



Council

29 June 2021

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Manning to ask the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods the following question:

“Representing a ward, like most councillors, with an ever-increasing number of private renters, I am acutely aware of the need for better protections and safeguards to control this largely scandalously unregulated sector. I have watched with interest the powerful success, now made public with the conclusion of the court case, of the St Faith’s Lane trial and am very pleased with the outcome for tenants involved. Can the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods comment on the importance of this success and how the council can build on this to further protect private renters in this city?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods’ response:

“Thank you for your question and support of the PSH officers who investigated, gathered evidence, served notices and gave evidence at the Upper Tier Tribunal appeal.

I attended the tribunal, and our evidence was professional fully justifying the council action resulting in the successful outcome. The subsequent criminal case against the landlord returned a guilty plea with resulting fines.

This case placed Norwich in the spotlight, with other local authorities watching closely the first case appealed to the Upper Tier Tribunal: this success gave LA’s the legal guidance for similar enforcement action, showing landlords cannot hide behind a company entity.

Equally, we can now confidently take further enforcement action where necessary to protect private sector housing tenants.

In addition, the current HMO licensing scheme is to be fully reviewed to improve HMO enforcement and developing a PSH citizens charter will demonstrate our commitment to supporting PSH tenants.”

Question 2

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

“Fuel poverty has been a persistent and growing problem in this city and the different actions and steps taken to address this over many years have been warmly welcomed by all members. The latest initiative, in Templemere Catton Grove Ward, has seen the successful installation of 80 gas central heating systems into some of the coldest homes in the city through the mobilisation of the Warm Homes Fund. Residents have received these installations for free with landlords paying a third of costs in private rented homes. This project has been a huge success for all involved and has helped to ensure the estate is suitable for habitation for many years to come. Can the leader comment on this initiative and the benefits attained?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Over a million pounds was invested into Templemere to install first time central heating. Alongside the 80 central heating systems, mains pipework was laid so all residents can choose to connect to the gas network. The new heating systems should reduce heating bills by almost half, making a drastic difference to people’s ability to heat their homes.

Beyond Templemere we have invested considerable resources to reduce fuel poverty and improve housing stock. Only around 30% of UK homes meet EPC band C but we have upgraded our council homes to an average of EPC band C. Other work includes Cosy City, to help residents access funding for home insulation, our renewable collective energy switching scheme, our “Warm and Well” programme and work with private landlords to improve the city’s poorest housing stock; last year alone we secured £2.5 million for private sector home improvement.”

Question 3

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

“I last visited Rayne Park earlier this year to view the development of the new Norwich Regeneration Limited properties. Returning just a couple of weeks ago I was deeply impressed by their quality, design and pleased to see new owners moving in. As we continue to develop this part of Norwich, and see NRL return to strong growth, can the cabinet for inclusive and sustainable growth, comment on progress and the new opportunities which future development can offer?”

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

“I am delighted to see the residents moving into Trinity Gardens at Rayne Park and the remainder of the development progressing so well. I too am very impressed with the revised designs and quality of development.

The development, when completed, will provide 153 new homes for the residents of Norwich, of which 49 will be for social rent, 2 for shared equity, 8 for private rent and 94 for open market sale.

Looking to the future and building upon the recent success of sales at Trinity Gardens, cabinet in March welcomed the NRL business plan, subject to independent assurance, and sought business cases for investing in two further sites, Three Score phase 3 and Ber Street.

The independent assurance report, along with an outline business case for Three Score phase 3, will be reported to cabinet next week seeking access to the finance to take this development forward.

Question 4

Councillor Oliver to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Everyone in’ showed what is possible if we want to “end rough sleeping for good”, but gains made nationally in March last year were quickly lost, as funding was quietly withdrawn over summer and by autumn 2020 at least 2,688 people were sleeping on the streets in the United Kingdom. In Norwich, in the spirit of “doing different”, we have continued to develop and build on the success of our Pathways scheme, working in partnership with others, to provide a better response to rough sleeping. Can the leader comment on the success of this work and the future strategy to tackle this most serious of problems in our city?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Our focus is to get people off the street and identifying sources of rough sleeping such as prisons and other public services. We have adopted a systems approach, creating referral systems so that less people end up on the street. Unfortunately, many people we find have suffered trauma at some point in their lives. Our strategy is helping people rebuild their lives through our wraparound services and reconnecting them with society thus breaking the cycle of homelessness. Throughout the pandemic we have housed 199 rough sleepers with 176 positive outcomes.

Despite this we continue to have flow on to our streets due to the transient nature of rough sleeping. To combat this, we are investing in support to connect rough sleepers to their home areas. Our long-term vision is to provide more Housing First opportunities adding to our growing stock of homes providing lasting change for people with support.”

Question 5

Councillor Peek to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Representing a ward near the famous Goldsmith Street I am aware of the difference which developments such as this can deliver to practically improving the environment in our city. Earlier in the month I was pleased that Norwich took the top spot as the UK’s best place to live for the most energy-efficient properties, with Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool and Edinburgh making up the rest of the top five. The findings were taken from this year’s Rated People Home Improvement Trends Report, where different UK cities were scored against a set of 20 ‘eco-home criteria’, ranging from how many homes have smart heating controls and energy-efficient lightbulbs to electric car charging points, smart meters and heat pumps. Can the leader comment on this success and our strategy for further delivering on the practical environmental agenda to deliver more eco-friendly homes in our fine city?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Addressing fuel poverty is a key action for this council. Presently our council housing stock condition outstrips the private sector with a Grade C average EPC rating. The council recently agreed to a carbon neutral housing stock by 2030.

The council has a strong record for retrofitting engagement. Examples include:

- In 2020 we secured £2.5 million to undertake private sector home improvements.
- Our collective group purchase solar scheme – Soar Together.
- Launch of the Sustainable Warmth competition last week
- plans to help more low energy efficiency, fuel poor homes. In particular EPC rating homes of E,F and G for residents with low incomes.

High environmental standards for our own development projects at Hansard Close, Rayne Park & the Goldsmith Street development. Design work on Argyle Street, Three Score phase 3 and the Mile Cross depot will draw high levels of insulation, renewable heat sources to maximise natural energy to help tackle fuel poverty.

Question 6

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

“There has been ongoing coverage in the local press on the work and aspirations to develop the East Norwich area, particularly since the closure of the former Colman’s site a couple of years ago. Some misinformation about the proposals, designed to worry residents, has been disseminated in Thorpe Hamlet and Lakenham. Given the significance and importance of regeneration, new homes, new jobs, and sustainable growth, can the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth explain the work that has been done to date, the decisions that have and have not been made and the development process going forward, with reference to public and stakeholder engagement?”

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

“Thank you for your question about engagement on the East Norwich masterplan.

Engagement is indeed a key element of the masterplan process, aiming to ensure that all relevant stakeholders including landowners, elected members, local residents, businesses, and community and amenity groups have their say in shaping the masterplan. Good progress has been made by the consultants so far, including meetings with a range of stakeholders including landowners, member workshops, and stakeholder engagement workshops. Public drop-in exhibitions are planned for late July following relaxation of covid restrictions.

No decisions have been taken on the content of the emerging masterplan yet. The purpose of this stage is to listen to the views of stakeholders and the wider community. This will then set the framework for the development of masterplan options during the summer, with a final concept masterplan developed by late summer / early autumn.”

Question 7

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

“A Green Party motion was passed in September 2019 to address the biodiversity emergency. One of the actions in this biodiversity motion was to update the council’s biodiversity action plan, which, shockingly, was last updated in 2002. The response on the motion tracker says that this work would start in 2020 and would be brought to climate and environment emergency executive panel for discussion in 2020. So far, we have not seen any updated action plan. Could you please clarify when, after almost two decades, an updated action plan will come to members for discussion?”

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

“Work to improve biodiversity across our city has not stood still since the last action plan. There have been major improvements for our local nature reserves and wildlife sites, significant changes in how we manage formal parks, open spaces and communal gardens, and improvement in how we interact with our community groups.

Work is underway on the new biodiversity strategy and action plan. The next step is engagement with communities and partners, given the important role they have to play. This will take place over the autumn and include members.

Royal Assent of the, much delayed, Environment Bill, expected this autumn, is also a key milestone. It proposes significant changes around the relationship between local and national government, with potentially a greater responsibility sitting with councils.

Nonetheless, our ambition is to have this strategy and action plan in place during this financial year.”

Question 8

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“Cabinet is the decision-making body of the council. 224 pages of papers for its meeting on 9 June contained important items, including its *Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy*; *Customer Experience and Digital Strategy*; *Budget Monitoring Provisional Outturn* and *5 Year Air Quality Action Plan for Norwich*. A standing item is *Public Questions/Petitions* - 'to receive public questions/petitions from the public **by 10am** on Tuesday 1 June 2021 in line with the council's constitution.' However, the cabinet papers were not published until the **afternoon** of 1 June. I was surprised the Leader of the Council did not use his discretion to allow questions received from members of the public. It is not possible to send in questions on reports before they have been published. What will the council do to ensure members of the public can ask questions about council reports at the meeting at which the report is tabled?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“A question may only be asked if it has been received by Democratic Services no later than 10am five clear working days before the meeting.

The clear days does not include the day the meeting takes place.

There is a statutory requirement for a forward plan for key decisions which Norwich maintain, and this is done to give early notice of what is to be discussed at any meeting which give details of items on the cabinet agenda.

Part 4, points 23 and 28 of the constitution (Access to information rules) note that the 5 clear day period also applies to publication of agendas and notice of meetings – this is in line with the statutory position for the publication of agendas.

I appreciate that this may have caused some concern and individuals might feel disappointed not being able to read the report until after the deadline had passed.”

Question 9

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

“In September 2019, this council agreed, as part of a motion to urgently tackle the biodiversity emergency, to continue ‘*to work with the Pesticide Action Network, to lead Norwich to becoming pesticide free*’. In March 2021, the council agreed to ‘*continuing work with the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) to lead to an end in use of pesticides in Norwich*’. Could the cabinet member give an update on the work that the council has done with the Pesticide Action Network over the last two years?”

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

“I am sure that all councillors will appreciate that the impact of Covid 19 has restricted the work that Council officers and NCSL / NNE staff have been able to undertake. This, inevitably, restricted the time available to identify alternatives to pesticide use in maintaining the Council’s Parks and Open Spaces. Furthermore, there had always been the intention and opportunity to have greater control of the contracts once they had transferred to the newly created NCSL.

Despite challenges, we have made progress. An audit of existing pesticides has been completed and we have been preparing for a trial of non-pesticide methods of weed control next spring. It is intended to be completed with a final report presented next summer.

Working with Norwich City Council and the Pesticides Action Network on the aim to remove all pesticides is included as a key deliverable in the NCSL business plan for 21/24.”

Question 10

Councillor Schmierer to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“I was very concerned to read in election literature from the Labour party, which forms the administration on Norwich City Council, that only Labour councillors have the ear of the administration. Can you please reassure me that the administration respects the outcomes of elections and equally listens to concerns of residents which are raised by opposition councillors who represent a significant proportion of Norwich residents?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Councillor Schmierer, as an experienced councillor and former Lord Mayor, I would have assumed a familiarity with the accountability arrangements that operate within the council.

There are of course the realities and different roles that come with being in administration or being in opposition. Labour has been elected to deliver its manifesto. We have always adopted an open and inclusive relationship with all political parties represented on the council. By way of illustration, this evening’s council agenda demonstrates this both in the opportunities provided to ask questions, comment on reports and the work done cross party, prior to council, to achieve a consensus on the motions for debate this evening.”

Question 11

Councillor Grahame to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“I was very disappointed to see in the CITIZEN magazine a full-page advertisement of city council car parks, without any indication of how people could travel into the city in a more sustainable way. This illustrates the big elephant in the room: the council wants to be sustainable, but big parts of its income come from parking charges. Can the cabinet member please update me about how the council is planning to reduce its unsustainable reliance on car parking fees?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“The Council’s Financial Plan forecasts that £11.8m of gross savings will need to be found over the four year period from 2022/23. This quantum of savings represents 21% of the 2021/22 proposed gross expenditure budget. The car parking service makes a considerable direct contribution to the Council’s current revenue budget, and this will be required to meet the significant financial challenges that the Council faces due to Tory austerity.

It also makes a significant indirect contribution through supporting the City’s economy by providing an appropriate level of parking to support economic vitality, ensuring that parking is inclusive for all users, delivering efficient parking and traffic management to support the local economy, and providing access to key services and facilities.

The Council is currently reviewing its asset management strategy and the future approach to car parking provision will be influenced by this and forthcoming review of the Transport for Norwich Strategy.”

Question 12

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

“We hear that the council and Weston Homes are considering their options for Anglia Square. An indication of the council’s thinking was a new policy in the Regulation 19 Greater Norwich Local Plan, proposed, regrettably, without public discussion, which does not bode well for the need to achieve wide support. The main change is lower housing numbers (from 1250 to 800 units) but new student housing has been added. This still represents a substantial amount of housing for a 4.79 ha site and makes high-rise development in the oldest part of Norwich likely. There was no mention of green space despite the city becoming hotter due to climate change and extensive building and paving over. When will the city council open up the debate on Anglia Square and involve ward councillors and stakeholders in crafting a sensitive, imaginative and forward-looking, climate-aware planning brief for this important site?”

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

“Anglia Square has been a priority for comprehensive regeneration for many years now. The need for regeneration was first highlighted in the Local Plan of 2004, Northern City Centre Area Action Plan, and in advance of considering the last application for the site a planning guidance note was produced. All these documents involved extensive programmes of public engagement.

The timing of the secretary of state’s decision to go against his own inspector’s recommendation and refuse the proposed redevelopment of the site last November came at a time that wasn’t ideal for the preparation of the local plan. Nevertheless, it was possible to consult on the emerging policy in the GNLP earlier this year.

The council continues to work closely with all concerned to identify the appropriate next steps in development of the site and I’m confident there will be extensive engagement with all interested parties.”

Question 13

Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“At the budget scrutiny committee meeting, Green councillors asked whether Community Municipal Investment Bonds (CMIBs) could be included as a potential funding source for capital projects with social or environmental benefits. At the time, the council said that no projects were proposed that would be appropriate for such funding but that it remained an option. Does the cabinet member agree that the council should be actively looking for investment opportunities that could be funded through CMIBs to provide social and environmental benefits while generating a local financial return, for example investing in local solar power?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“Community Municipal Investment Bonds (CMIBs) are a potential funding source for future capital projects. However, depending on the nature of the investment, other forms of finance might be more suitable. Consideration should be given to all viable options.

The council actively looks for investments and has investigated community energy, grid flexibility and energy saving in partnerships. These proposals require significant work to be viable and regrettably many don’t make it over the line for various reasons including a changing regulatory landscape.

The council has developed an expression of interest for funding from the Community Renewal Fund. This proposal intends to find new commercial solutions for the emerging hydrogen economy and localised energy sectors. This could result in funding from variety of sources.

I would welcome any costed commercial business cases from councillors which allow for a return on investment whilst also providing social and environmental benefits with minimal risk.”

Question 14

Councillor Haynes to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“The financial outturn for the last financial year shows an underspend of £396,000 for the estates aesthetics programme. This underspend has been explained by Covid restrictions. This programme is vital and a number of estates could really benefit from crucial investment in aesthetics. We know from research commissioned by the council and research on the broken window theory that the aesthetics of an area have an important link to feelings of safety and reductions in anti-social behaviour. It is one of the ways in which the council can make a crucial contribution to improving residents' lives. I understand that a request has been made to carry this underspend over to the next financial year. Can you please commit to carrying over the full amount so the council can ensure that as many estates as possible can be included in this programme going forward?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“I completely agree that the estates aesthetics programme is crucial to improving our estates and neighbourhoods which is why we have increased the budget over the past few years. The current projects total £608,684.52 from a of budget of £1,000,000 and we are assessing further bids. For now, this this area of work does not require any financial carry forward. Should there be a need for additional finance to deliver any additional works identified throughout the year, and as circumstances change then this will be subject to separate business cases requests throughout the financial year.”

Question 15

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

“I would like to know what progress the administration has made with their plans to charge for parking in Eaton and Waterloo Parks.

Details such as the cost of installing the equipment and estimating the potential net income and consulting with local residents?”

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

“The council has identified the key milestones that need to be completed before we can implement charges for parking in our parks. These milestones include conducting Stakeholder Consultation, options appraisal on payment methods, and finalising projected income and expenditure, including start up costs. Much of this work will be carried out as part of an integrated approach to the introduction of cashless parking at our other off street and on street parking sites.

Resources for this work are being allocated, and this work will be completed over the summer for a decision by cabinet in early autumn. It is anticipated that full implementation will be achieved by the end of this calendar year ”

Question 16

Councillor Wright to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“The council’s recent announcement about the closure of the Tourist Information Centre has caused much local interest and disappointment.

Whilst the council clearly has to look for savings, and the over £100k saved from this closure is not insignificant, a city the size of Norwich should be able to maintain an in-person tourist centre.

An alternative might be the provision of a market stall to be used by VisitNorwich and resourced by the excellent City Hosts.

Has the cabinet member given any consideration to alternatives such as the one suggested?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“Fewer tourists are visiting Tourist Information Centres, even before Covid19. The national trend is for customers to use multiple channels giving increased visibility and flexibility to learn about their destination.

The City Hosts are organised by the Norwich BID and they provide an excellent source of accessible information with a face-to-face service. There are many other alternatives for visitors before and during their visit; the council responds to phone and email enquiries and there is a ‘Live Chat’ function on the VisitNorwich website, which we support via funding. We support marketing, such as the current ‘Summer is on’ campaign and work in partnership with organisations to make improvements, such as with the new Wayfinding totems across the city centre.

I feel confident of a strong and safe tourist season ahead, and that visitors will be able to access the information they need to make the best of their stay.”