

Council

24 November 2015

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Grahame to ask the leader of the council:

“Please will the leader publish the letter to the Government from the three group leaders on the European refugee crisis, which council agreed at its last meeting? Earlier this month, the United Nations special representative for international migration, Peter Sutherland, said Britain will be adopting a morally unacceptable position if it turns its back on the refugee crisis in Europe. This city has a good record of responding to previous refugee crises with humanity, and has indicated its will to do so again with this current crisis. As a harsh winter sets in in Europe, and while acknowledging the security issues after Paris of which refugees are often the first victims, please can the leader say what further urgent pressure, the council as a whole (i.e. cross-party), could put on the Government to provide genuine assistance to the refugees currently suffering across Europe?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

“Thank you for your question. I must admit to being a little surprised by a public question which would have been better discussed informally. At the last leaders meeting with councillors Haynes and Wright I did raise the need to get a draft prepared and volunteered to do that once I had received relevant extracts from the speeches of councillors Lucy Howard and James Wright. I stand to be corrected but I have not yet received that information. I guess it is the downside of writing a letter by committee. I have not felt able to progress this until I have that information - since all three group leaders need to be satisfied with the contents before signing the letter to Prime Minister and Norwich MPs.

Another reason that has to be factored in to the timing of our letter has also emerged - the fact that Norfolk County Council, as the lead authority dealing with the Home Office over the Syrian re-settlement programme, has yet to receive an actual offer from Government (funding, I suspect, remains a sticking point). Until that is resolved the city council - which has clearly expressed its wish to welcome Syrian Refugees to the city - cannot set in train its own approval process. We hope for a speedy conclusion to these negotiations and I look forward to receiving the necessary information from colleagues to prepare a draft letter to Government.”

Question 2

Councillor Schmierer to ask the cabinet member for resources and income generation:

“Does the cabinet member for resources and income generation think it is ever acceptable to put forward or even threaten to put forward an unbalanced budget - something which is especially pertinent given the scale of cuts that are set to fall on local authorities like Norwich?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for resources and income generation's response:

“Local authorities are required to set a balanced budget. The process for calculating the council's budget requirement and the council tax are set out in chapter three of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires the section 151 officer to make a report to all the council's members and to its external auditor, in consultation with the monitoring officer and the head of paid service, if it appears that the expenditure of the council incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources available to it to meet that expenditure. Serious consequences could follow making such a report.

Under the Local Government Act 2003 section 25, there is a statutory duty on the s151 officer to report to the council, at the time the budget is considered and the council tax set, on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of proposed financial reserves. Under the same section of the legislation, the council must have regard to this report when making decisions about the budget.

The Secretary of State has reserved powers to specify in regulations a statutory minimum level of reserves that will be used if authorities fail to remedy deficiencies or run down reserves against the advice of the s151 officer.

So, in answer to the question, it is never acceptable to put forward an unbalanced budget.”

Question 3

Councillor Jones to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

“The council has a policy of forcing pot plants and similar items to be removed from communal balconies and landings even when they are not in the way and are not a fire hazard. Could this policy be reconsidered?”

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing's response:

"In light of serious fires resulting in deaths of tenants and fire fighters in other parts of the country, we worked very closely with Norfolk Fire Service to come up with an updated communal areas procedure, informed by consultation, which has been designed to keep people safe, allow the Fire Brigade access in the event of an emergency, whilst balancing the practical needs of the people who live there. The council's cabinet approved this updated communal area inspections procedure in December 2014.

We want to encourage sensible use of communal spaces wherever possible, but we also have a statutory responsibility. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires us to carry out fire risk assessments and to maintain communal space as means of escape in the event of a fire. Our duty is to ensure that escape routes are not obstructed. We are required to keep stairways/steps, corridors and all exit routes clear of obstructions, trip hazards and combustible materials.

The communal areas inspection procedure is designed to encourage tenants and residents to create welcome environments in communal areas but in way that does not create risks and hazards for others.

The procedure and its implementation will be reviewed in the next six months, once the full roll out of the procedure is completed."

Question 4

Councillor Bogelein to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development safety:

"Anyone who has raised a baby will be stunned at how much waste a little one produces purely through nappies. With an average of 8 nappies a day, the bin fills quickly. A large number of mothers want to do the best for their baby and the environment and thus choose biodegradable nappies and wipes. I have met many of them and the demand is growing, despite the higher costs. The problem is: in Norwich we have currently no composting facility for biodegradable nappies. When calling the council I was advised to dispose of them in general waste. This defies the whole environmental benefits of biodegradable nappies, as they cannot biodegrade in a landfill.

100% biodegradable nappies and wipes offer high quality composting material and are much better for the environment when composted. Will Norwich City Council look into establishing a composting facility for biodegradable nappies and therefore not only be at the forefront of this growing practise but also be able to harness the benefits of making use of biodegradable material?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"At present there are no plans for the council to establish a compostable facility for biodegradable nappies. Options for waste treatment facilities are being discussed through the Norfolk Waste Partnership. The partnership is investigating the most cost effective ways for the tax payer of delivering such facilities for the whole of Norfolk. I will ensure the issue of biodegradable nappies is included in the discussions."

Question 5

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"Will the cabinet member consider revisiting the decision to make a single late night activity zone on Prince of Wales Road and conduct a public consultation on situating a second zone away from the city centre and residents on an industrial or commercial estate for example that can be policed efficiently? A focus for the results of any consultation should take into account the existing costs to the council, Police and NHS whether or not these costs have yet been established."

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"The council recognises that the issues involved with the night time economy in Norwich are complex and need to be managed carefully and responsibly. This involves taking a co-ordinated approach to managing the activities through a dedicated licensing forum, involving close co-operation between the council's planning, licensing and environmental health officers, pub and club operators, representatives of the local community and the police to ensure the proper regulation and enforcement of the sector.

Our *Local plan* which was adopted by council in 2014 identifies two late night economy zones rather than one. One is centred on Prince of Wales Road, the other is on Riverside. The associated policy (DM23) seeks to enhance the vibrancy of the city centre and local and district centres and cater for increased demands for leisure and hospitality uses. It seeks to concentrate late night entertainment within the two specified areas whilst aiming to reduce conflicts by restricting noise sensitive uses in these areas where possible.

In March 2014, cabinet adopted a 12 point plan to further improve management of the night time economy and to help mitigate the effects of the night time economy on residents, businesses and visitors within the city centre.

This 12 point plan has taken such steps as to restrict traffic movement in the surrounding residential streets and promote other traffic improvement plans;

increase CCTV coverage; install a new gate to prevent anti-social behaviour in a particular alleyway; work with night time economy operators; develop the new Rose Lane car park plan to make toilet provision more widely available; instigate various designated driver and reducing the strength of alcohol campaigns, and has seen the introduction of the Safe Haven project. Much of this work is complete, although some is ongoing. The feedback on actions taken so far has indicated a positive improvement for the residents surrounding the existing late night activity area.

In June of this year the council also adopted a cumulative impact policy which applies to a single defined area of the city centre and will assist in ensuring that licensing decisions take into account the fullest possible range of considerations. The policy applies across a significant part of the city centre including both of the two defined late night economy areas in the *Local plan*.

Late night uses contribute significantly to the economy of the city and are a feature of all vibrant major urban centres. We will continue to work closely with all interested parties to find the best way of maximizing benefits and managing the impacts of the night time economy. However, we are not intending to conduct any review of our *Local plan* policy in the near future and I am not at all convinced that seeking to create a new zone for late night activities remote from the city centre on an industrial or commercial estate would be a popular, practicable or deliverable option to pursue”

Question 6

Councillor Henderson to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

“The council has recently approved an *Air quality action plan* at cabinet. With the building of Generation Park, residents in the area are concerned about potential impacts on air quality in the area surrounding it. Will the cabinet member consider monitoring air quality at Thorpe Ridge*?”

*Quebec Road, Thorpe Road, Riverside Road, Cotman Road and Telegraph Lane East areas

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development’s response:

“We are well aware from the many representations received on the planning application for Generation Park that its potential impact on air quality, which was highlighted in the Environmental Statement accompanying the application, is a cause for concern among local residents. As you may be aware, to ensure this matter was fully and properly considered as part of the planning application, the council has commissioned its own independent expert advice on air quality to assist it in determining the application. This has led to further information being requested from the applicant which is currently outstanding.

At this stage it would be premature to be specific about how air quality will be monitored in one particular area of the city going forward. The planning application has yet to be determined so at this stage we do not know whether it will be approved or refused. Possible measures to monitor and mitigate any air quality impacts will need to be considered through the planning application process and, if approved, any permission may well have conditions attached related to air quality.

Furthermore, in addition to securing planning permission, if the Generation Park proposal is to become operational it would also need an environmental permit from the Environment Agency. If such a permit is issued this is likely to require monitoring at source."

Question 7

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"For this financial year, Norwich City Council agreed to use £50,000 of Community Infrastructure Levy to re-plant and maintain some of the city's 2,000 street trees removed since 2011. This appears to be a one-off payment with no plans in place to support re-planting in future years. Trees are essential for supporting people's quality of life and biodiversity, improving air quality, flood protection and cooling the city as global temperatures rise. Will the portfolio holder consider reinstating the annual tree budget for re-planting the city's stock of street trees outside of conservation areas?"

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"The council did increase the budget for tree planting this year by £16,000 allowing 102 trees to be planted on our streets. In view of the continued pressure on council's finances, there are no immediate plans to raise the tree planting budget still further. The commitment to review the level of funding in the future when funding is more readily available remains, as does the commitment to identify other sources of funding as demonstrated by the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy to plant a further 99 trees across the city."

Question 8

Councillor Howard to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

“Tenants renting through Let NCC are sometimes vulnerable people unable to bid for council properties. Does the cabinet member for housing feel that council policy is being applied consistently by housing officers when dealing with tenants living in damp, mouldy properties, and have officers received sufficient training to allow them to make accurate judgements regarding mould caused by 'tenant lifestyle' and damp caused by underlying issues the landlord or council has responsibility for?”

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing's response:

“Let NCC is a valuable and innovative scheme to assist vulnerable clients who may otherwise not be eligible for social housing in Norwich into accommodation leased by the council. Typical clients will include those that have previously been unable to maintain tenancies and those who do not qualify for other housing options because of their previous behaviour, so this can often be a challenging client base with a poor history of tenancy management.

Since its launch in 2007 the Let NCC scheme has assisted over 1000 such clients into accommodation, demonstrating its immense value to the council in making such a contribution to our work preventing homelessness in the city.

As part of their property management remit, Let NCC officers are required to have a good all round knowledge of all aspects of housing, including being able to identify disrepair issues. As such, officers are required to attend HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) training. This nationally recognised training gives a good overall knowledge of repair issues, housing conditions and hazard awareness but, as you would expect, this would not be to the same level as a specialist surveyor. As such, where appropriate, specialist advice is sought for more complex issues and once identified; officers will work with the landlord to ensure that any underlying repair issues are resolved.

The cause of damp issues is often not straightforward to identify and we have found that, as in the council's own stock, the lifestyle of the occupants can often play a significant contributing factor. As such, the council places great emphasis on educating tenants with advice and information as to possible causes of damp and condensation in the home, particularly where lifestyle can be such a contributory factor.”

Question 9

Councillor Ryan to ask the cabinet member for resources and income generation:

“Can the cabinet member for resources and income generation give his views on the new council website due to be launched next year and the additional advantages it should provide for users?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for resources and income generation’s response:

“The new website is due to go live towards the end of January. The main benefit will be the advanced technology that sits behind it, allowing it to be fully responsive. This means we will soon have a website that provides maximum optimal viewing and an interactive experience across a wide range of devices from desktop computers to mobile phones and tablets – all of which will benefit from easy reading and navigation.

Users will be able to access content with the minimum of resizing, panning and scrolling when searching for what’s needed. Additional functionality includes a customer portal for secure access to individual information including online account balances, an improved intelligent search facility, greater functionality on forms with the ability to make payments and send attachments and integrated mapping functions all of which will improve the customer experience and provide a cleaner, clearer and fresher experience.

This is an important step forward for the council for two key reasons:

- Responsive web design is becoming increasingly important due to the upward spiral of mobile traffic across internet usage as a whole.
- Having a website with content that’s easy to read and delivers what visitors need quickly and efficiently has an important link with our work and support around digital inclusion.

With council budgets increasingly under pressure, having a fully responsive website means, in a cost-effective way, we can help to deliver what more and more of our customers want – round-the-clock and easy access to the council services they want, on any device.”

Question 10

Councillor Button to ask the cabinet member for resources and income generation:

“Following an excellent response to the consultation on improving the River Wensum, can the cabinet member for resources and income generation comment on the next steps for developing a strategy and action plan to promote this treasured resource?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for resources and income generation’s response:

“There was indeed an excellent response to the River Wensum Strategy public consultation in summer 2015, which generated over 800 responses from over 160 individuals and organisations with an interest in the river. The report on the consultation, published in the autumn, summarised a wide range of issues and potential opportunities identified by consultees. These include many leisure related issues and opportunities related to improved boating infrastructure, improved access, better signage, and opportunities for enhancement for specific sites, as well as opportunities for enhanced biodiversity, and green infrastructure enhancements.

The River Wensum Strategy Partnership is led by the city council, working with the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership (also representing the Norwich Society and Norwich HEART). The Partnership is currently developing the strategy, taking into consideration the large number of consultation responses, along with input from partner organisations, and also addressing the complex nature of partners’ roles and responsibilities for the river which can be a challenge to management of the river corridor and delivering change.

These roles and responsibilities include the city council’s role as landowner of the river bed and local planning authority and the Broads Authority’s role as navigation authority and local planning authority for the tidal reaches of the river. The Environment Agency also has responsibilities for the non-tidal reaches of the river upstream of New Mills, and Norfolk County Council has responsibility for a range of functions including delivery of green infrastructure within the Greater Norwich Growth Board (GNGB) area.

Partners are working together with a shared vision for the future of the river corridor to ensure that the emerging strategy delivers real benefits for all by increasing access to and greater use of this important asset.

Given the complexity of responsibilities, many of the emerging proposals inevitably require discussion and coordination between the partner organisations in their various capacities, and with relevant stakeholders as appropriate. As the intention is to produce a strategy that is focussed and deliverable, the process of developing proposals also includes investigation of feasibility and of funding sources where relevant.

Once complete, the draft strategy will be subject to a further public consultation in 2016 to give the public and stakeholders an opportunity to comment on its proposals. Following this consultation, a final version of the strategy will provide a framework for delivery and will support funding applications for specific improvement projects.”

Question 11

Councillor Sands (M) to ask the leader of the council:

“Can the leader give his opinion on the success of the recent Living Wage Week closely supported by this council? How does he envisage the Living Wage campaign locally developing for the future?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council’s response:

“My thanks to Councillor Sands for his question.

There can be no more important an issue than the campaign for a Living Wage. Low pay and insecure employment is sadly a characteristic of the Norwich economy. In the city, more than one in four employees earns less than £7 per hour. It is also a national problem, with the number of low paid workers across Britain hitting a record high last month of over five million. So ‘Living Wage Week’ which took place in the first week in November is an important date in the Norwich calendar of events. The council working alongside ‘Living Wage Norwich’, Aviva, trades unions, local churches, voluntary sector and advice organisations and a growing number of living wage employers, ran events through the week and raised the profile of this most urgent of issues. The living wage is calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK. The current living wage is £8.25p an hour. The ambition is to end low pay and make Norwich a ‘Living Wage City’. Working with our partners ‘Living Wage Norwich’ - and in particular its chair, Tony Gammage - we have seen significant progress, with businesses signing up to pay a living wage or committing to work towards becoming living wage compliant.

The campaigning work needs to be sustained - not least with the threat of cuts in the income of low paid workers (working tax credits) and what amounts to a charter for bad employers with the Conservative Government's attempt to emasculate the employment rights of all workers in the form of the Trade Union Bill currently making its way through Parliament.”

Question 12

Councillor Brociek-Coulton to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

“In England 112,330 households applied to their local authority for homelessness assistance in 2014/15, a 26 per cent rise since 2009/10. Given these shocking figures can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his opinion on the new Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy and its role in tackling homelessness within Norwich?”

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development’s response:

“Homes in England are becoming less affordable and harder to find. As a result, homelessness in all its forms, whether rough-sleeping, sofa-surfing or living in overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation, is increasing.

Norwich, however, has a good track record in preventing homelessness: We offer temporary accommodation for people in immediate housing need and provide advice and support for households who face losing their homes. We fund outreach services to rough-sleepers, work closely with local hostel providers and prevent private tenants from being forced out of their homes due to poor conditions. We also offer good quality, affordable and secure council homes to over 15,000 households in Norwich.

Last year we helped 627 households faced with immediate homelessness to remain in their accommodation or to find a suitable alternative.

The Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy sets out clearly how we will continue tackle this hugely important issue over the next five years. Our main focus, as with our previous strategies, will be on prevention and our main priorities will be:

- Targeting our resources at those people who are most at risk of homelessness - it is always better to stop people becoming homeless in the first place;
- Helping people find affordable, safe, good quality housing;
- Working in a co-ordinated way with partners – for example working with services involved with mental health and substance misuse since poor health can lead to homelessness or can keep someone homeless for longer;
- Helping people develop independent living skills to reduce the risk of them becoming homeless in the future - The council has an excellent track

record of setting up services like Norwich LEAP that tackles the links between homelessness, education and work.

This strategy will ensure that, at a time of increasing pressure both on public resources and individual households, we will continue to offer a coherent and effective approach to tackling this growing problem. ”

Question 13

Councillor Manning to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

“The new *Reducing inequalities action plan* offers opportunities to use limited resource to tackle inequality with an additional specific focus upon Lakenham. Can the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety give his comments on the anticipated improvements aimed in the action plan for this community?”

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety’s response:

“Inequalities within Norwich are both stark and deeply ingrained. This action plan will not deliver a quick fix and neither will it fully mitigate the impacts of changes to welfare and those of low incomes. What it does seek to do is support households both in and out of work to tackle some areas of their lives over which the council and its partners can help them have a positive impact.

For example the council will proactively encourage residents to claim benefits to which they are entitled but have not yet taken up, especially around tax credits. This should increase income in people’s pockets which is a core strand of the council’s financial inclusion activity.

The council will support people into skills and jobs as best we can with limited resources by, for example, offering and signposting to support into jobs through our digital inclusion activity. The council will also support as best we can people into accessing lower fuel prices and insulating their homes.

Through recent work, it is clear that there is considerable activity run by the voluntary and community sector, which we are looking to join up with.

The city also has considerable assets including physical assets such as parks, open spaces and community centres as well as activity run by residents themselves.

If all of these can be harnessed and focussed, they can help make a difference and reduce the inequality and hardship that some of our residents face.

Many changes will take a long time to have a positive impact. In the short term though the council would want to see more people in work, maximising their income, reducing their households costs and making best use of opportunities to improve their health and wellbeing through partners in the public, private and voluntary sector.”

Question 14

Councillor Woollard to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

“Can the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety comment on the recent ‘Get Involved Week’ which sought to link community groups operating in Norwich with volunteers and interested residents? Given the vast cuts to local government funding how will the council continue to harness and support volunteers who wish to become active in their communities?”

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety’s response:

“Norwich has a long history of active communities and the aim of ‘Get Involved Week’ was to showcase and encourage volunteering and active participation across the city.

Community groups were invited to run activities and show case the huge range and level of voluntary activity that takes place in the city that residents could attend and find out more.

85 confirmed activities were offered from 42 different groups therefore as a first attempt at the council promoting voluntary activity this was a remarkable achievement. 40% of these groups had not had extensive contact with the council before.

Feedback from groups hosting events was also very positive with 94% indicating that it had raised their profile.

Norwich has always had a strong community sector and the week of events provided another example of people’s willingness to get involved and make a difference to their communities and where they live.

Members will know that the council has to make significant savings by 2020 to 2021 and a very different approach is required with the council’s operating model being revised to reflect the role of the council in terms of influencing others and working better with partners, residents and the voluntary and community sector.

The council is therefore developing a programme of community enabling to encourage self-sufficiency and self-service and achieve better coordination with the voluntary and community sector.

In order for the council to deliver such a programme in Norwich, visits were made to a number of other councils including Lambeth which like Norwich is a co-operative council.

A number of these council's run 'love where you live' initiatives and a 'love where you live' programme is planned for Norwich.

This will set out to encourage residents to take greater ownership of the areas where they live; rely less on the council to deliver services allowing the council to focus on those most in need.

The programme will include a number of elements which have been successful elsewhere in the country:

Street champions

The council will enlist, train and support a network of street champions to help facilitate community enabling within their local street or neighbourhood, building self-sufficiency and resilience.

The street champions would be responsible for facilitating and organising community activities specific to their street or neighbourhood, which addresses local challenges, help adopt open and public space to build social capital and realise community benefits. For example, a litter picking event or organising a street party, where different people of the community come together, helping to establish new relationships and build community ties.

Running parallel will be a programme of education.

'Do the right thing' will encourage positive behaviours such as helping an elderly neighbour, encouraging re-cycling, reporting issues online or litter picking.

'Not on our streets' will seek to challenge and address the all too common 'enviro-crimes' such as littering, fly-tipping and dog fouling that costs the council many thousands of pounds a year to clear and clean up.

The details of these programmes are being finalised for launching early next year.

If the interest and enthusiasm seen in Norwich during 'Get involved week' and over many, many years can be developed and encouraged further, the city can look forward to communities playing a greater role in their neighbourhoods and making a difference where they live."

Question 15

Councillor Coleshill to ask the cabinet member for parks, markets and open spaces:

“Can the cabinet member for parks, markets and open spaces give his opinion on the early results of the recent Norwich Market consultation?”

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for parks, markets and open spaces response:

“The response to the Norwich Market survey has been very pleasing indeed.

We received 866 online survey responses and a further 115 completed paper copies on the market giving us a grand total of 981 responses.

This means it was one of the most successful survey responses for Norwich City Council in recent years. We rarely break through the ceiling of 500 responses so 981 really is phenomenal. According to a popular survey statistics site, we actually only need 384 responses to claim we are representative of the Norwich population, so again 981 is fantastic.

The survey was widely circulated and available online and in paper format on the market itself so I’m happy that a wide range of people were given an ample opportunity to respond and give us their thoughts.

Ninety three per cent of respondents said they thought the market was an important part of the city and 91 per cent said they did browse or shop on the market. We had a whole range of comments telling us that “we [should] not lose the market”, “it’s famous”, “it’s historically important” and is “integral to the city’s character”.

The survey has given us a useful profile of the people who shop on the market. 42 per cent of shoppers were aged 45-64; the split between men and women was broadly equal and most people (46 per cent) spent between £5 and £10 per visit.

We also gathered a whole range of suggested improvements. Fifty eight percent of people said the layout was confusing and nearly the same number said the range of products needed to be wider.

The fresh and pre-packed food and hot food stalls were by far the most popular stalls according to respondents.

And many people commented that they wanted more varied and interesting street food and more seating on the market and would love to see it opened up a bit with a central square or something similar.

So all in all I am very pleased and I feel we have some really useful data which can inform decisions we make about the market in the future.”

Question 16

Councillor Wright to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

“Nottingham City Council has recently launched Robin Hood Energy, a not-for-profit power firm. This differs from a switch and save scheme in so far as the council would be buying gas and electricity from the market and then reselling.

As well as offering lower tariffs than the ‘big six’, there is potential for any surplus to be retained by the council as part of an income generation strategy. Has the cabinet member any plans to explore this opportunity?”

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development’s response:

“Thank you for this timely question. Considering the recent weather, I am sure that many residents will be thinking of switching their provider to save some money on their fuel bills.

Norwich City Council regularly compares the offers from its ‘Switch and Save’ programme to other providers. In this respect the findings showed that the Switch and Save tariff was cheaper by £146 per year. (Based on Ofgem average consumption data for dual fuel)

In addition to this, by looking at comparison sites and comparing the new Robin Hood Energy tariff, Prime Energy V2. It appears that two more, big six companies are also cheaper than Robin Hood Energy: Npower with their Online Price Fix Dec 2016, which is £47.16 cheaper and Scottish Power Online Fixed Price 2016, which is £40.72 cheaper.

Therefore it appears that whilst the not-for-profit model can provide good offers to citizens, these offers are not as good as the market leading deals created via collective switching schemes or deals offered via some of the big six.

Therefore our analysis concludes that a not-for-profit power firm would not generate much income as its primary purpose is to provide savings to its customers.

In comparison our ‘Switch and Save’ model creates a small income via referral fees which come from the new supplier. Therefore, enabling the authority to assist the very vulnerable, via our affordable warmth activities, whilst not affecting the offer made.

The seventh tranche of the Norwich Big ‘Switch and Save’ will be launched on 1 December.”

Question 17

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

“Along with other councillors, I recently received a letter from a local care provider setting out concerns over the changes to the parking permit charges. The author of the letter suggests that their overall costs will increase by £6,700 per year as a result of these changes.

We know that carers provide a vital service on behalf of society in challenging financial circumstances. Will the cabinet member responsible reconsider the position as regards permits for care providers and carers?”

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development’s response:

“The council has recently increased the cost of permits to statutory and other service providers. A variety of evidence has shown such permits being used for non-operational reasons, thereby using up scarce parking otherwise intended for local residents and their visitors. The number in circulation exceeded likely operational needs whereas they were also very cheap compared to the price of other permits such as say residential permits.

I am aware that the price increase has created a problem for carers – whose number has grown greatly since the permit review commenced.

Officers have therefore recently met the county council, who commission carer services, to discuss the matter with it. Members will be aware that on-street permit parking is a service provided by the council ultimately on behalf of the county council as highway authority. In view of this, a mechanism has been agreed whereby the county council would become responsible for the provision of carer permits, ensuring that the number in circulation is kept within reasonable operational requirements and so as to control inappropriate use. The county council is currently investigating the number of permits that will be reasonably required by the care agencies to carry out their duties, and will be liaising directly with our business support team to arrange for these permits to be issued. Once they have been issued, they will be distributed and managed by the county council.

We will be in a position to issue the permits as soon as we have received confirmation of the number required from the county council.”

Question 18

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

"I have in my ward tenants who have lived in their council house for over 50 years. They regard their house as their home, where they brought up their family and where they have their friends. They do not wish to move at this stage in their lives to a one bedroomed sheltered housing bungalow or to a downstairs one bedroomed flat. They are in their seventies and are enjoying reasonable health. They would really like to have their bath replaced by a shower. Is this really too much to ask?

Apparently it is. "Baths will be replaced with baths when upgrades are done unless the tenants are disabled" is what they have been told in a letter from the council. So regardless of whether the tenants use the bath or not they will get a new one and no chance of a shower cubicle. Is this helping the tenants to stay healthy and independent longer in their own home?

Why is it that good tenants who have paid rent for 50 years are denied the opportunity to live independent lives, with easy washing facilities with a shower, saving water, saving money on heating the water and saving the NHS money because they are less likely to have falls using a shower than a bath? Why cannot we give those tenants who want a shower, a shower cubicle instead of a bath which they do not use?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing's response:

"The council wants tenants, and their immediate household, to live independently in their homes for as long as possible and to help tenants achieve better housing and living conditions. In addition our aim is to ensure that the best use of existing adapted council properties, whilst offering a value for money service.

During the council's upgrade programme standard replacements to bathroom fittings in homes classed as general needs will include a new bath, where there is one currently and an over bath shower. Where tenants have asked for an independent shower, subject to the tenants approval, their case would be referred for an occupational therapist assessment. This would be to ensure that the tenant could discuss their overall needs; given there may be other issues to consider. Showers and others changes may then be made to the property.

If the council were to install shower cubicles, replacing baths, as part of the standard upgrade programme there would be an additional cost to the council in fitting these. These will vary from home to home dependant on the current bathroom design and would reduce the number of improvements we could make to other properties.

In addition, many of our homes are suitable for family living and therefore a bath with an over bath shower provides flexible use for a range of family member's needs. If shower cubicles are fitted without careful consideration there will be additional costs to removing these to meet future tenant needs as many people prefer the flexibility of a bath and over bath shower.

It is important for the council to consider all these factors, managing our homes carefully to ensure it makes best use of its financial resources whilst meeting the needs of its current and future tenants

Due to the complexities of this issue, we are currently commencing a full review of the current policy, including the cost implications of taking a different approach in the future."