



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

29 June 2010

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

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

"01 June 2010 was the first day of the reduced Cashiers' Service at City Hall with opening hours of 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. instead of 8.45am to 5.00 p.m.

Please can you let Councillors know how the public have responded to the reduced hours and whether any changes are to be made to the closure programme as a result?"

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

"In general the public have responded well to the change in hours. With the first reduction in hours on the 01 June 2010 it is clear that in fact the decrease in the number of customers using the service has accelerated. Statistics show that 28% fewer customers used the service during the 4 week period to 20 June 2010 compared to the same period last year.

Three comments were received regarding the closure of the service during the 4 week period between 24 May 2010 and 20 June 2010.

The implementation programme is running to plan with key milestones being achieved so currently no change in the programme is envisaged at this stage."

Question 2

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Following complaints to Councillors and reports in the Evening News about missed and delayed housing repair appointments, uncut grass verges etc, could the Executive Member tell us why these problems have occurred and when Connaught will be fulfilling their contractual obligations and the system running as it should be?"

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Liberal Democrat Councillors have received numerous complaints regarding the performance of Connaught. These have ranged from the poor upkeep of Riverside Walk, to problems with potholes, to calls to the Customer Contact Centre going

unanswered. Could the Executive Member reassure Council and the people of Norwich that performance will improve and residents will get a better standard of service going forward?"

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

"The transfer of services to Connaught Partnerships Limited (CPL) required CPL to transfer of over 500 staff, procure over 300 vehicles and procure protective clothing, equipment and materials. There was also a high court action which created uncertainty around the contracts for refuse and recycling and housing repairs, maintenance and improvements both for the Council and CPL. The complexity and difficulty of demobilising and mobilising these contracts must not be underestimated.

CPL is not responsible for repairs to potholes as this is delivered through the highways partnership with a different contractor.

We have already seen a decrease in the number of missed bins reported, a reduction in response times to fly tipping as well as improvements to street cleansing in the City Centre.

However, we are also aware of other areas where performance is not yet up to the standard expected. Council officers have worked with CPL to identify issues and ensure that performance improves.

Some of the issues around grass cutting have been for areas where bulbs are planted and should not be cut until June but this left a perception during April and May that work was not being completed. Some problems have been caused by equipment not being available at the beginning of the contract and some areas were not completed as required. Performance in this area is improving and CPL and officers are working on further improvements. New equipment has been delivered and further new equipment is expected before the end of June.

CPL are increasing capacity in their customer contact centre. CPL also brought in additional resource at the beginning of the contract to clear outstanding housing repairs.

The beginning of any new contract will have a settling down period and we are now reaching the end of that settling down period for these contracts. Monitoring against the key performance indicators will allow the council to ensure that services are delivered to agreed standards and that this can be demonstrated through performance monitoring. We have agreed an action plan with CPL to ensure that services meet and exceed requirements – including:

- Further integrating the grounds and street cleansing services, geographical area based working in line with our neighbourhood strategy and new mechanical sweepers. These proposals and plans are being presented by Connaught to Adrian Akester this week;

- Further resources in project management in housing planned works. Five new posts are being filled to provide better planning and co-ordination of works;
- Good progress is being made on the co-location of housing staff and Connaught staff;
- Connaught have also recruited more staff to the contact centre so that they can improve performance in responding to calls.”

Question 3

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“At the City Council meeting on 2 March 2010, the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development agreed to work with Officers in taking forward proposals from a private company to install units in the city centre for recycling of items such as CDs, batteries, mobile phones and ink cartridges. What progress has the Executive member made with this issue?”

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

“As promised at the Council meeting, the proposals were discussed at the Waste Management Working Party held on 12 April 2010. The Council had received proposals for approximately 45 units to be placed around the city at various locations concentrating on areas of major pedestrian footfall such as St.Stephens Street. It was decided at the Working Party that due to planning and highway considerations, these would need planning applications and that the final decision for any unit to be located in the city would be a matter for the Planning Department and Planning Applications Committee. Of the 45 proposed locations it was felt by Planning Officers that 10 would be likely to be recommended for planning permission if planning applications were received.

The company has also been encouraged to approach shopping centres and other private businesses. Members should note that most major retailers now have their own recycling facilities for such items as batteries, ink cartridges and offer take back facilities for mobile phones.

Finally, Councillor Makoff could have saved herself and Council Officers a lot of time and effort if she had just looked up the Waste Management Working Party minutes on e-Councillor or even asked her party’s representatives on the Working Party for the information.”

Question 4

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"Does the Council still believe that the Essex and Silver Rooms 'provide a cost-effective, accessible and high quality model of care' and that they are 'well-placed to meet existing and potential demand for day services within the Norwich area'? If so, how is the Council using its representation on the newly established Day Care Partnership to make the case for retaining these centres as day care facilities?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

"As Councillor Holmes will be aware, the Council passed a motion on this matter on 24 November 2009. The Executive then agreed a response to the County Council consultation on day care provision on 24 February 2010. This position has not changed.

The response to the consultation concluded:-

22. Norwich City Council accepts the need for reform of day services across the city. We also accept that the existing facilities, including the Essex and Silver Rooms, are in need of significant updating.
23. However, we are concerned that the proposed closure of these facilities would significantly reduce services in areas of the city where there is already a shortage of services, and where there are high levels of need.
24. We would therefore expect to see a range of alternative provision provided by Norfolk County Council for elderly people in the city, and there should be absolutely no closures of any facilities until these alternative services have been agreed. In the absence of a robust plan to stimulate the growth and capacity of third sector day services, or a plan to support and enable older people to engage in other community activities, Norwich City Council feel that it is premature to de-commission two day centres that currently provide much needed day services and activities for vulnerable older people.
25. We are very clear that the provision of these services is the statutory responsibility of Norfolk County Council. However, we are keen to work with the County Council and its partners to stimulate growth and capacity within the third sector and local community to provide lower level social services and activity opportunities for older people.
26. Until this has been achieved, and a sustainable delivery model adopted, the council feel strongly that the existing day service provision at the Essex and Silver Rooms should continue. To do otherwise would adversely affect vulnerable older people.

At present the proposed Day Care Partnership, has not been formally established. The City Council has been working with partners (including the County Council, Age

Concern Norwich, Broadland Housing Association, Voluntary Norfolk and LINK) to discuss the feasibility of forming a day service partnership. The County Council are currently drawing up a set of draft terms of reference for potential partners to take back to their organisations to discuss and consider further. The focus of the partnership is expected to be on exploring how the partners can work more closely together to improve services for older people across the city, and in the light of the emergency budget announcements about potential cuts to public sector funds, which may impact on services for older people, this will be a very timely development.

It is important, however, to be clear that that the proposed Day Care Partnership will not directly address the future of the Essex and Silver Rooms. Now that the opportunity for unitary status for the city has been removed by the Government, the future of these facilities will remain wholly the responsibility of Norfolk County Council.

There is no question that our policy remains opposed to the closure of the day centres though we will of course continue to engage in discussions about improving services for current and potential users of the kind of services provided by the Essex and Silver Rooms. Critical to that is to ensure that the voice of the service users remains strong and that the county council is not allowed to duck its responsibilities to people living in Norwich. The county council cannot be allowed to simply walk away from its responsibility to those who use the Essex and Silver Rooms but should the campaigning fail to dissuade them and they decide to do just that then this administration will do all it reasonably can to support those who need these services to access them."

Question 5

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

"Earlier this year the Council pursued enforcement action against the owners of Earlham House shopping centre on Earlham Road over the state of the front car park at the shops, which was full of pot holes. The owners eventually organised for some resurfacing work to be done in March, but it was partial and ineffective. A number of potholes have rapidly reappeared. I and many residents in the area feel that the owners should re-tarmac the whole car park. I understand this was what the Council was intending to do if the enforcement action had resulted in the Council organising the work. As the work that took place did not provide a lasting solution to the problem, and the area continues to be dangerous and unsightly, will the Council now return to its plan of organising work on the site and sending the bill to the private owners?"

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

"At the moment we are not able to take this course of action. The works undertaken on behalf of the owners of the property earlier in the year are far from ideal and were less comprehensive than those which would have been undertaken by the Council. Officers have recently visited the site and consider that the state of site has been

improved to the extent where it is currently above the threshold where action can be taken. Therefore we cannot take direct action in this case at the moment.

The Council has written to the landowner concerned pointing out the deficiencies in the work undertaken and indicating that if the area is allowed to deteriorate further then it will take the action needed to ensure the area is maintained in a satisfactory state of repair.

I can assure you that Officers are keeping a close eye on this situation and will not hesitate to use the powers available to them should this be practical.”

Question 6

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-

“Can the Council commit to doing all it can to ensure the Jenny Lind children's play area will be open in time for the school summer holidays?”

Councillor Susan Sands, Executive Member for Children and Young People's reply:-

“The refurbishment of the Jenny Lind Park is a very exciting project, which has been shaped by extensive consultation with local people and has been described as good practice in how residents can shape services. The facility when complete will be a real asset to the neighbourhood.

The first phases which include the construction of a new multi use games area and landscaping have been completed and these are excellent facilities which are already being well used. The lining out of the new multi-use games area will be undertaken on the Wednesday 30 June 2010.

Contractors were on site to complete the installation of a drain in the old play area, which was necessary due to ground flooding, on Friday 25 June 2010 and the seeding of the area will be undertaken in the autumn.

Unfortunately, due to the exceptionally long period of bad weather in the winter, the work to replace the play equipment was delayed and had to be paused at the end of the Council's contracts with CityCare.

The play equipment has been purchased and is in store and a new contractor has been procured to undertake this work and started on site on Thursday of last week, the 24 June 2010.

The contractors have advised officers that this work has an estimated completion date of Friday 30 July 2010. However, final confirmation will be provided once the grounds works are been undertaken over the next few days and officers will be working closely with the contractors to ensure everything is done to keep to this timetable.

Whilst the anticipated completion date is one week later than had been anticipated and overlaps with the school holidays by this one week the major works will be completed in term time and the site will be open for the majority of the school holidays. The final seeding and shrub planting will be completed in the autumn."

Question 7

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"It is over a year since I asked a question regarding the replacement of the Eden Springs water coolers which are still in use despite assurances from the Executive Member that they were due to be replaced last year by jugs and glasses. I am sure that, as well as general concerns over environmental sustainability of bottled water, the Executive Member is aware that Eden Springs' parent company is in breach of international law by drawing water from the illegally occupied Golan Heights and marketing and distributing this product- although not in these particular water coolers of course. Can the Executive Member comment on how far the replacement has progressed, specify the timescale for replacement, and let me know whether my concerns could/will be addressed through the new procurement strategy which is currently being worked on by the Council?"

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

"It is over a year ago since I requested information from you that would demonstrate the link between the bottled water provided in city hall and breaches of international law. You didn't get back to me. I am happy to have that discussion when you are ready.

Officers have examined the feasibility of replacing the bottled water coolers with mains fed water coolers. However, there is no existing water supply to the committee rooms and the cost to put in a water supply to each room exceeds £3000.

Officers have examined having jugs of water and glasses in the committee rooms but the main barrier to this is the staff time that would be required to collect the glasses, fill the jugs, collect and wash the glasses and jugs at the end of the meeting. This is not an efficient use of officer time.

Officers have also examined using the catering supplier to provide glasses, fill the jugs, collect and wash the glasses and jugs at the end of the meeting. However, there is a cost attached to this and the Council has already made the decision not to have tea, coffee etc provided at meetings due to cost. The cost of providing water through this method would exceed the cost of the bottled water.

The Council has reduced to a minimum level the refreshments at meetings and the basic provision of water in the committee rooms can currently most efficiently be achieved by bottled water.

The procurement strategy sets out a framework for balancing issues such as cost, quality and environmental impact. Each decision has to take account of all of these

factors and in some cases, such as the bottled water, the preferred option is not economically viable.”

Question 8

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Leader of the Council:-

“Can the Leader update Council as to the actions taken as a result of us passing a motion against the raising of university tuition fees?”

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council’s reply:-

“I am surprised and disappointed that Councillor Jeraj feels the need to address this matter through a question to Council.

Councillors are updated through e-councillor on a regular basis on progress relating to motions. The last update was published just before this motion was passed. If he couldn’t wait until the next update, which will be published shortly, he could have spoken to Democratic Services who would have told him that the letter of support to the Union of UEA Students for its funding campaign, and the letter to the then Higher Education Minister, David Lammy, MP, opposing an increase in, or the deregulation of, tuition fees, had been sent.

I am particularly surprised if, as a member of Scrutiny Committee, he is asking me what progress has been made with Council’s request that Scrutiny Committee considers the impact of increasing student debt on the lives of individual students and local businesses. He was at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 May 2010 when neither he, nor any other Scrutiny Member, felt the need to raise it under the discussion on Scrutiny work programme. I understand that since he submitted this question, Scrutiny Committee has decided that it does not wish to include this matter in its work programme. I assume he is aware of that?”

Question 9

Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Leader of the Council:-

“The coalition government has announced its intention to scrap the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative. What is the expected impact of this decision on Norwich?”

Councillor Steve Morpew, Leader of the Council’s reply:-

“The coalition government have announced a number of reductions in funding including in year reductions to the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI), as well as a reduction in capital funds available for local transport schemes. All of these will have an immediate detrimental impact on residents in the city. Furthermore the government have announced that the Local Authority Business Growth Initiative and the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant will cease. Combined these provided up to £900,000 in the current year (of which £57,000 was LABGI) and the loss of funding on this scale will clearly have an impact across all council services in 2011 and beyond.

Although I appreciate that there is a need to tackle the deficit I am concerned that this is undertaken in a manner that does not disproportionately disadvantage people on lower incomes and the ability of this council to support the people of Norwich. The announcements will have a greater impact on areas such as Norwich that are seeking to tackle high levels of deprivation and disadvantage. To enable the Council to take a considered view on the financial challenges it will face over the next few years, a special meeting of the Executive will be held tomorrow to start the process.

I would encourage all Members of the Council to consider the implications of the report establishing a blueprint for a lean city council. In the meantime the Council will continue to explore all avenues to secure funding to invest in the City of Norwich."

Question 10

Councillor Howard Jago to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"Could the Executive Member please clarify, under the new contract, what arrangements can be made in areas with communal bins to assist residents with mobility problems?"

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

"The new contract has been let on the basis that it will deliver a better service and greater efficiencies in terms of cost and quality which is a top priority for the authority. To achieve this, the way in which waste is collected may vary slightly across the city and may also change from the way it has traditionally been done. The introduction of communal waste facilities in flats is one example of this.

By adopting this method of collection the service will be more efficient and it will bring the advantage of providing recycling facilities and opportunities which were not previously available to such flats this in turn will reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. Other considerations include managing the risk of injury to staff by eliminating the many journeys between all of the flats and the collection vehicle and to reduce the risk to residents on collection days with bins/ bags along the balconies.

As part of the planning and implementation process, we carried out consultation with tenants on the changes to the management of waste and introduction of communal bins. An equality impact assessment was carried out at the end of 2009 and completed in February 2010. The equality impact assessment requires that data is gathered on who might be affected and how, as well as requiring that a consultation takes place, including people with disabilities, and identifying any potential issues which might have an adverse impact on them. It also requires that where one may be identified, that the authority outlines how it intends to deal with that adverse impact and lessen or remove the problem where appropriate.

The Council has considered the intended change in service/ policy and the impact it might have on disabled people in depth, as the results of the equality impact assessment shows. We recognise that the change of service from collection of waste from outside the door to a communal bin service may require some adjustments.

Throughout the consultation process we have listened to residents and made adjustments to best suit the need of the users, these have included: the locations of bins and raised paving to help visually impaired tenants.

We have promoted the new service with tenants and held local meetings to allow tenants to discuss the changes and ask questions.

If any tenant is finding it difficult to manage disposing of their rubbish we will visit and discuss individual requirements and options for disposing of their rubbish including self help, signposting for support packages and reasonable adaptations to ensure access the new disposal service. We are also conscious that where this change has highlighted individual issues there may be wider personal issues that become apparent that we can also address in a positive way with partnering agencies, this might include an occupational therapist to provide a holistic assessment of needs. We can then use that information to explore what reasonable adjustments we can then offer to allow you equal access not just our services but improved quality of life.

In these specific/ individual circumstances we will make temporary arrangements until we have undertaken the personal holistic assessment work and found a sustainable solution."

Question 11

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"Why were some roads from the 2009-10 window replacement programme not undertaken in that financial year when they were deemed to be of sufficient priority to be done at that point, and tenants had already been told they would be done? And why was the 2010-11 programme delayed by 7 weeks?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

"The total number of properties that received window replacements during 2009/10 was as programmed and planned this was a figure 1,748. The programme is drafted in such a way that those properties in highest need are included earlier in the programme and as a result some properties in a street will have their windows replaced whilst others, which are deemed to be less of a priority, are programmed to be replaced later in the programme.

During the course of last year an officer decision was taken with the contractor to include some properties not identified for replacement within the programme whilst the contractor was working in a street. The view was taken that this would be more efficient. Clearly this decision was in the best interests of those residents in question

but unfortunately consideration was not given to the effect on the overall programme and delivery within the agreed budget.

This resulted in a small number of properties that were due to have their windows replaced not receiving them. However, all residents affected have been contacted and assurances given that their windows will be included at the start of the 2010/11 programme. This situation has not changed and this year we will be delivering replacement windows to 3,264 homes.

As members are aware the legal challenge to the award of this contract prevented the new contractor being in a position to commit to the full schedule of works, including window replacement, to enable the programme to start on 1st April. There is a minimum 6 week lead in time between site survey, manufacture and installation for windows. To take account of this delay work programmes have been amended and the numbers required to be delivered have been increased to ensure that all properties identified to have the work carried out this year will receive new windows. The contractors assure me that they can deliver this increased work programme so that we can meet our stated aim of completing the window programme by the end of 2011."

Question 12

Councillor Rupert Read to the Leader of the Council:-

"With particular reference to maximising accountability, could the Executive Member please clarify the Executive's position on shared services?"

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

"With the current pressures on local government finances and the coalition's apparent hostility to much of the public sector the Council will need to consider any options for reducing costs and getting better value for money, and this will include sharing services with other public sector organisations facing similar challenges.

At the Executive meeting on 30 June 2010, we will be discussing the impact of the recent budget announcements and what we anticipate in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. We will also be considering a paper – "Norwich City Council" – focussed and flexible". – Establishing the principles for change.

This is an opportunity to discuss issues such as Shared Services, and the Executive will conclude discussions and finalise this on 21 July 2010. This gives us all the opportunity to take a measured view of key issues in the light of the changes we now have to face. I think we can safely assume unremitting bad news with our challenge being to try to protect those most vulnerable.

However I see no reason to divert from our stated position that we do not want to see shared services being used as a euphemism or cover for privatisation. Beyond that there are many possibilities for closer working, co location and coproduction of services with others in the public sector and third sector organisations that provide complementary services. "

Question 13

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"In light of the new government urging all councils to publish spending of above £500, will this council be following the government's advice and throwing open the books to proper public scrutiny?"

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

"Just to take issue with the rather crusading tone of Councillor Wright's question; I'm sure I don't need to remind her that information about the Council's budgets have always been in the public domain and regularly reported upon at Council, the Executive and through Scrutiny; in addition to information provided through Freedom of Information requests. The Government's proposals are an iteration of processes already in place. Procurement and Finance will review the extract and publishing of data to meet the government requirements. The latest guidance is that this must be completed by January 2011 but we expect to complete this earlier than that.

Councillor Wright, will I am sure, be pleased to know that the Labour administration will be 'throwing open to public scrutiny', on a regular basis, the impact of the deep and dangerous cuts already embarked upon by her Government. In this context we will be monitoring and reporting the voting record of both Norwich MPs."

Question 14

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

"Given the continued failure to supply the scrutiny committee with up to date information, could the Executive Member tell council (as accurately as possible) how long it is taking the council to process housing/council tax benefit claims and changes of circumstance?"

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

"I believe you are referring to the national indicators (NI 180 and NI 181) and the data for these is collated by the DWP. The indicators are as follows:-

- NI 180 - Changes in Housing Benefit/ Council Tax Benefit entitlements within the year
- NI181 - Time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events

The DWP has instructed all authorities that they may not publish the results in any form, internally or externally for NI 180. For NI181 the information has not been reliable therefore it would not have any value if the results were published.

Please see below the information requested relating to processing housing/council tax benefit claims and changes of circumstance:-

Results for 2009/2010	New Claims	Change of circumstances
	Days	Days
Quarter 1	29.5	9.9
Quarter 2	27	11
Quarter 3	34	15
Quarter 4	41	12
Annual Average	33	12

Results for 2010/2011	New Claims	Change of circumstances
	Days	Days
30 April 2010	44	14
31 May 2010	37	15
June 2010 – to date	31	11.5
Average to date	37.3	13.5

Norwich City Council collects this data monthly and the figures reflect pressures created by the recession.

A 63% increase in the number of claims and changes of circumstances received compared with 2008/2009. The caseload has increased from 16,100 in October 2008 to a current caseload of 19,093.

As you can see from the performance information, the number of days increased throughout 2009/2010, however there has been a marked improvement so far in 2010/2011 and this can largely be attributed to the LEAN project. The council has taken up an offer from the DWP to look at how the service to our customers can be improved by using LEAN methodology. We have been working with the DWP since November 2009 on this. A project has been selected and scoped, and a team trained to take this work forward. We are now in the early stages of implementation of the project and are testing the newly designed processes, as of 14th June 2010. The results are excellent, and in the first week the team processed new claims in 3.3 days.” Once the testing is finished we will be able to apply this new methodology to all new claims. We will need to wait to see the overall impact of the changes, and can expect to see some real improvements.

We will report the performance of the benefits service and the improvements being made to members through the quarterly performance report to the Executive and Scrutiny. “

Question 15

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Leader of the Council:-

"Will the Leader of the Council join me in thanking local residents (including the 6,000+ members of the 'Making Norwich City of Culture' Facebook group), the numerous local organisations, and the officers of this council for their continued work and support in making our bid to be the UK's first City of Culture in 2013. Can I also thank him personally for his contribution, and can I further ask him to welcome Early Day Motion 44, tabled by Norwich MP Simon Wright, which backs the Norwich City of Culture bid and encourages all Norfolk MPs to back the bid."

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

"Thank you. As Councillor Watkins says the support that the city has shown for this has been truly fantastic. The number of local people, cultural and community organisations and celebrities who have come forward with their ideas and support has been truly overwhelming.

I would like to thank each and every one of them for supporting the City in the finals. We are confident about the outcome and in truth we have already achieved a huge amount. We haven't tried to assess how much it would have cost to buy the vast advertising that would be needed to get the kind of exposure Norwich has had nationally - but we certainly couldn't afford to pay for it. It has already driven Norwich further onto the radar and up the pecking order of UK cities. The Festival benefitted from and promoted that coverage in the kind of virtuous circle we are trying to create on a grand scale. Come what may we have already made a difference as a result of the bid and the city will be the winners as a result whoever gains the accolade itself.

And yes this is one of the few occasions that you will here me support a coalition initiative - I do very much welcome the early day motion. Of course our MP's can do much more and keeping Norwich under the nose of the ministers in the run up to the decision is something I hope both our MP's and indeed all MP's in Norfolk will make a priority. The UK City of Culture was an initiative of the last Labour government and we did have a huge amount of support and encouragement from them and from Charles Clarke, so credit where it is due.

As another unusual step – how can I say enough to thank the Evening News for their support? They have been simply brilliant. All the local media have got behind the bid, but the file, or perhaps pile, of EN cuttings we were able to show the judges to demonstrate local media were behind the bid was simply breathtaking.

Finally can I add my thanks to the bid team and champions for the work and commitment they have put into this. It really has been a whole city project that the whole city will benefit from."

Question 16

Councillor Jenny Lay to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

“Could the Executive Member give an early indication of the impact of the coalition Government's cuts in funding on the people of Norwich?”

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

“There are 2 parts to this answer – what we already know from actions the coalition Government has already taken, and what we are anticipating based on the emergency budget announced on 22 June 2010.

Overall, the situation looks very serious. The independent Institute of Fiscal Studies yesterday said:-

“In total, the cut in central government public services spending as a share of national income now planned by the Coalition will more than reverse the entire increase we saw under Labour. We are looking at the longest, deepest sustained period of cuts to public services spending at least since World War II.”

What we know already

What we already know is that the Government has already started cutting back on major public sector funding streams. Some examples that will have an effect on the city include:

- Cuts to the proposed provision of free school meals;
- A 20% cut in the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) – this is money set aside for supporting new business growth, and advising individuals considering setting up their own businesses;
- Housing & Planning Delivery Grant – up to £1 million expected in 2010/11 to help kick start growth in housing and improve planning services;
- A 25% in year reduction in the County Council's integrated transport block allocation which funds highway improvements in the City;
- Cuts in a range of capital schemes that may affect major developments around Norwich such as the Northern Distributor Road, the Rackheath Eco-town, the A11 dualling and many other schemes;
- A range of other funding streams such as our deal with the Homes & Communities Agency to build affordable homes, and upgrade council homes, have also been suspended.

In addition, the Government has moved to cancel the decision of the previous Government to award unitary status to Norwich. This decision alone will cost the city around £4m every year in lost efficiency savings which could have been re-invested into service improvements, as well as denying the city its right to independence and self-determination.

The scale of further cuts that are expected.

The emergency budget on 22 June 2010 served notice that more cuts are to come. It is too early to be clear about the effect of all of them, and a further announcement is expected on 20 October 2010 to provide more detail. We expect the level of cuts to be deep and will have a significant impact upon public services relied upon by all Norwich's citizens. There is also a significant risk that this will stifle future economic growth in the City, and lead to higher unemployment and greater difficulties for ordinary families to make ends meet.

Some of the key headline proposals that will affect people in the city include:

- A 25% cut in the spending of Government Departments (except Health and Overseas Aid);
- A cap on Housing Benefit claims at £400 per week;
- Reductions in entitlement to family tax credits - from 2012, families with a combined income of £30,000 will have their entitlement scrapped;
- Means testing for Disability Living Allowance;
- Increase of VAT to 20%.

It is significant that the protection of the NHS in particular will intensify the squeeze on funding elsewhere. Applying the squeeze evenly across all Government departments would require 14% cuts rather than the 25% or more that the least favoured departments now face. My concern is that the final cuts to local government services could actually exceed 25%, and end up nearer 33%.

The impact on vulnerable people

My other fear is that these cuts will affect the poorest people in the city much harder than others. The Institute for Fiscal Studies statement on 23 June echoes my concerns:-

"Turning to the distributional impact of the Budget, Mr Osborne and Mr Clegg have been keen to describe yesterday's measures as "progressive" in the sense that the rich will feel more pain than the poor. That is a debateable claim."

"The Budget looks less progressive – indeed somewhat regressive – when you take out the effect of measures that were inherited from the previous Government, when you look further into the future than 2012–13 and when you include some other measures that the Treasury has chosen not to model."

There is widespread concern that children, young people and poorer families in Norwich will suffer the most. Dr Katherine Rake, Chief Executive of the Family and Parenting Institute has said:-

"With the Child Trust Fund being abolished, child tax credits being cut for many ordinary families and child benefit frozen for three years, parents might be forgiven for suspecting they are in the frontline for cuts."

“Each separate announcement on the likes of raising VAT and cutting tax credits might sound manageable. But when considered together as a package, it's clear this Budget will mean significant pain for families.”

The measures outlined in the budget will directly impact on the work of Children's Services, in particular the cuts in Sure Start Maternity Grant and the Health in Pregnancy Grant. According to the Local Government Information Unit, there is a real concern that the capacity of councils to step in and provide effective support to the most vulnerable families will be compromised by the significant reduction in departmental budgets.

This will be compounded by changes to housing benefit that will make life a lot tougher for those poorer families in Norwich now burdened with an increase in VAT and real cuts in child benefits. The homelessness charity Shelter have said that some people claiming housing benefit would lose up to 40% of their total rent and many would be forced out of their accommodation. Campbell Robb, Chief Executive of Shelter states that there is nowhere for many of these people to go and expects to see debt and evictions rise as a result. To make matters worse, plans in the city for an expansion in affordable housing are under increasing threat as a result of the savage cuts agenda being revealed by the coalition.

Conclusion

All Members of this Council recognise that urgent steps need to be taken to tackle the deficit. However, Norwich is the second most deprived District in the whole of the eastern region, and it cannot be right that a regressive budget means that the poorest people are asked to bear the brunt of the cost of putting it right.

At the moment we estimate that the total effect of the cuts on City Council services will be around £7.5m over the next 2 years, but the effects across the City overall will be much more significant as the police, voluntary organisations, businesses, families and individuals will also be badly hit.

The City Council will, of course, work hard to minimise the effects of the cuts on our services, and will aim to protect front-line services and minimise the impact on staff. But it will not be possible to absorb cuts of this scale and some service reductions are inevitable. We will, of course, work with local people and organisations to identify how and where changes should be made, with a priority to protect the most vulnerable at all times.”

Question 17

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

“With regard to the new neighbourhood strategy, which is designed to move services closer to local communities thus improving engagement and the interaction between services, can the Executive Member provide reassurance to city centre private leaseholders who inform me that they feel very unsupported, that they will receive advice and assistance in a more 'joined up' fashion?”

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

"The Executive agreed an initial approach to developing a neighbourhood strategy in March 2007, which set out a neighbourhood vision where:

- Communities are engaged, listened to, and empowered;
- Communities and organisations have a better shared understanding of the needs and aspirations of neighbourhoods, set out in neighbourhood profiles and neighbourhood plans;
- Services are delivered at a locality level, by the Council and its partners, wherever possible;
- Residents and services are working together to improve life for residents in neighbourhoods and localities.

The implementation of the strategy has been through a phased approach, with phase one focussing on community engagement and most recently the introduction of four multi-disciplinary teams located out in the neighbourhoods from April 2010 which were developed during the improvement and efficiency programme in 2009-10.

This provides:

- four area teams led by a Communities and Neighbourhood Manager each based in the neighbourhoods, in place from April 2010;
- devolved mainstream services to a neighbourhood level – community engagement, community safety and contract monitoring;
- the alignment of other mainstream services with, for example named contacts;
- increase engagement with communities, members and partners.

And aims to help the Council to start to:

- deliver services at a local level;
- help communities to influence services so they can meet local need;
- Joining up services and working with communities and service providers at a neighbourhood level will improve the quality of life for residents by building on an areas strengths and addressing together specific problems and challenges.

Since the teams have been in place they have been getting to know, understand and respond to local issues by talking and meeting at every opportunity, residents, community groups, Ward Councillors and representatives from partner agencies. As part of the 'getting to know you' process Cllr Divers should have received an invite from the relevant Neighbourhood Manager to meet the Neighbourhood Team and

raise any issues of current concern and I hope that Cllr Divers, along with all other Ward Councillors, has taken or will be taking up this opportunity very soon.

They are also working closely with partners, in particular the police, to develop and agree joint priorities and closer working at the neighbourhood level.

I believe that Cllr Divers is concerned about private leaseholders in the city centre, where there have been concerns raised about the council's response to noise and anti-social behaviour.

The Council does have a dedicated officer who deals with issues of noise and anti-social behaviour in the city centre which is not related to the council's landlord housing function and works closely with the police to develop a joined up approach. This post was held vacant during the improvement and efficiency work after the post holder left in December. The new post holder started in the role during April and has followed up on cases that had been reported to the council during this time.

If Cllr Divers is aware of particular issues where the concerns of residents have gone unheard or where services require bringing together then perhaps Cllr Divers can provide further details of the residents and I will ask the relevant Neighbourhood Manager to contact them so that the issues can be looked into and resolved."