



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **Council**

**16 July 2024**

### **Questions to cabinet members**

#### **Question 1**

**Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“Could the cabinet member comment how the 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme for our poorest residents supports the collection rate of Council Tax raised by Norwich City Council?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“At the start of this financial year the Council Tax gross debit figure was c£125m.

After reductions such as Council Tax Reduction, exemptions and discounts, the net collectable debit figure is currently c£93m.

The collection rate is then calculated based on the net collectable debit less payments received.

As at 1 July 2024 we have 12,751 residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. Of this, 10,120 residents are in receipt of 100% Council Tax Reduction.

As at the 2 July 2024 the total amount of Council Tax Reduction awarded is £15.36m.

If the 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme was reduced to a lesser % we may need recover small debts from those already on low incomes with little ability to pay, which could impact the collection rate and may also mean we need more resource to collect the debt.”

## Question 2

**Councillor Carrington to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“There are owners of mansions in Mayfair that pay less Council Tax than the tenants of terraced houses in Hartlepool, would you support reforms to add higher bands of Council Tax for the most expensive houses?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“Yes, I would like to see what the Labour Government in Wales has done, which introduced more council tax bands for the most expensive houses. Extra money raised should be collected on a national level and shared out so that councils such as Norwich which represent poorer areas can benefit.”

### Question 3

**Councillor Huntley to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“I’ve been pleased to see community policing initiatives in the Mile Cross ward recently. With the “Safer Norwich strategy” now over a year old, could the cabinet member comment on the new arrangements of a partnership approach and the impact this is having for the city?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“It is really positive to see the continued development of partnership working with the implementation of the Safer Norwich Strategy and Safer Norwich Board.

Of particular note is the involvement of the Board in determining the quarterly policing priorities for the city. This has seen additional focus on not only the Mile Cross ward, but also other areas leading to improvements in tackling crime and antisocial behaviour being experienced by our residents and visitors.

There is always more to do, and I look forward to realising the further improvements we can collectively drive with this partnership approach.”

#### **Question 4**

**Councillor Mike Sands to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:**

“I was delighted to hear the council has been successful in bidding for funds to install solar panels at Riverside Leisure Centre. Can the cabinet member comment on the importance of this scheme, especially in terms of financial and carbon savings?”

**Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:**

“I am pleased to confirm that we have received £520,000 of funding from Sport England, match funded with £375,000 from the Council’s budgets, to install solar panels at Riverside Leisure Centre.

This investment demonstrates our continuing focus on delivering a Climate Responsive Norwich, as set out in our Community Led Plan, “We are Norwich”. It will also support the delivery of our Fairer Norwich priority by ensuring people have continuing and cost-effective access to these leisure facilities, supporting better health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents. According to Sport England data the centre has provided a social value of £2.4 million over the last 12 months, which represents support for those in our community who may need additional help to access leisure facilities such as these, for example via reduced rates, or delivery of tailored classes for residents with a disability.

The project is expected to save approximately 80 tons of carbon per annum – equivalent to 24 economy class trips to Hong Kong or five brand new family cars – and will reduce utility costs by a projected £50,000 annually.”

## Question 5

**Councillor Maguire to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:**

“Knowland Grove in my Ward has recently seen the installation of new, secure bin enclosures. Can the cabinet member comment on how this and other measures the council is taking will help to keep communal bin stores tidy?”

**Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:**

“Over the past year the Council has been rolling out various measures to improve the maintenance and appearance of a number of areas across the City with the aim of increasing civic pride and safety in our neighbourhoods.

As part of this new Metrostor bin enclosures were installed earlier in the year at Knowland Grove and Douro Place. These are fully enclosed units which encourage proper disposal of refuse and recycling. The bins are designed to restrict larger items not considered household waste being placed into the bins and reduce contamination as recycling bin lids cannot be forced open.

The bins have not been installed in isolation and revised signage, CCTV cameras and a more active approach to enforcement has also been undertaken. Scrutiny was updated on progress on the programme of activities in March.

No single measure will ever provide a magic bullet to resolve issues of waste storage and collection in high density housing areas but through constantly learning from experience and trialling new measures I'm confident that we will be able to drive significant improvements to appearance of these areas in the months and years to come.”

## Question 6

**Councillor Oliver to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“The Unity Hub is a collective of charities and community interest companies all working for the benefit of the people of Norwich and beyond. I visited Carrow House with council officers and members of the Unity Hub in summer of 2023 where there was much excitement about the prospect of the group taking on this empty building as their base. As well as enabling these vital groups to continue with their excellent work, it would also mean that Carrow House would be maintained rather than standing empty. Since that time, plans appear to have come to a sudden halt, and I have had no reply as to why this might be. Please could the Cabinet Member enlighten me.”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“Thank you to Councillor Oliver for this question, however the suggestion that the project has come to a sudden halt comes as somewhat of a surprise to me given there is a recommendation to Cabinet tomorrow night to grant a 3-year lease of Carrow House to Norwich Unity Hub.

Carrow House forms part of our plans for the redevelopment of East Norwich. Whilst those plans progress, the Norwich Unity Hub project provides an exciting and innovative opportunity over the next three years for Carrow House to be used as a base for the charitable organisations. These organisations deliver a considerable amount of social value for Norwich and the prospect of using one of our largest assets in this way demonstrates our recognition of the impact that these organisations have on the city and our commitment to partnering with them to deliver our community-led plan.

The first visit by Unity Hub to Carrow House was in October 2023 rather than Summer as you have suggested. Council officers have put in considerable work to move this project forward. Thanks to a very productive working relationship, together we have been able to ensure that there is a robust business plan for the project and that all the practical considerations in undertaking a major project such as this have been satisfactorily dealt with.

Given the level of public subsidy for this proposal, it will require determination by Cabinet. As you will understand, local and national elections have meant there has not been a Cabinet meeting since March, but I'm pleased to say this proposal will be considered at the first available opportunity – namely, as I said, by Cabinet tomorrow”

## Question 7

**Councillor Smith to ask the cabinet member for a prosperous Norwich the following question:**

“The Lord Mayors Procession is taking place again this July. What is so special about this event and what can Norwich residents and visitors to Norwich expect this year regarding an event that's taken place, bar the pandemic, every year for decades?”

**Councillor Kidman, the cabinet member for a prosperous Norwich's response:**

“The Lord Mayor’s Procession has a long history and is the second oldest street procession in the UK, dating back to medieval times.

The Lord Mayor’s Weekend is the largest free event in the city and provides an opportunity for our residents to come together to celebrate and enjoy the vibrant colours and sounds of the carnival parade, along with lots of family activities and an open-air music festival.

This year, the procession included school and community groups who danced, pedalled and walked their way from the Cathedral to Chapelfield Gardens. People lining the route saw giant puppets, including those made by students from Norwich University of the Arts and the Norwich Puppet Theatre, wonderful costumes, samba bands, brass bands, singing and lots more. The family-friendly entertainment and activities continued in Chapelfield Gardens with live music, performances and dance acts, stalls and games, a bar area and a food arena. People were able to join workshops and try new skills and the bandstand, which was programmed by The Garage and Young Norfolk Arts Festival, showcased some of our local, emerging talent.”

## Question 8

### **Councillor Hoechner to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“Nearly 400 people signed a petition asking the Council to screen arms investments out of our treasury management and Norfolk Pension fund. It was presented to Council on 12 March and the response given was no more than 'Thank you for your petition '. Will the Cabinet member please respond to the requests to screen the arms industry out of our treasury management and Norfolk Pension scheme as far as possible. If there is no intention to take action, will they please say so and explain why?”

### **Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:**

“The most significant area of investment by local authorities in financial markets is by way of their pension funds and we have recently written to Norfolk County Council as Administering Authority of the Norfolk Fund Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in respect of their ‘Disinvestment/Exclusion & ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) Aspects of Investment Strategy’. The pension fund response highlighted that the Pensions Committee regularly reviews its approach to ethical investment and over the years has taken a considerable amount of legal advice in relation to its fiduciary responsibility. It should be noted that the pension funds ESG approach leads to a portfolio with characteristics substantially better than the benchmark global equity indices.

In respect of the City Council’s own investments in financial markets, these are limited to our day-to-day treasury management activities and are invested in approved counterparties which does not include directly investing in equities (companies). However, broader money market funds or on-lending by financial institutions does present a secondary risk of indirect investment in companies which are involved in the arms trade. We have specifically considered ethical investments in our Treasury Management Strategy, which is published alongside the budget each year, and, through our use of money market funds, we have now capacity to invest in money market funds which have been identified as having environmental and ethical investment purposes. With our advisors help they are also supporting the council to invest in Money Market Funds that are Article 8 compliant (part of European Union, Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulations). Screening strategies can be used for Article 8 funds to include characteristics whereby companies involved in controversial weapons are screened out of compliant investment products.”



## Question 9

**Councillor Price to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:**

“Pavements and gulleys in the Harbour Triangle and across Thorpe Hamlet have a proliferation of weeds growing. The main cause is inadequate sweeping which allows silt to build up and for weeds to establish. Weeds damage the hard surfacing, leading to an unnecessary and avoidable increase in repair costs. It results in a waste of public money. Can the cabinet member explain why this problem has not been picked up through the monitoring of contractor agreements and what steps are they going to immediately take to rectify it?”

**Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:**

“Thank you for your question. This issue has been picked up by Council Officers whilst carrying out ongoing inspections in the area and responding to enquiries. The Street Cleaning team at NCSL are currently working to identify different methods of removing the seed bed from the highway and the pavements. Weed spraying in the area is carried out by Norfolk County Council and there have been issues with the completion of this task in the past few years meaning the weeds are harder to remove. There are ongoing discussions between Council Officers and Highways Staff to improve the co-ordination of services in future”

**Question 10**

**Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“Since February residents in several households in Gladstone Street have been waiting for the council to give them an answer on a site visit regarding mending a council fence which is now in a dangerous condition which the council put up on its land behind their properties. They are rightly concerned about anti-social behaviour and security. As a local councillor I have assisted them but have so far been involved in a dozen emails and calls and no progress is forthcoming from the council. Is six months an acceptable wait, especially when security is compromised?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“It is not acceptable that residents have had to wait for a resolution for six months and experienced poor communication. The repair works have now been costed and work will commence on 18 July. Delays in processing this work were avoidable and I have sought reassurance that matters such as this are resolved swiftly in the future and communication about progress, including any delays and reasons for delays, are improved.”

## Question 11

**Councillor Haynes to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“During 2023-24 the council commissioned a market research organisation to carry out an independent satisfaction survey of its tenants. One of the questions asked respondents “how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Norwich City Council’s housing service complaint handling?”. Of the 224 respondents who answered this question, just 21% were satisfied. Would the cabinet member for housing explain the reasons behind this clearly unacceptable figure?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“This survey is carried out in line with new requirements from the Regulator of Social Housing to collect Tenant Satisfaction Measures. This specific result falls short of our own aspiration and tells us we are not meeting the standard that residents expect from us in handling their complaint.

As the Tenant Satisfaction Measures are new, we are not yet able to directly compare our result with other similar housing providers, although early generalised benchmarking results indicate that the median satisfaction score for complaint handling is 33.8%, which is low across the housing sector. This does not make it acceptable, and we recognise the need for improvement. Our complaint handling performance from April 2024 is already showing an upward trend and we will continue to monitor this and the Tenant Satisfaction Measure results during the current financial year.”

## Question 12

### **Councillor Francis to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“Some residents in council sheltered housing found their annual heating costs trebled and sheltered housing costs doubled in March. Together with the council rent increase they had to cope with a steep hike in weekly costs totalling nearly 25%. It is especially distressing when on a fixed income, with no warning of this sudden and frankly unmanageable increase. Some then tried to make contact with the council but found it hard due to the costs of phone calls. We understand these increases are across the board. Will the cabinet member commit to giving advance information, and back up support, to sheltered housing tenants in future regarding such hikes?”

### **Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“Service charges in sheltered housing are based on actual expenditure during the previous year. Energy costs have increased dramatically, and we were aware that there would be a greater than usual increase. For this reason, the charges were capped to be less than 70% of the actual cost.

Tenants all received the £60 per month energy credit as part of the government scheme during the previous year and, for those on district heating, this was applied to their electricity account.

A leaflet was sent with the letters confirming the increase which gave additional information about the service charge calculation including details of the council's cost-effective energy tariff. Tenants would have received this by 4 March 2024.

We encourage anyone who is struggling to speak with their sheltered housing support officer for advice and support. The team has supported many eligible tenants to access the Household Support Fund or access other services throughout the cost-of-living crisis.

Customer contact team can be reached on an 0344 number which is charged at local rate or included in most mobile packages. Tenants have the option to request a call back if the line is busy.”

### **Question 13**

**Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“In March the council was asked how many payments have been made to residents as compensation for damp and mould issues per year. The council did not respond to the query, then finally in early June said it would "be handled under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)" and then, because the statutory deadline of 20 working days for this had actually passed, that it would be "treated as an overdue EIR". Still no answer has come though, more than 3 months on. Does the cabinet member agree that damp and mould in people's homes is important enough to merit a timely response?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“Addressing damp and mould in people's homes is an incredibly important issue for the city council.

With regards to the specific request, compensation payments have been paid to tenants due to damp and mould issues. These have been funded from a budget which also supports other costs, which means it is not possible at this time, to provide an accurate figure of just damp and mould related payments. I have asked that changes are made to enable these costs to be identified and reported from next quarter.”

A response to the request for information should have been provided within the council's agreed timeframe.”

## Question 14

### **Councillor Fox to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“In light of the city council’s earlier stated opposition to the Norwich Western Link Road (NWL) we trust that the council will be objecting to the NWL planning application and asking the secretary of state to call in the planning application and hold a public enquiry. Will the council call on the new government to withdraw the 85% funding for the NWL and invest the money instead in sustainable transport alternatives?”

### **Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:**

“The proposed Norwich Western Link Road, although entirely outside of our administrative area, is a very significant strategic road scheme that will have long term impacts on transport in the City and County. With the submission of the planning application, it has reached an important stage, and it is important that this Council considers its response carefully.

It is intended to prepare a report to Cabinet for 11 September for this response to be agreed. Officers are engaging with staff at the County Council to ensure that flexibility in the timetable will be allowed to enable us to undertake this proper consideration.

Until Cabinet has been able to consider relevant information and reaches a decision on the proposed response to the consultation our position on the scheme remains as set out in January 2022 when it was resolved not to support either the Transport for Norwich Strategy or the Western Link project contained within it.”

## Question 15

**Councillor Calvert to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“We are currently paying agencies over 4 times the going rate for interim staff, often for very extended periods, with some middle managers on day rates of £850 per day. What is it about this council, as an employer, that means we need to pay so far over the odds to attract qualified staff?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“The use of interims in the public sector is not unusual and is not in any way, as suggested by Councillor Calvert’s question, a reflection on Norwich City Council as an employer. Our pay policy statement – agreed annually by full Council, outlines our recruitment approach and the use of interims.

Like many employers both in the public and private sector we have seen challenges in recruiting to some roles, including hard to fill roles where there is a national shortage. This alongside a need for additional temporary resources with specific specialist skills to deliver priority projects, means that we need to use agency and interim resources to supplement establishment roles.

At the end of June interims and agency workers represented only 7 % of our total workforce. The majority of agency workers placed with the Council are paid in line within the established grades for the roles with a small proportion being paid on a day rate, which includes an agency mark up. It should also be remembered that these roles do not include pension and holiday pay elements that are included within salaries for permanent roles.

Day rates reflect the market rates for interim resources - the council is not paying agencies over four times the going rate.”

## Question 16

**Councillor Worley to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“The four-day working week campaign has had some incredibly positive strides over recent weeks. An article in The Guardian outlined the indisputable success of the largest public sector trial in South Cambridgeshire. Unison, the Union for public service, NHS and Police staff voted through a motion to “demand the next government takes action to ensure more employers adopt this new way of working”. And the change in government has taken away the threat of repercussions for councils who trial this massive improvement in conditions for their staff. Would the cabinet member therefore agree that now is the perfect time for Norwich City Council to commit to a trial of a four-day working week?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“Thank you for your question.

The new Government have pledged to introduce a ‘New Deal for Working People’ which contains key employment reform proposals. These proposals reference flexible working and in particular tackling one sided flexibility, however, at this time the position on the four-day week isn’t specifically referenced and there is no indication from the current Government that the position on the matter will change. In fact, a spokesperson for the Government confirmed on 10 July that “this isn’t Government’s planned policy”.

I would anticipate that the next steps in respect of the employment reform proposals are likely to mean a legislative Bill in the Autumn. The Government have committed to full and comprehensive consultation on any proposed legislative changes.

The city council continues to be an exemplar in terms of the flexible working arrangements within our workforce – we have a broad range of different working arrangements and patterns in place.

We plan to develop a new People Strategy during the next 12 months – on which, we will consult fully. In developing this strategy, we will consider all options for flexible working, (including a four-day working week) considering the needs of our residents and workforce.

We will continue to monitor the Government’s legislative agenda”



**Question 17**

**Councillor Young to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“A council tenant who is disabled and in poor health can no longer get in and out of their flat due to access issues with stairs. However home options turned down their request for a move, saying there was no documentation. The tenant had however sent in many records, so they are now appealing. This will take 2 months, they are told. They already waited 9 months. In this time their physical capacity has diminished due to not being able to get out. Another person known to us has been waiting many months for housing options to see him and has had to sleep rough. These are just two examples but we have more. Could the cabinet member please look into if there is a capacity issue in the home options team leading to these unacceptable delays?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“Understandably I am unable to address specific cases however should you wish to discuss these matters directly, please contact the Housing Options Teams. In the meantime, I can confirm that the Home Options team is fully resourced in terms of its established posts and there are no delays in processing medical assessments.

## Question 18

### **Councillor Catt to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“With the election of a new government last week, I expect we are all relieved to see an end to 14 years of Conservative government that has gutted our public services and local government, with the most vulnerable taking the brunt. One of the biggest issues here I often raise is the housing crisis. Can the Cabinet Member explain to me how Norwich City Council intends to reduce the ever-growing waiting list, that currently stands at over 4,000, under a Labour government that will stick to the Conservative’s fiscal rules?”

### **Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“Norwich, like the rest of the country has suffered under the previous conservative government from a chronic under supply of housing across all sectors. As a result, it has been those least able to afford it who have suffered most, priced out of the market both in terms of purchasing a home or inflated private rents and at the mercy of insecure tenancies subjected to no fault evictions.

Whilst the King’s Speech on 17 July will provide more detail, I believe there are many ambitious plans within the manifesto on which this Labour government was elected that will significantly improve access to housing and look forward to their delivery.

These commitments include:

- A commitment to build 1.5 million new homes
- Deliver the biggest increase in social and affordable housing in a generation
- An overhaul of the planning system
- A brown field first approach to housing – which will be beneficial for Norwich
- Working with councils to create a cross government strategy to end homelessness
- Abolish Section 21 no fault evictions, which increases protection for private renters to challenge poor quality landlords

Some of these will be able to be delivered quicker than others, reversing the impact of 14 years of conservative rule will not be achieved over night but I am confident that this will be sustainable change that ensures, that unlike under the previous government those most in need are not ignored.”

## **Question 19**

**Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“Residents in Langley Walk have been affected by a leaking communal gutter, which is causing damp in their properties. When this has been reported to the council, residents have been told that a repair will be scheduled, but have not been given a date for the repair. Does the Cabinet Member agree that residents should be given a repair date when reporting issues in council properties?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“Residents should be provided with a date for any repair that is inside an individual property. Repairs to communal areas are not booked in at the time of call. This is because they do not require any specific resident to be present to provide access. This gives the scheduling team at NCSL the ability to schedule these works wherever there is a gap in the operatives’ work. These works may then be moved if higher priority works arise. However, the overall time frame should always be adhered to which in most cases will be either five working days or 60 days depending on priority. Any works that are categorised as emergency should be attended within 24 hours.

In the case of Langley Walk, the repair was raised on the 6 June with a target date of the 5 August.”

## Question 20

**Councillor Bolton to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:**

“The councillor development working group last met in February 2020: yet there are a lot of aspects to councillor training that need work. Similarly, the constitution working group last met in February 2023, but there are clearly many aspects of the constitution that need updating or changing so that we can function better as a council for the benefit of the people of Norwich. Furthermore, one of the council's 5 key priorities is to be a climate responsive Norwich. Despite requests for the Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel meeting in June to be rearranged no such measure has been put in place, leaving the next meeting for October. Is agreeing to the formation of committees and then not scheduling any meetings part of a deliberate strategy to avoid democratic accountability or simply a matter of chaotic mismanagement?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:**

“Working groups meet on an ad hoc basis as and when there is business to discuss. The recent Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel was cancelled due to the elections. An update note has been prepared and will be sent round to Councillors. This note covers the key areas of work over the last period.”

## Question 21

**Councillor Caine to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:**

“Norwich has a proud history of council housing, with some of the first council housing in the country being built here over a hundred years ago, giving a way to lift the most vulnerable out of the slums and provide an alternative to exploitative slum landlords and private interest. We didn’t just provide affordable quality housing to those at the very bottom – by the end of the 1970s in Norwich, over 50% of the population lived in a council house. Successive Conservative and Labour governments have stripped us of this right. We see thousands languishing on Norwich’s waiting lists while many more are condemned to the private rental market. We often hear from the Labour benches that they would love to build more council housing, but when the Labour government refuses to commit any money to this, how can we ever build a city with truly secure and affordable housing?”

**Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:**

“The Labour manifesto is clear in its commitment to the delivery of the biggest increase in both social and affordable housebuilding in a generation. This is to be delivered through the strengthening of planning obligation, changes to the affordable homes programme to ensure more is delivered from existing funding, a commitment to support councils and registered providers to build.

There is a clear commitment to both the prioritisation of building new socially rented homes and better protecting those we are building to be there for future residents.

We continue to be committed to safe and affordable housing for all our residents, and I am looking forward to working with both Clive Lewis our re-elected Labour MP for Norwich South and Alice MacDonald the new Labour MP for Norwich North to advocate for the support Norwich needs to fulfil this. I know they will both be strong voices for Norwich within the Labour government.”