



NORWICH
City Council

COUNCIL

19 July 2011

Questions to Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Stephen Little to the cabinet member for play, parks and open spaces:-

Maintaining more areas of parks and open spaces as wildflower/long grass areas rather than closely mown grass would have many benefits: it would attract a diversity of plants, insects and birds; it would add colour to the urban environment; and it would provide opportunities to involve the community in their maintenance and schools in realising their educational potential. While the council has done some work on costing the creation of wildflower areas, there is also clear evidence to suggest that savings could be made in the long run because of lower maintenance costs, particularly if volunteers and/or sponsors are engaged. Assuming that residents are fully consulted and that any health and safety concerns are addressed, will the council consider transforming more of its grassed areas into wildflower areas?

Councillor Deborah Gihawi, cabinet member for play, parks and open spaces' reply:-

Over the years, the council has created many wildflower areas in our parks including Earlham Park, Millennium Green, Wensum Park, Eaton Park, Woodrow Pilling Park and most recently St. Clements Eco-park.

Where possible we have introduced 'wildlife friendly' mowing regimes in parts of Rosary and Earlham Cemeteries. Using GNDP money, the Mousehold Heath wardens have created a demonstration heathland area and a separate wildflower meadow on part of a school playing field on Heartsease Lane. Both these features are on formerly close-mown grassland. Local volunteers have helped in managing Rosary Cemetery, Mousehold Heath and other areas. In total 1,278 volunteers were involved in the management of open spaces and gave over 4,000 hours of time to specific projects across the city over the last year.

Most of our main grassland or wetland natural areas are managed by controlled grazing, which encourages a wide diversity of flowering plants. Grazing is also used to recover previously neglected sites: at Eaton Common, for example, the re-introduction of grazing has largely eradicated 'problem' species such as docks and thistles, whilst desirable wildflowers such as Ragged Robin, Yellow Rattle, Meadow Saxifrage and Southern Marsh Orchid have greatly increased (2 Marsh Orchids recorded in 2006, 178 in 2011). On natural areas where grazing is not practical, at least part of the natural area will be managed to encourage wildflower-rich grassland, often through a Conservation Cut.

We are always looking for ways to increase bio-diversity and would welcome the opportunity to work with our local communities to explore where this is feasible.

Question 2

Councillor Ash Haynes to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

Does the cabinet member share my concern about the scrapping of the Duty to Involve, taking away the rights of citizens to participate in public services?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

As Councillor Haynes will know from her constituency work, councils do not need legislation to make us involve the people of Norwich in how their services are shaped.

And there are many things that concern us about how the coalition government are seeking to undermine local democracy.

For this council, as my colleague will know, we have a tremendous track record through our housing improvement work, neighbourhood engagement and community development in involving the people of Norwich.

The public consultation will be launched tomorrow where residents, charities, business and advocacy groups will be asked to give their views on:

- the future priorities for the council
- savings options that will involve changes in the level of service or the way we provide a service to the public
- a new commissioning framework for the council

This is an example of how we want to involve people helping us to shape the future of council services.

Question 3

Councillor Lesley Grahame to the chair of licensing committee:-

Does the council have any plans to restrict further growth in numbers of lap dancing clubs in the city, for example through making use of Cumulative Impact Zones or other such powers?

Councillor Keith Driver, chair of licensing committee's, reply:-

With effect from 6 April 2010, local authorities were given powers to regulate lap dancing clubs and similar venues by virtue of section 27 of the Policing and Crime

Act 2009, which introduced a new category of sex establishment called 'sexual entertainment venue'. The powers are adoptive and on 18 March 2010 the council's licensing committee considered a report on the matter. Members resolved to adopt the provisions introduced by section 27 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 following their commencement on 6 April 2010.

The council had already carried out the legal process to adopt powers to control sex establishments (or sex shops) some years ago and it was initially thought that a further committee resolution adding the new category of sexual entertainment venues to the existing adopted powers would be sufficient. However, following the licensing committee decision, clarification has been received from the council's legal advisors on the adoption process and it has become apparent that a further resolution will be required from the licensing committee in order to repeat the original adoption publicity procedure. Additionally, in accordance with Home Office guidance, consultation must take place with local people as to whether a resolution adopting section 27 should be made. I would envisage that a report on this matter will be brought before the next licensing committee on 15 September 2011.

The four premises currently operating as lap dancing clubs in the city have strict conditions attached to their licences to effectively control their activities and are checked on a regular basis in accordance with the council's enforcement policy.

Question 4

Councillor Lucy Galvin to the leader of the council:-

Swimming has enormous health benefits, especially for elderly people who may not be able to exercise in other ways. The council's free swimming programme was a great benefit to them and others and well used. Many residents have been in touch with me to say that they will no longer be able to swim since it was ended on 10 July. We all know money is tight, but keeping people healthy is an investment. What is the council doing to bridge the gap for these regular users and help them stay healthy?

Councillor Brenda Arthur, leader of the council's reply:-

For clarification our free swim scheme was not part of the national scheme which at first provided a government grant for older people to swim free and then was extended to children. Norwich could not join that scheme because people from across the county would have been eligible to swim here and we would not have been able to claim any grant for them. So Norwich taxpayers would have had to subsidise swimmers from our neighbouring authorities.

The council's free swim scheme was paid for with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF), a different grant from central government, which has now gone. Unlike the national scheme, ours was not just restricted to the young and old but allowed all residents with a Go 4less card to swim for free.

This grant of £74,000 was awarded in April 2009, and has amazingly lasted for over two years and 43,000 free swims have been funded by this. The clear understanding was that free swimming was only there as long as the NRF grant was there. This

money was never part of the council's budget it was external funding and now sadly the external grant has gone. It is worth noting however that less than a third of the free swims were taken up by older people. So we have worked hard to maintain the prices for people to swim at Riverside on a Go 4less card affordable and they are as follows:

Child £1 – this price has been held by us since the pool opened and compares to £2.30 for non Go 4less

Adult £2.30 – compared to £4.25 for non Go 4less

There is also an offer of £15.99 per month swim membership which will allow unlimited swimming. And an early morning swim at Riverside Leisure Centre (7am to 9am) costs £1.85 for (Many of the older swimmers visit the centre first thing in the morning).

We have in addition negotiated a discount for Go4less customers who pay through direct debit. If they choose this option then after a £13 set up fee they pay £9.99 per month for use of the Riverside Leisure pool between 7a.m and 5pm Monday to Friday, 8am and 5pm on Saturday and 8.30 and 5pm on Sunday. Furthermore it requires just one months notice to cancel the agreement.

Next year's budgets are not just tight they are very challenging. We face some difficult options and will therefore be looking throughout our forthcoming consultation at what is the role and responsibility of a local authority. Clearly we acknowledge the importance of encouraging people to become and remain fit and healthy and understand what value this brings to individuals and communities. Therefore we will do all we can to work with partner organisations to enable people to access opportunities that will contribute to their overall health.

Question 5

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

In the light of recent incidents including attacks on animals and children by out of control dogs - will the cabinet reconsider looking at Dog on Leads Control orders for specific areas after local consultation as the Act requires?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

As reported to cabinet in June this year the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act requires the council to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs and to be able to show that the order is proportionate to the level of the issue and is being implemented in a direct response to problems caused by the activities of dogs and those in charge of them.

The council has continued to monitor the enquiries and complaints about dogs over the course of the year. From the 1st April this year the council has received 423 reports about dogs of which only 6 were about dogs off leads. A large proportion of the reports were about:

- stray dogs for which 115 reports were received
- barking dogs for which 76 reports were received and
- dog fouling for which 44 reports were received.

The council has acted in proportion to the reports being received and the evidence does not support a need for dogs on leads control orders at this present moment. However, we do encourage residents to report incidents of this nature. We will continue to monitor the situation and if a need does arise action will be taken.

Finally I would wish to advise the councillor that attacks on animals and children by out of control dogs is a matter for the police. Such attacks on children may not be remedied by dogs on leads. They have a duty to deal with dangerous dogs and as such I would encourage everyone to report such incidents to the police.

Question 6

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the cabinet member for housing:-

Several councils and housing associations have used timebanking as a way to encourage broader tenant involvement and community development. Is this something which Norwich City Council would be prepared to investigate with our tenants?

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

The council is aware of timebanking, as one of the many tools to improve and reward community engagement.

We are currently carrying out a review of tenant involvement and we hope to have finalised proposals for tenants and Cabinet to agree in the autumn 2011. As part of the implementation plan for this new approach we will with tenant representatives, the suitability and deliverability of this type of initiative. In doing this it needs to be recognised that although time banking is an extremely useful community development tool, it can be very resource intensive. At a time of significant budgetary pressures across the Council considerable caution needs to be exercised before committing the council to another new initiative. In this context it may be that timebanking is something that is best developed as a grass roots led initiative with limited council involvement. If residents and tenants wanted to develop time banking, Council would need to establish the level of resource it could contribute if support was requested. These and other matters are the sort of issues associated with encouraging the pooling of community support that will be explored with tenants.

A time bank is a way for people to come together to help others and help themselves through a non monetary "credit/debit" system of time given. Participants 'deposit'

their time in the bank by giving practical help and support to others and are able to 'withdraw' their time when they need something done themselves.

Everyone's time is valued equally: One hour = 1 time credit and participants can spend their time credits on the skills and support of other participants when they need a helping hand. This can be everything from making phone calls, giving lifts to the shops, DIY, help with the kids etc.

This system can be used for tenant involvement activities where Time Credits are awarded as a 'thank you' for their involvement in helping to improve tenant engagement. The time credits can then be used to access training, cultural or social events.

Question 7

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the cabinet member for resources:-

Given the council's existing target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from its buildings and also the pressing need to realise revenue income from its assets, why has the assessment of properties for the potential for micro-energy generation been designated as low priority?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

The Asset Management Strategy agreed by cabinet on the 13 July identified how the Council could improve the environmental performance of its non-housing portfolio. A clear distinction was drawn between operational property (where the Council is both owner and occupier) and investment properties (where council owned property is occupied by a third party).

The council has given priority to work to reduce the energy use in its operational buildings and the 30% carbon reduction target covers buildings that we pay the utilities on or where we subcontract our services from. These utilities plus other fuel costs such as oil and/or petrol/diesel are used to calculate the carbon footprint. In these buildings we are delivering a range of energy efficiency measures and as you are aware at the last meeting of the cabinet, it was agreed to install 40kw system of photo voltaic panels on city hall. This proposal is estimated to cost £235,000 and has a projected pay back period of 13 years. The experience at City Hall suggests that micro-energy projects often have a longer payback period than projects which lower electricity or gas consumption.

Works to council owned leased (mainly investment) property would usually require mutual agreement with the tenant(s). Since this is of direct financial benefit to the occupier in normal circumstances it would be an investment the tenant would promote and finance. The council does not have the resources available to undertake this type of investment over and above its current landlord responsibilities. That said, the council would, in general, not wish to stand in the way of a tenant installing energy efficiency measures and this could include a micro-generation scheme. In the context of limited resources available for the management of the non housing portfolio, the asset management framework seeks to establish a priority

order with most resources being directed to high priority tasks. This does not mean that no work on lower priority tasks is undertaken but that the level of input is more measured and balanced against risk and return for the Council. For this reason the council will, where appropriate, include as part of the rolling programme of 'asset reviews' currently being undertaken, a discussion with the tenant the energy performance of the property. This should raise awareness of the opportunities available to them to reduce their energy consumption costs.

Question 8

Councillor Peter Offord to the cabinet member for resources:-

Why has the council not developed a policy for transferring assets to community ownership and when does it plan to have one in place?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

Strictly speaking all the assets we hold are in community ownership: held in trust on behalf of the people of Norwich by the city council. So consideration of any asset transfer will need to deliver clear social or community benefits without risking the wider public interest. For the future we will be able to make these assessments through the non-housing asset management strategy agreed by the cabinet on 13 July. This includes an action point reviewing the council's 'approach to the management and ownership of community assets'. I assume that part of Councillor Offord's question anticipates the community asset elements of the Localism Bill presently trundling through its parliamentary stages.

It would be premature to speculate on the nature of this policy, although I am reminded of a related question from Councillor Grahame (about the county council's approach to community asset transfer) to the 28 June council meeting. In my answer to Councillor Grahame I described some of the provisions in the Localism Bill. These include:

- A requirement on district councils in future to keep a record of 'community' assets whether owned by the council or other organisation including private companies; and
- Rights for community groups to nominate and bid for such assets when they are sold.

Given the impact of this legislation on community asset ownership my view remains that it would be wise to wait until such legislation reaches the statute book and clarification of the nature of any government financial support, before confirming a council approach to transferring assets to community ownership.

At this moment in time my concern is more about moving assets out of community control; as evidenced by the cursory consultations that are seeing local authority community schools beginning their journey into the private sector through the Academy conversion programme.

Question 9

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the cabinet member for housing:-

The county council has recently consulted with Sheltered Housing residents in the west of Norwich on the Part-Night Lighting option. This has resulted in concern from residents that the loss of their street lights between 12 midnight and 5 am will leave them more vulnerable.

Please could the cabinet member for housing make public the response that this council made to this consultation as a landlord on behalf of sheltered housing residents and give reassurance that should the county council decide to go ahead with their proposal to turn off lights then this council would make good any light deficiency by installing extra lighting in the sheltered housing schemes?

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

The council did not support the introduction of part night time street lighting but this was a decision taken by the county council and I am surprised and concerned that Councillor Lubbock is suggesting that the council and/or our tenants should now incur additional expenditure to address this matter.

Lighting within a sheltered housing complex operates completely independently to the Norfolk County Council street lighting that illuminates the perimeter of the scheme. It is not the role of the city council to provide street lighting and if the Councillor is concerned about the impact of the county council changes then this is a matter that she can take up with them.

However, in relation to the provision of lighting within a sheltered housing complex we have, in recent years, improved the landlord lighting in a number of schemes and we will continue to keep under review the need for further improvements. It is important to remember that landlord lighting is paid for by the tenants via their service charges and therefore any changes to the current arrangements would require tenant consultation and agreement.

We do not have any plans to change the current landlord lighting arrangements, which residents seem happy with and that appear to be working well across a number of our sheltered housing schemes.

Question 10

Councillor James Wright to the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods:-

The city council's website gives members of the public the ability to report graffiti on council owned properties, but lacks useful contact information that would help the reporting of graffiti when it is on phone boxes, bus shelters and other street furniture, something that other councils provide.

Can the cabinet member advise me as to when this type of helpful information could be made available on the city council's website?

Councillor Julie Westmacott, cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods' reply:-

I thank the councillor for raising this and officers are already looking at what links we have from our website.

Please note that when we are contacted by members of the public Adshell are contacted by us informing them of the need to clean off the graffiti. Virgin Media provide us with green paint for painting out any graffiti found on the green utility boxes found on our streets and street furniture such as road signs, benches and lamp columns will be cleaned by our graffiti team.

The council is also supporting the Graffitibusters campaign to try and stop the spread of tags across the city. The campaign, which is being supported by Norwich police, Central Norwich Citizens' Forum, Norwich City Council and the Norwich City Centre Partnership and has urged people to donate money, paint or time to help keep the streets clean. So far people have turned up at paint-out days in Tombland, Pottergate, King Street, Rose Lane car park and Weavers Lane. The issue was made a priority by the SNAP team for the city centre

The public are encouraged to report graffiti either through our customer call centre or through our website.

Whilst this is an important issue the councillor could have got the information by contacting the council direct.

Question 11

Councillor David Fairburn to the cabinet member for resources:-

It was announced recently that the Council will spend £25,000 on extra work to highlight steps in the Memorial Gardens, in order to guard against further accidents and stumbles by visitors, especially the elderly. Can the portfolio holder give an explanation for the disclosure that the Memorial Gardens was refurbished without being compliant with building regulations in the Disability Discrimination Act?

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources' reply:-

Memorial Gardens is a listed building. Although all development work should aim to meet the requirements of the building regulations and the Disability Discrimination Act, it is often not possible to fully comply without causing harm to the special architectural and historic character of a listed building. In these situations the listed building status takes precedence.

The recently completed refurbishment works to the Memorial Gardens required planning and listed building consent. The process for listed building approval where the council is landowner requires referral of the application to the national casework

unit (following the demise of the government offices) who decide whether consent should be granted. They take account of the support of the local planning authority and also the advice of English Heritage. The planning and listed building consent that we obtained was based upon reinstating the original design and stones. The stepped layout of the memorial gardens is an integral part of the original design.

We did not anticipate the incidents that have occurred since the gardens were reopened because, to our knowledge, there were no problems when they were open previously. We now acknowledge that the cleaning of the stone may have contributed to incidents since re-opening by making the stones much more uniform in colour. Before the refurbishment, the step nosings had been darkened by years of use, thereby drawing attention to them. Such darkening is already beginning to re-emerge and appears to be mitigating any problem.

Nonetheless, to respond to the current problems, we have developed a possible scheme involving putting slate inserts in the nosings. This work requires listed building consent so a listed building application has been submitted. We have had discussions with English Heritage informally who are supportive of finding a solution. As the listed building application needs to follow the process outlined above, we will need to await the outcome.