



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

30 March 2010

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Leader of the Council:-

"What assurances can the Leader of the Council give that the proposed Implementation Executive of the new unitary council will be run with openness and accountability and that relevant documentation will be made available whenever possible?"

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

"We are determined that the implementation process will be as transparent and open as possible. However, we need to bear in mind that there are only 12 months left for the implementation programme, which means that a huge amount of work and decisions will be needed in a relatively short period of time. We will therefore need to strike a balance in order to allow decisions to be made clearly and quickly.

Accountability to the people of Norwich has been consistently at the heart of our unitary proposals. Unlike the current two-tier system, decisions on the future of the city will be made by councillors who represent areas within the city area. Members of the Implementation Executive will be directly accountable to city electors, and there will be all out elections in May 2011 where local people will be able to express their views on the implementation process.

The draft structural change orders for a unitary Norwich council stipulate that the Implementation Executive will be a committee of the City Council's Executive. This means that the normal rules with regard to publication of papers and agendas will apply. Meetings will be held in public.

The draft orders also set out that the work of the Implementation Executive will be subject to oversight by a Joint Scrutiny Committee made up of elected members of both the City Council and Norfolk County Council. These meetings will also be held in public, and normal publication arrangements will apply.

We will also be developing a range of communication and consultation activities to keep local people abreast of developments. This will include a dedicated website for the development of the new council, which will provide information on implementation arrangements, the design of new council and decisions that have been taken."

Question 2

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

"According to the recent Shelter report, the City Council is failing to match the annual level of affordable housing needed within its area. With a waiting list in excess of 8,000, the report states that the council has built an average of 410 dwellings during the last three years - well below the national target of 624 affordable homes.

Whilst I understand that the Shelter report has come in for some criticism, does the Executive Member recognise any shortcomings within the council for failing to meet the required housing need, or does she blame the policies of this Labour government instead?"

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

"We all know that good housing is the bedrock on which healthy, vibrant, sustainable communities are built. Therefore this administration has recognised the importance of improving our existing stock and ensuring that more affordable housing is made available.

As a result this authority can be proud of its record of enabling the delivery of affordable homes for the people of Norwich. In 2006 the newly elected Labour administration promised 1000 new homes in its first three years and that figure was surpassed in under three years. The recent groundbreaking single conversation with the HCA will ensure more homes are developed and for the first time in many years Norwich will by the end of 2010 start work on building its own council houses again. This comes at a time when our RSL partners have struggled with the capacity to deliver having been hit by reductions in revenue and the economic downturn resulting in a lack of funds and low numbers of properties coming through section 106 agreements on stalled sites.

You will have seen from Shelter's league table that Norwich is 5th out of 47 in the Eastern Region and 23rd out of 323 nationwide. So while there is still room for improvement we are currently in the in the upper quartile both regionally and nationally.

Clearly we want to build on the work we have undertaken of late to increase our ability to provide more homes. Our Housing Development team will continue to work diligently with our developing partners in the City and with the Homes and Community Agency to bring forward as many properties as possible.

It should also be remembered that new build affordable housing is not the only answer to meeting need. Our work in bringing empty properties back into use, with the majority of the Empty Dwelling Orders being enforced across the country being here in Norwich, has resulted in a number of homes coming back into the market. Our initiatives to enable people to access the private rented sector through our Landlord Accreditation Scheme and our Private Sector Landlord Scheme are also helping to address housing need in Norwich.

Looking to the future we were pleased to hear last week that the Housing Minister John Healey has announced his recommendations for a long awaited restructure of the Housing Revenue account. His proposals will allow stock holding local authorities to retain all of their income and be in a better position to respond more effectively to local need in a more sustainable way. This together with the Homes and Communities Agency established by this Labour government and our own work locally demonstrates a clear commitment to social housing both in central government and here in Norwich."

Question 3

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

"Benefit interviews are taking place in areas such as the third floor landing in City Hall. I am concerned that members of the public are having supposedly 'confidential' interviews in public areas, rather than in a private and comfortable setting. Could the Executive Member tell me whether they are happy with the present arrangements, why these arrangements have come about, and how long they will be in place for?"

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

"The benefits service has introduced a new role of benefit officer for a one year trial period. There are 6 benefits officers who help benefit claimants complete benefit claim forms and assess the claim. This new role has been devised to give our customers an end to end service from first point of contact. The role has relieved pressure on the customer contact team and helped to manage to deal with the 60% increase in new benefit claims over the past 12 months.

Prior to the introduction of the benefit officer role in the benefits service interviews were taking place at the counter in the customer contact centre. The customers would have to stand at the counter and give personal details in earshot of the waiting customers.

The 6 benefit officers conduct interviews throughout the day. They use an interview room where possible and where this is not possible they will use a private space, such as the space on the third floor landing."

Question 4

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Leader of the Council:-

"What proportion of the items celebrating tourism in Norwich, for sale at the Norwich Tourist Information Centre during British Tourism Week were made in the city?"

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

"Norwich Tourist Information centre (TIC) sells approx 300 different lines of stock, sourced from approx 24 suppliers. Of those 10 are Norfolk based companies. It is not always possible to use local companies as the type of goods we require are supplied by national companies who are the only manufacturer – e.g. A-Z maps, Ordnance Survey etc, or some Norwich branded merchandise. We still abide by the councils procurement policy to balance the cost of procurement with the quality of goods, and how these meet our objectives.

Our new ranges of exclusive merchandise with the 'I love Norwich' logo is being sourced through the Design, Print and Production (DPP) procurement tender process which follows the councils procurement guidelines. Several companies were asked to supply quotes for printing and supply of various lines. Of the 4 lines ordered so far, 3 are from Norwich and Norfolk based companies. Our brief for these items which are exclusively available at the TIC, is to where possible, continue the sustainable ethos begun with the 'I love Norwich' bag, i.e. organic, fair-trade.

Exclusive lines ordered so far are:-

- baseball caps which are made of recycled plastic bottles;
- T- Shirt which are Earth Positive climate neutral manufactured and made from organic cotton;
- T-towel which are made out of organic cotton;
- earthenware mugs."

Question 5

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"I have had a number of complaints from residents regarding the uneven quality of roads after being 'surface dressed' and the build up of large piles of stones by the roadside. Ashby Street is one particular example with many residents of the opinion that the surface is now, after two years, even more uneven than it was previously. Can the Executive Member clarify how the Council chooses which treatment to apply to road surfaces and, more specifically, when will Ashby Street be fully resurfaced?"

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

"Surface dressing is an efficient cost effective means of preventing further deterioration of a road. It can extend the life of a road by over 10 years and it restores surface texture as well. However, it does not improve the profile or ride quality of the underlying surface, although prior to surface dressing the worst erosion and surface depressions are patched.

Excess chippings are swept up by the surfacing contractor after completion of the works. Stones will however continue to work free from the surface for several weeks after this initial sweep and this is addressed through our routine street cleansing

operations. However, due to the presence of parked vehicles, street sweeping can be difficult to achieve (even with advance notice to the public).

The cost of surface dressing is much less than resurfacing a road: by a factor of 6 to 10. With limited and declining budgets for road maintenance there is therefore a choice – in trying to use the funding as effectively as possible – to either:-

- resurface few roads and allow others to deteriorate so that they become more expensive to repair at a later date; or
- surface dress several roads and help manage the need for more expensive intervention.

Funding for highways maintenance is provided by Norfolk County Council in accordance with the Norfolk Transport Asset Management Plan and Local Transport Plan. In reality, funds are made available for both resurfacing and surface dressing. The works budget for resurfacing principle roads (i.e. A and B class roads) in the City during 2010/11 is £1,331,000 and, for non-principle roads, it is £91,000. These figures compare to £293,000 for surface dressing.

With Ashby Street having been surface dressed and the life of the road extended there are presently no plans for full resurfacing within the foreseeable future. However, Ashby Street is inspected four times a year and routine repairs will be ordered as required. Also, if these inspections were to show further worsening then the need for resurfacing would be reviewed.”

Question 6

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

“The pedestrian crossing at the junction of the Avenues and Bluebell Road was recently replaced. However, the markings on the pavement for pedestrians and cyclists had not been repainted, causing a lot of confusion. When will this work be completed?”

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

“I am pleased to confirm that the outstanding works are scheduled to be completed by 30 March and within the anticipated project programme timescale.

I believe that this area of the City is in University Ward, could Councillor Jeraj confirm that he had contacted the University City Councillors to let them know he would be raising an issue concerning their Ward and asking them if they minded he was encroaching on their Ward. This has always been an unwritten rule of the Council as it is a matter of politeness and common manners to let Councillors of a Ward that is not your own know what you are doing in their Ward.”

Question 7

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Customer Contact and Citizens Services:-

"Having recently reported a number of incidents of broken glass in public areas I have been informed that there is a special section in Environmental Services who will be dispatched to clear the glass within 24 hours. I passed this information on to the Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA) representatives and a couple of local residents. Please can this information be circulated to all TRA teams across the city and advertised in the Citizen. Broken glass can be a hazard to children and animals and if we are offering a service we should ensure that residents who are interested in their area are fully aware that it exists."

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Customer Contact and Citizens Services reply:-

"All such incidents need to be reported through the Council's Customer Contact Team so they can be logged and dealt with in the most efficient way. You can contact the team from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday on 0344 980 3333. Once logged, they are passed to the appropriate team to deal with. In the case of broken glass it is normally passed to the contractor through the Environmental Services team so that it can be cleared as quickly as possible.

Councillors will be aware of the new neighbourhood teams that are being put in place that will increase the numbers of staff working at the local level with communities and partners to improve the quality of life. These teams, in conjunction with neighbourhood housing officers will be able to deal with these types of problems much more effectively.

If the TRA's identify specific problems that keep reoccurring, they will be able to raise their concerns with local neighbourhood officers who can start to resolve some of the underlying issues on why such things keep happening.

We want to deliver services at a local level and work much more closely with residents and partners and enable communities to influence services they receive so they are responsive to local needs. The teams are about joining up services and working with communities and service providers at a neighbourhood level to improve the quality of life for our residents."

Question 8

Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

"It is very good news indeed that consultation has started on a new zebra crossing for Recreation Road School and a road safety scheme for Clover Hill Nursery & Infant School. Could the Executive Member please tell me how many schools and nurseries in Norwich do not have a road crossing scheme (zebra crossing, pelican crossing, lines/dropped kerbs etc) outside of their gates and of any plans to rectify this to ensure that we really do provide "safe routes to school?"

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

"In the last ten years, the City and County Councils have worked closely with the schools developing School Travel Plans and whenever schools have requested measures in the school's immediate vicinity these have been provided. The scope of measures implemented include those mentioned by Councillor Little, together with signage, waiting restrictions and traffic calming. At the three schools where nothing has been done (Eaton Hall, Harford Manor and Magdalen Gates Schools), it is because nothing was requested or needed.

We have also widened the scope of the Safer and Healthier Journeys project to look at routes to the school – and what can be done to make these routes safer for pedestrians and cyclists. For example, this summer we will be providing a pedestrian phase at the Aylsham Road / Woodcock Road junction, which will benefit both Mile Cross Primary and Catton Grove Primary, plus of course the wider community.

The scope of these improvements on the routes to schools varies enormously, it may be that it's just a short stretch of footpath that is required, or a new cycle lane, or a pedestrian refuge. These can be relatively easily funded by the Local Transport Plan, which for 2010/11 has set aside £275,000 for such improvements. However some of the more major projects are harder to deliver and one of the biggest obstacles to improving routes to schools is how to improve crossings at junctions on the key road network. The roundabouts on Heartsease Lane, Newmarket Road, Earlham Road and Hall Road have all been highlighted as particular problems, along with the signalled junction at Bracondale / King Street. To provide crossings at these locations, without detriment to capacity would require multi-million pound schemes, that there are simply not the resources available at present.

Members may be interested to know that as of yesterday, 29 March 2010; all school zigzag markings which restrict parking outside school entrances will be covered by a legal order that makes them enforceable by our Civil Enforcement Officers where previously only the police could enforce these. Removing dangerous parking from outside schools, should improve safety for children and their parents."

Question 9

Councillor Niki George to the Leader of the Council:-

"We are all very pleased that Norwich has been shortlisted as the UK's city of Culture. Would the Leader of the Council consider creating an Executive Member with specific responsibility for Culture at the next Council AGM, as has been the case prior to 2008, to give the bid and the cultural output of the city real leadership and drive from a single, focused, accountable and responsible member?"

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

"Councillor George will be surprised to know that we already have an Executive Member with specific responsibility for culture. In my role as Leader I have had culture as part of my portfolio since 2008.

As Councillor George rightly notes that during my time as portfolio holder Norwich has been shortlisted for the UK city of Culture and I believe the City has an excellent chance of securing this prestigious title and the estimated hundred's of millions of pound investment in the City that would result from this.

I would like to think that the City's Cultural offer has already benefitted from being part of the leader's portfolio as it is receiving the attention it deserves. It is fully my intention to keep culture as part of the leader's portfolio at the next Council AGM in order to ensure culture and our bid for city of culture will continue to have leadership and drive from a single, focused, accountable and responsible member."

Question 10

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

"Following a concerning discussion with residents of my ward, could the Executive Member please tell me what are the Council's current obligations towards maintenance of its community centres and upgrades of their individual systems, such as heating?"

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development's reply:-

"The Council owns and maintains 15 community centres across the City in addition to the Norman Centre. The 15 centres are managed on a day to day basis either by voluntary management committees or community associations under a license or lease agreement with the Council.

These agreements were reviewed in 2005 and clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of the Council as the asset owner and the community associations as the occupiers. The agreements can be made available to members should they wish.

In essence, the Council is responsible for the fabric of the building, external decoration, electric and heating. The community associations are responsible for internal decoration, fixtures and fittings and furniture.

Some centres have, with support from officers, successfully accessed external funding or in kind support to undertake their own improvements. For example, in the last year West Earlham and Belvedere Community Associations have refurbished their kitchens and Wensum Community Centre has replaced their heating boiler. Council officers can also advise community centres on issues such as energy efficiency and how to ensure that the centres are signed up to the most economical tariffs for their energy consumption.

As Councillor Wiltshire has not specified which Community Centre is causing concern to residents in his ward I am unable to offer a more detailed reply, however if he wishes to share these concerns with me I will endeavour to supply him with more comprehensive information at a later date."

Question 11

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

"Please could the Executive member for Finance explain the various options for Norwich businesses paying their business rates?"

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

"The following information is provided by the Council and can be found on the following webpage:-

http://www.norwich.gov.uk/webapps/atoz/service_page.asp?id=1142)

Where it says:-

'How to pay your business rates

Paying by direct debit

Direct debit is the easiest way to pay. Payments are automatically taken from a bank or building society account each month so no need to worry about remembering to pay the bill. The payment date can be chosen - either on the 1st, 8th, 15th or 28th of each month from April to January. To pay by direct debit you can complete the form below and send it back to us or contact our revenue services on 01603 212898.

[Direct debit form](#)

Telephone payments

To pay business rates by debit or credit card over the phone, please call our telephone payments hotline on 01603 212282.

Paying by cheque

Please send cheques to:

Revenue services
City Hall
Norwich
NR2 1NH.

All cheques should be made payable to **Norwich City Council** and the business rates account number should be written on the back of the cheque (this can be found on the bill).

Paying online

Payment of business rates and other services can be made online using a debit card or credit card.

Please note that if you are paying your business rates by credit card there will be a 1.95% surcharge.

[Click here to make online payments](#)

For more information please contact

Revenue Services
City Hall
Norwich, NR2 1NH

t: 01603 212898

f: 01603 212905

e: revenues@norwich.gov.uk

Minicom: 01603 212587

The following information is also relevant to Councillor Lubbock's question:-

The Council publicises hardship relief provisions in the Booklet that accompanies the annual rate bill. Ratepayers are also made aware of the provisions when an organisation is known to be in financial difficulties. The Council does not have a specific budget available for this purpose due to its own financial constraints. However, we would normally encourage payment by making arrangement to settle over an extended period to help firms in this situation.

When considering the provision for hardship relief the Council is required by law to consider the impact granting the relief would have on the local council tax payers as well as the benefit to the business. Each request is considered on an individual basis.

25% of cost of the relief is met by the council tax payers of Norwich. The remaining 75% is met by the National Pool. The receipts from non domestic rates collected by the Council is paid into the national pool each year and redistributed as a grant to each authority in accordance with the formula set by the government.

Another form of relief is the small business rate relief that applies to property with a rateable value of less than £15,000. Where the rateable value is below £10,000 additional relief will be granted. However, there are a number of qualifying conditions where the ratepayer has more than one property. The scheme is advertised in the booklet that accompanies the annual bill and is advertised on our website. An application form must be completed before relief can be granted.'

There are currently around 1200 businesses who receive small business rate relief (SBRR) (value £1,046,249). The Business Rates team proactively discuss SBRR with any business that contacts us and there is information about SBRR with each bill that is sent."

Question 12

Councillor Jeremy Hooke to the Leader of the Council:-

"It is believed the role of the Lord Mayor will change considerably within this next Civic year. It is understood that there will be a reduction in the amount of functions attended by the Lord Mayor from the traditional 500-750 down to around 200 per

Civic Year. This is an approx reduction of two thirds and many Civic Events, Military Events, Charities and City Organisations will suffer.

With this in mind:

Will the staff at the Civic Office, the Lord Mayor's budget and Lord Mayor's monthly expenses all be reduced by two thirds accordingly?"

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

"Councillor Hooke prefers it when I don't get cross at the questions he asks in council, but he really should help me. He knows my phone number it would have taken little effort to ring me to check his facts. He knows the lengths we go to in order to make sure the civic offices are treated with respect and it is really disappointing to read a question like this.

As a consequence, even to begin to try to answer his question is pointless. If he wants to discuss it properly then he knows how to contact me."

Question 13

Councillor Mary Cannell to the Leader of the Council:-

"Could the Leader outline the achievements of the Labour administration during this civic year?"

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

"The Labour administration has had a number of notable achievements over the last civic year. This list is in no particular order

1. Achieved unitary status orders through parliament;
2. Achieved clean accounts;
3. Achieved a 2 in Use of resources against the harder test;
4. Started work on the war memorial;
5. Set up the Norwich war Memorials trust;
6. Started work on the skate park;
7. Agreed an historic deal with the HCA to develop 1100 new homes;
8. Won agreement and funding towards building the first new council houses in Norwich for decades;
9. Set a council tax level well within our promises to the city – about 1p per day for 89% of households;
10. Restored from 1 April the extra hour for concessionary bus pass holders;
11. Introduced and maintained free swimming for Go4Less card holders;
12. Exceeded 35% recycling – way ahead of our targets;
13. Announced the start of food waste collection from autumn;
14. Relet the contracts previous carried out by CityCare at lower cost and higher performance overall;
15. Reduced the budget by 16% without unpopular service cuts, further privatisation of services and few redundancies;
16. Introduced Neighbourhood working from 1 April;

17. Returned wardens to local areas and extended the area they cover;
18. Made 'phenomenal' improvements in our housing service on target to reach 2 stars in 2 years;
19. Led the campaign through Regional Cities East for improvements and influence in future rail services;
20. Reached agreement with partner GNDP councils on the Joint Core Strategy;
21. Been shortlisted for the UK Capital of Culture;
22. Exceeded 350 new business created under LEGI funding;
23. Opened the Lady Julian Bridge;
24. Started work as part of GNDP on St Augustine's gyratory system;
25. Introduced new 0344 phone number;
26. Introduced advice and support for people worst hit by the recession;
27. Helped bring the Genome Analysis Centre to Norwich;
28. Brought the Sport Relief Mile event to Norwich;
29. Taken the Planning service into the top quartile of performers."