24 hours;
- 950 less urgent orders, 95.7% were attended to within 5 days.

Reporting limitations mean that these figures include other works such as missing gully grates, oil spills and so on, but you can see that responsiveness is very good.

I am not aware of any “repeat fillers”. However, from time to time and to preserve response times, the repair is made with a temporary material to make the road safe pending a more permanent repair which may take longer to plan and carry out. There are also cases where a pothole has been repaired but the adjacent road fails at a future date. Such failures are identified either by the routine highway inspections or by calls from the public and area dealt with accordingly.”

## **Question 2**

### **Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Leader of the Council:-**

"Since the announcement by the Secretary of State that Norwich City Council will become a unitary authority, the Executive has announced its intention to set up its own Adult Social Services and Children's Services Departments. Would the Executive Members for these two departments give their reassurance they will take on board the very real need to invest in preventative services, despite the initial increased costs, and could they clarify what it is they will do to address the very real problem of neglect that faces many children and older people within the City?"

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

"I am not sure whether to be disappointed or annoyed at the question which clearly seems to demonstrate that whilst the Conservative group have been vociferous in their opposition to the bid for a new council they, or Councillor Wiltshire at least, has clearly not even read the bid submitted in January 2007. That clearly sets out the intention to create a people hub with directorates for 'Children, Families and Education' and 'Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing'. Even the titles provide a clue to the philosophy that underpins the bid – the chance to provide better services by a more integrated approach that takes account of the needs of the whole person in their individual and community context.

It provides a huge opportunity to move away from stale distinctions like those in his question and instead means we can design support and services that genuinely improve life chances from pre birth to end of life care.

There is a mass of papers associated with our unitary case he would do well to read and encourage his colleagues to read and take note of despite the possibility the facts might not sit comfortably besides the anti unitary propaganda."

## **Question 3**

### **Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

"A private company is offering to supply units in the City Centre for recycling of items such as CDs, batteries, mobile phones and ink cartridges. The company is offering to organise and pay for the units and collections. This would mean residents would have access to much needed recycling facilities at no cost to the Council. I attended a recent presentation by the company at which Councillor Morrey said he supported the scheme in principle and agreed to investigate how best to take it forward. Could the Executive member give Councillors an update on when this scheme is likely to be introduced?"

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

"Officers are aware of this scheme and of other opportunities to promote and expand 'recycling-on-the-go'. However, during the last few months all of the Council's waste

and recycling resources have been directed at managing our existing services and planning for the implementation of the new contract.

The Council already has a network of Mini-Recycling Banks (MRB's) in the city centre and these have proved to be very popular with both visitors and residents. Whilst new facilities and new opportunities are welcomed, the Council needs to be certain that the provision of such facilities does not create any confusion which might impact on existing services.

The Council is committed to increasing the level of recycling and a proposal of this nature is worthy of consideration. As members will appreciate there are a number of issues that would need to be considered alongside the benefit of increasing the opportunity for recycling and these include the potential impact on the local amenity, and how the scheme is to be promoted, managed and regulated. I am discussing with officers how the Council can consider this type of initiative and will report back to the Waste Management Working Party as soon as possible".

#### **Question 4**

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

"Could the Executive member provide an update on progress towards determining and promoting a Living Wage in Norwich?"

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

"I will start by setting the context within which the issues around promoting a 'Living Wage' in Norwich are framed. Firstly it is important to recognise that the 'Living Wage' is just one of a number of different strands that inform our financial inclusion strategy designed to help sustain people, and the local economy through difficult times.

The Executive allocated in excess of £175,000 to the short term actions in the Financial Inclusion Strategy covering five key themes of:

- Working more collaboratively;
- Income maximisation;
- Access to free money advice;
- Increase access to financial products and services;
- Improve the way people manage their money;
- Increase access to affordable credit.

The recession has changed the profile of people experiencing financial exclusion. Along side the many individuals who have long been identified as financially excluded, there are many people experiencing debt problems and / or unemployment for the first time. The focus during the past 12 months has been to support those people in need of debt advice, help with budgeting and managing payments to creditors, developing the capacity of the credit unions in Norwich and

training front line staff and those from voluntary and statutory agencies to improve the level of advice at the first contact.

We have also held a number of money fairs in the neighbourhoods and combining these with targeted benefit campaigns made sure that information has been made available to ensure residents access the money they are entitled to. These events and outreach advice has been provided to residents where they live as we know that travelling into the city centre for advice is not an option for some people.

The Executive has also identified the issues of in-work poverty and the problems that exist for the many low paid workers in the City.

The last time I was asked this question, the Executive recognised that the recession was impacting on businesses and developing activity on the living wage had to be timely if we wanted to have an opportunity to make it a reality.

Officers are and continue to keep abreast of best practice and some resource has been identified to develop a living wage programme that could be tested with key employers. The next step will be to talk to those national and international organisations represented in Norwich who have introduced a 'living wage' and to find out what has been the impact of doing so. This will be followed by a range of informal discussions to both test and inform opinion about the possible benefits of a living wage strategy to tackle in-work poverty, strengthen business productivity and create more demand in the local economy. The objective is to achieve a 'win-win' situation. Introducing a 'living wage' is a decision that can only be taken by individual employers whether in the public, private or third sectors. It requires willing partners to make progress. The opportunity to debate the issues around the living wage is one of the ways in which we as a community can respond to the problem of poverty and deprivation in the city and the impact of the recession on the local economy.

The Executive has been clear on its priorities over the past year and has invited Scrutiny Committee to review progress on the implementation of the financial inclusion strategy at its meeting on the 11 March 2010. Any recommendations on medium term actions which will be considered by the Executive on 24 March 2010 when it agrees its financial inclusion action plan for 2010/2011."

## **Question 5**

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

"Given the uncertainties about water provision for the Rackheath eco-town it is becoming increasingly clear that, if housing growth is to happen, measures must be taken to reduce water usage in existing houses and businesses. Could the Council be updated on progress regarding point 2 of the 'World Water Day' motion passed in March 2008 which calls on the executive to 'Work with relevant organisations to set up campaigns and actions to bring about a change in the way water is used by its residents and businesses?"

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

"Regionally, the Council has been a key partner working with Waterwise East to produce practical tools for planners and developers to support them in delivering water efficient developments. The partnership also produced practical guidance on how to improve the water efficiency of existing properties (mainly housing). Council officers are also engaged in producing national guidance on water and planning.

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) has received and considered a final report on its water cycle study, which looks at water supply, water quality, sewerage and flood risk management issues to make sure the growth planned in greater Norwich to 2026 and beyond makes best use of infrastructure. The amount of change in the area means that the GNDP and its partners have been working to develop a strategy for using existing and improved water infrastructure in the future. The water cycle study shows that while there are sufficient water resources available to meet the needs to the growth that is being planned in the short to medium term, careful planning is needed to protect the quality of the water environment. Policy initiatives at a regional and a national level are also needed to verify the approach to water supply and water quality that is needed to plan for the minimum levels of growth that are required in growth areas such as greater Norwich.

The water cycle study has provided the evidence for the GNDP to develop policies which demand high water quality and efficiency standards from new developments. These high standards are needed to enable development in a region that suffers from water stress.

The vision and objectives of the Joint Core Strategy promote water efficiency and the protection of water quality. These are taken forward through policy 1 (requirements for sustainability and protecting water quality) and policy 3 (water efficiency in new development). Implementing these in full will protect sensitive areas such as internationally significant sites, including the River Wensum and the Broads, and enable best use of water resources.

In terms of the Council's own stock we are actively seeking products/different ways of working that will contribute to water conservation, and discussions will take place with the new service provider for repairs and upgrades to identify products that can be used to deliver water savings. In addition to this Housing Property Services will have water conservation measures as a priority within their service plan for 2010/2011."

**Question 6**

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

"I am aware of a number of narrow streets around the city through which recycling and waste collection vehicles have difficulty gaining access. Green Councillors have requested on a number of occasions that the new contract for waste collection should include provision for smaller collection vehicles. Could the Executive Member please inform me of whether this is included in the new contract?"

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

"The specification for the new refuse and recycling service clearly noted this issue and instructed that all tenders should address it. The specification states:

'The Contractor shall familiarise itself with the layout and width of roads and streets to be covered by the Services and the customary daytime parking practices and shall provide vehicles appropriate to the circumstances.'

Both the Council and the new contractor have recognised that different vehicles may be required for certain routes and some trials have already been conducted in Norwich to assess the suitability of different vehicle designs. Further vehicle trials will be conducted and other options are also being considered, such as amendments to existing production chassis. Officers and the contractor are also assessing the suitability of collection practices in other cities with similar street layouts to Norwich."

**Question 7**

**Councillor Janet Bearman to the Leader of the Council:-**

"Bearing in mind that we are now over half way through the period during which the Leader of the Council was requested to "initiate a review of the role and functions of the Lord Mayor", could the Leader please inform us of what form this review is taking and how it is progressing?"

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

"The review is progressing well. I have been gathering information on current practices and identifying some options to suggest as a way forward. Once I have done this I will circulate an outline to group leaders and officers for comment and so they can take their own soundings. I anticipate the report will be at quite a high level and will propose areas where more detailed work will be needed. For instance I anticipate there will be proposals for different priorities for different types of civic engagements and I anticipate outline criteria will form part of the report. However I don't propose to set out a detailed list but rather to propose that a detailed list be prepared as a subsequent stage of the work that can be done by officers in accordance with the decisions of council.

The complicating factor is the unitary decision which we were unsure about when council made the decision. I think we need to continue this review, but it is clear that for future years with a new unitary council the role will need further consideration in terms of scope and resources. I will add something on this to the report depending on what we know at the time the report is circulated and will update when it comes to council at the end of March.

Meanwhile the name of the Lord Mayor for the next civic year is usually agreed at this meeting every year for confirmation at the Annual meeting and I look forward to learning who will be nominated in accordance with the formula agreed by Council."

## **Question 8**

### **Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

"It is noticeable that a great many street gulleys do not carry water away when it rains. Large puddles form which slosh around due to passing cars, to the detriment of any pedestrians nearby. This surface water cannot be beneficial for the road surface under normal temperatures, and even less so with freezing temperatures. Does the Executive Member accept that poor drainage has contributed to the breaking up of the road surface by frost damage?"

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

"Gulley cleaning forms part of the CityCare contract and if a councillor or member of the public notices that a gulley is not free draining, I would encourage them to contact the Customer Contact Team so that action can be taken accordingly.

It is true that standing water is not good for the road surface and less so when temperatures are freezing. It is also true that road surfaces in the city have suffered greatly during the recent cold period but this is true for the whole country. However, evidence so far is that the damage is due to a combination of more general freeze/thaw action associated with a road surface that is already beginning to fail, rather than due to standing water.

Due to the cold weather, a maintenance back log has built up and whilst urgent repairs to make roads safe are being attended to, it will take time before the back log is resolved. Officers are in discussion with their County Council colleagues to resource this work, although you will appreciate that such problems are found across Norfolk – not just in Norwich – and maintenance budgets are limited.

Whilst there is no evidence that poor drainage is contributing to the breaking up of road surfaces, there is every reason that blocked gulleys should be attended to in a timely way. For example, standing water poses a potential safety hazard and at very least is inconvenient for pedestrians. From 1 April, gulley cleaning will be delivered by the Norfolk County Council partnership (May Gurney)."

## **Question 9**

### **Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care:-**

"In view of recent communications from residents regarding issues of dog fouling and stray dogs in Catton Grove area please can the Executive member confirm what the current arrangements are for dog services covering both stray dogs and education/prosecution regarding dog fouling in public areas. Could details also be given as to what the service will be after April 2010?"

**Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-**

"Dog fouling is a street cleansing issue which should be reported directly to the Council by calling the Contact Team. In this way the issue can be quickly and effectively resolved.

Identifying irresponsible dog owners who do not clear their own dog's fouling often depends on information provided by the public. Traditionally many dog walkers do so early in the morning or later in the evening and it is not an effective use of Council resources to have officers patrolling the streets in the hope of occasionally spotting a dog fouling issue. But where reports are received it is possible that an officer can attend to a particular location at a particular time. If a problem is identified then our response is to offer advice and education. Our experience is that this approach is successful, in part because it appears to embarrass people into taking responsibility for their dog.

From April 2010 any enforcement action that may be required on dog fouling will be undertaken by the newly formed Corporate Enforcement Team. Stray dogs that are reported to the Council are collected by officers and every attempt is made to reunite the animals with their owners. Where this is achieved owners are required to pay for the costs of providing this service – such as any kennelling or vets fees. The current restructuring process is ongoing and some operational details are yet to be concluded, however, I can confirm that a stray dog collection service will continue to be operated from April 2010."

**Question 10**

**Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

"The uncommonly cold weather we have had this winter, the coldest we have had for 31 years, has had a devastating impact on our roads. The Executive Member will also appreciate the frustration of many residents living on unadopted roads who will need to make arrangements for the private repair of their roads. Please could the Executive Member:

- (i) provide all Members of the Council with a complete list of unadopted roads;
- (ii) tell Members of the Council what additional work will be undertaken to repair our roads & the likely timetable for this."

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

"Presently, there are some 30 sites awaiting adoption. These range from locations where development work has only just started to locations where the road will be adopted shortly subject to the satisfactory resolution of minor defects. In Councillor George's ward there are 8 sites awaiting adoption.

I will ask officers to prepare a detailed schedule of roads awaiting adoption, indicating their status, to circulate to members as Councillor George suggests.

In answer to Councillor George's second point, I am not sure if he is referring to roads which are awaiting adoption or those that have been adopted.

The latter make up the vast majority in the city and as pointed out in this and other questions they have suffered in the recent poor weather. A maintenance back log has built up and whilst urgent repairs to make roads safe are being attended to, it will take time before the back log is resolved. Officers are in discussion with their County Council colleagues to resource this work, although you will appreciate that such problems are found across Norfolk, not just in Norwich, and maintenance budgets are limited. I presume Councillor George knows that the City Council at the moment is not the Highways Authority it is the Conservative controlled County Council. We only do the work on behalf of the County and can only do that work that the county will fund. If Councillor George believes more money should be spent on this work perhaps he will join me and officers in making the argument to the County that the City needs more funds because of the state of our roads. You and your colleagues could also spend time supporting a New Unitary City Council so that in the future we do not have to go to the County Council with a begging bowl for funds that enable us to look after our city. We should be able to decide without interference from the County on how our city should be looked after.

In connection with roads awaiting adoption, the council is not proposing any additional repair work. Whilst unadopted they are the developer's responsibility and we will only accept their future maintenance, i.e. adopt them, once we are satisfied that they have been constructed to a satisfactory standard. To do otherwise, would present major financial liabilities to the Council and hence also the public purse."

#### **Question 11**

#### **Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"Can the Portfolio Holder tell me how much it cost to make the adaptations to the reception desk in the Council's foyer?"

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

"Essential refurbishment has been carried out to the main reception desk at City Hall at a cost of £10,855. The work was necessary to improve the safety and security of the reception staff and to meet the Council's Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) responsibilities. The new low level counter now serves the needs of our wheelchair users' customers. City Hall's main reception desk now meets DDA requirements.

From the safety and security perspective a new rear lockable door was installed and the inner door lock repaired to create a 'temporary refuge' for staff if they feel threatened by a customer. The desk front was widened to create additional distance between customers and staff thereby reducing the risk of physical assault on staff.

The work also included new storage to improve the image of the reception area and the opportunity was taken to renew old electrical power and network cabling."