

**ADDENDUM TO MINUTES****COUNCIL****27 January 2015****Question 8****Councillor Chris Herries to ask the cabinet member for housing:**

“Earlier in December the city council backed Learning, Employment and Accommodation Project (LEAP) received national recognition in the form of a major funding boost. Since this announcement can the cabinet member update council on his view of the success of the scheme and the difference this funding will make to tackling homelessness in Norwich?”

**Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for housing’s response:**

“I’m very pleased to confirm that LEAP has been awarded £387,710 from the Big Lottery Fund which will enable the continued support of those most at risk of homelessness in Norwich.

LEAP will continue to be a key component in the city council’s homelessness prevention strategy and the grant award provides a further three years funding for the project, which was set up in 2009 in partnership with St Martins Housing Trust to help homeless people in Norwich by providing them with employment, education and training opportunities in conjunction with secure housing. It is an innovative approach to addressing some of the issues of homelessness particularly in respect of housing and employment.

LEAP takes a holistic approach to addressing the needs of homeless and hostel-dwelling clients by providing accessible, individually tailored support to individuals in housing crisis by building their skills through coaching, training and mentoring. In this manner the scheme addresses single homelessness, offending and re-offending, substance misuse and mental ill health, developing a legacy of skills and stability within the community.

In awarding the grant the Big Lottery Fund has recognised the fantastic outcomes that have been achieved since the project’s inception. Over the last three years 75 LEAP clients have moved into their own independent accommodation. 81 people have found employment and a further 242 clients have gained access to work-focused opportunities and placements.

These results, working with a marginalised, vulnerable and often challenging client group, in tough economic times, are not to be underestimated. In addition to freeing up bed spaces in hostels, the demonstrable reductions in substance misuse and re-offending, give further evidence that LEAP really is transforming lives.

The new grant will facilitate the recruitment of an employment and enterprise co-ordinator, tasked with building links with employers, generating more work experience opportunities for LEAP clients and expanding 'The Feed' catering project. In addition, the award will guarantee the project's ability to run weekly drop-in and interview sessions for clients and run regular 'GOALS' training programmes, focused on improving clients' self-esteem and helping them set clear steps towards the life they really want. Of these clients, at least 25 per annum will be assisted into their own independent accommodation.

The project is open to every individual over the age of 16 who is facing homelessness or in supported accommodation in Norwich and the ongoing success of LEAP ensures that the disadvantaged people of Norwich have an opportunity to live a fulfilling life of their choice.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the work of the LEAP team and our partners St Martins whose vision and positive approach has produced remarkable successes."

## **Question 11**

### **Councillor Marion Maxwell to ask the cabinet member for customer services:**

"In late November the city council received news that our 'Transformation Challenge Award' bid had been successful. Will the cabinet member for customer services give council her opinion on the opportunities to promote digital inclusion in the city with this funding?"

### **Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for customer services' response:**

"We are delighted to have been successful with our bid to the transformation challenge fund and have received £446k over a three year period. This gives us a great opportunity to escalate our digital inclusion action plan over this period.

Working with a range of partners including the third sector, county, CCG, Social landlords and Barclays we will be able to ensure that citizens do not lose out on opportunities to learn, save money and keep in touch with friends and relatives.

When individuals are digitally active it can improve the accessibility of services and provide support to people who find themselves physically and emotionally isolated.

By making sure that opportunities exist to enhance peoples skills and confidence in the use of technology we will be making great strides in keeping people in touch with their community and society in general.

Digital exclusion impacts the city council both as a service provider and community leader and its partner organisations. The scale of change required is beyond the scope of one organisation and needs to be tackled from a partnership approach. Working together we can ensure that trained volunteers within partner organisations, who come into contact with a member of our communities, can provide support and real help to enable them to become digitally confident

Increased employability, increased confidence, reduced isolation and independence are some of the benefits from this project but also the wider socio-economic benefits particularly within the health sector, with fewer visits to doctors or use of NHS services, or reducing the need of older people to go into care at an early stage, therefore enabling them to live longer independent lives.”

### **Question 13**

#### **Councillor Caroline Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for housing:**

“In a recent court decision reported in the press, it was state that the council had overcharged leaseholders for caretaking and lighting. Is the cabinet member concerned about the impact this will have on council budgets?”

#### **Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for housing’s response:**

“Norwich City Council provides a mobile caretaking service to 32 sites, 925 tenants and 215 leaseholders across the city.

The service ensures that communal areas are kept clean and safe and all necessary repairs are identified and carried out.

The service was introduced in the late 1990s and was subject to a separate charge for service recipients from 2002 as part of the government’s rent restructure regime.

The service costs £150K per year to provide. Tenants pay £2.50 per week and leaseholders £130 per year.

When a council property is sold under the right to buy it is done so under a lease and includes a list of the services the council will provide and the leaseholder will pay for.

Leases on property sold before the service and charge were introduced, between early 1980s and 2002, do not have a specific clause referring to mobile caretaking, because the service was not being provided at that time. The Council has relied upon a clause in the lease regarding maintenance of the common areas to provide and charge for the service.

This has been challenged at FFT (First-tier tribunal – Property Chamber (Residential Property)) in relation to one property and the tribunal has found that the full cost of the service, “which may be desirable” is not recoverable unless a lease has a specific clause to that effect. The challenge was supported by the Norwich Leaseholders Association (NLA). The application to the FFT was for a period of eight years.

This decision does not set a legal precedent and the council has made an appropriate refund in respect of this determination. To be clear, the service has been provided and the costs incurred in doing so. These have been recharged to tenants and leaseholders. The council is obviously concerned any retrospective refunds will be borne by the housing revenue account and will mean less money to spend on activities such as maintaining and improving tenant's homes.

Out of the 215 leaseholders receiving this service approximately 130 leases do not have the relevant clause and these leaseholders may have call for a return of monies paid, if they so wish. Until this is known, and relevant calculations carried out involving the current let time, the final cost to the housing revenue account (HRA) cannot be calculated. However, we have HRA reserves to cover unforeseen expenditure as necessary.

The FFT also suggested that the council and leaseholders should work together to 'vary' leases to enable such a charge to be made and recovered. Unfortunately, it is not easy to vary leases before their extension or expiry and the process to vary will need individual leaseholder agreement and may incur significant legal costs

As a result of this determination the council will work with tenants and leaseholders to review the mobile caretaking service. The Norwich Leaseholders Association has been kept informed of the options being explored by the council and this work will be completed as soon as possible. An initial letter will be sent to affected leaseholders in the next couple of weeks.

A second case regarding how the costs of landlords lighting maintenance are apportioned, has also been considered by FFT following a further application backed by the NLA and this is currently subject to the appeal process. This is again in respect of work that has been carried out and paid for. The council is awaiting the outcome of the appeal before undertaking any further work on this issue."