



Council

20 June 2023

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Maguire to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Last month the previous portfolio holder for sustainable growth, now the new Leader, commented on the resilience of the Norwich high street and the resilience of the retail offer this city can still offer. Given the critical importance of small and medium enterprises to the local economy and retail in general, will he share my concerns that the Non-Domestic Rating Bill will do little, and indeed possibly hinder, protecting our city shops from increasing business rates at a time when the economy is still particularly vulnerable?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Currently businesses can have a number of reductions in their Business Rates, notably:

- Retail, Hospitality and Leisure premises have been awarded a 75% reduction in their Business Rates for the 23/24 financial year, capped at Rateable Values up to £110,000.
- Small Business Rate Relief if a property’s rateable value is less than £15,000 and the business only uses one property. A business will not pay rates on a property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, if that’s the only property the business uses. For properties with a rateable value of £12,001 to £15,000, the rate of relief will go down gradually from 100% to 0%.
- In April 2023 rateable hereditaments were subject to a revaluation. Where there is a large increase in the rateable value the rates payable are subject to Transitional Relief.
- Some properties may be eligible for Supporting Small Business Relief which restricts their increase to £600 this financial year.
- Properties with a Rateable Value of less than £51,000 pay the small business multiplier.
- Some businesses are exempt from rates completely. Others may be eligible for charitable or discretionary rate relief and more details of reliefs available can be found on our website.

The Non-Domestic Rating Bill is currently at its second reading in the House of Lords and is a government bill that would make changes to business rates.

The Bill will support businesses by modernising the business rates system to incentivise property improvements and support more frequent revaluations.

It would reduce the time between property revaluations (proposed from 5 years to 3 years, meaning those with falling values will see their bills drop sooner).

The Bill will impose a duty on businesses to notify the Valuation Office Agency of changes that could affect a property's rateable value.

It will also provide new business rates improvement relief, so businesses making qualifying building improvements will not face higher business rates bills for 12 months. This will make it easier for businesses to invest with new reliefs for property improvements, providing tax breaks for businesses who are extending or upgrading their property.

The aim of the measures being put forward is to review and reform business rates in England, making them fairer and more responsive to changes in the market."

Question 2

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet for resources the following question:

“Last month the introduction of Voter ID in Norwich, a measure which Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, who was in government when the measure was introduced, recently admitted as being an attempt at gerrymander the rules to gain electoral advantage, saw 68 Norwich citizens refused their right to vote.

Voters without an accepted form of ID - estimated at around 2 million - were able to apply for a free certificate allowing them to vote but only 85,000 people - around 4% of the estimate - applied for one online ahead of May's polls. The Electoral Commission studies into the impact of Voter ID confirmed that unemployed people, council housing tenants, and those with lower educational qualifications were more severely affected by the changes. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on this and advise council on what steps this council will take to make voting easier for those without ID?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“We are of course aware that Voter ID was brought in by the government alongside a highly publicised campaign by the Electoral Commission.

Despite their campaign and the additional extensive communication plan put in place by the council, it was disappointing to see that some residents were not able to vote because they did not have an acceptable form of photo ID. The autumn canvass is coming up and I know that we will be communicating the need for photo ID at a polling station with every property in Norwich. This will include information about the free Voter Authority Certificate. The communication and outreach work which started before the elections last May is still ongoing, so we will continue to ensure that we are reaching as many residents as possible. I am pleased to see that the scrutiny committee intends to look at the impact of voter ID at their meeting in July and I will very much look forward to attending to understand their thoughts on what can be done to ensure no-one in Norwich is disenfranchised.”

Question 3

Councillor Packer to ask deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Representing a ward with many leaseholders, I was concerned that plans to abolish the ‘feudal’ leasehold system in England and Wales were dropped last month by this Tory government. After announcing that leasehold would be previously abolished, many leaseholders cancelled their plans to undertake statutory lease extension and the U-turn has placed many now in limbo. As a Labour and Co-operative councillor, I have long supported and campaigned for leasehold reform and believe we need to strengthen and promote ‘commonhold’ alongside co-operative housing tenure, to protect homeowners and renters from unreasonable costs. Commonhold, widely used internationally and which has been available in the UK for nearly two decades, would be a better system to give people a say over their homes. Can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she would support this?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Until detailed legislation comes forward setting out the nature of a “commonhold lease” and a plan to move from existing tenures to the new tenure type it would not be appropriate to commit the council. That being said there is a clear need to simplify and standardise all tenure types and we would engage and support that process.”

Question 4

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Representing a ward which contains some of the highest level of poverty in the city and the greatest need for strong public services to respond to it, I was concerned by research from the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA) that revealed between 2010/11 and 2023/24, the 10% of local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 28.3% - while the 10% of councils with the lowest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 10.1%. Councillor Sir Steve Houghton, leader of Barnsley Council and chair of SIGOMA, warns that the "gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider", while the Government has reneged on a promise to reallocate business rates. Would the Leader agree with Councillor Houghton and commit to making the case, at every opportunity, for this council to receive the funding needed to meet the challenges this city faces?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:

“It is quite clear that the Tories have manipulated the local government funding formulae and processes to benefit more affluent areas at the expense of the poorest areas as the statistics you have quoted demonstrate. This has meant that the authorities facing the greatest economic and social needs have faced the biggest cuts and are struggling the most to meet those needs.

In Norwich, we have faced particular challenges. The Tories have delivered a real term reduction in funding to this council of over 21% since 2015 alone, and before that year-on-year cuts of more than 8% were seen from the start of the Tory led coalition in 2010. While we have managed this relatively well, have made savings and have protected front line services, but there are more cuts to follow over the next few years which will be incredibly challenging for us. This comes on top of the cost of living crisis, which was of course exacerbated by the disastrous Truss budget last Autumn which crashed the economy. Some of our wards in Norwich are very deprived. We know that poverty, low pay and deprivation in general results in a much greater need for economic and social support, but the Tories are more interested in passing money to areas populated by their affluent supporters than in supporting those who are suffering hardship and most in need. Therefore, I do agree with Councillor Sir Steve Houghton and will indeed make the case at every opportunity for this council to receive the funding to meet the challenges this city faces.”

Question 5

Councillor Fulton-McAlister to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Representing University Ward which contains a significant, and growing, number of private renters, the issue of poor-quality housing, exorbitant rents and lack of security of tenure are repeatedly raised by my constituents and remain a very real problem. We, as councillors, have debated and discussed this issue many times before. Now that the Renters Reform Bill has finally been published and will proceed through the House of Commons, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she feels this will solve the problems of the private rented sector in this city?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“After more than four years of delays and broken promises the Renter Reform Bill has begun its journey through parliament, although it is important to note that it is still a long way from Royal assent and entering law. In this time nearly 65 000 households in the country have been made homeless because of section 21 of the 1998 Housing Act which the government promised this Bill will abolish, but for those households this is too late.

Whilst I welcome any legislation that increases protections for private renters, this bill should be viewed cautiously and as only the beginning of introducing a fairer system for private renters rather than the end point as there are areas where it presently does not go far enough.

It is important to acknowledge some of the protections it will potentially offer:

- A new landlord registry will support tenants being better informed prior to entering a tenancy
- Abolition of section 21, so called “no fault evictions”
- Increased powers for tenants to challenge rent increases

But there are clear loopholes which are very worrying.

- If a landlord evicts with the intent to sell, a ban on reletting for only three months is unlikely to be much of a disincentive to a landlord who evicts for the purposes of increasing rents.
- Lack of adequate safeguards to prevent retaliatory evictions when tenants challenge unsafe conditions.

There is much more to be added to this legislation to ensure that it provides real protections to those living in the private rented sector. I fully support the campaigns by Generation Rent and the Renters Reform Coalition to strengthen this legislation as it passes through parliament, so it provides robust protections in the future.”

Question 6

Councillor Kidman to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Community safety remains a top concern for my constituents and despite the cuts to this council I was pleased that our budget in February protected services such as the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative and expanded CCTV. Given a recent rise in burglary in the city can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on the latest batch of alley-gates installed and the locations across the city?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Since January 2023 Norwich City Council’s Safer Neighbourhood Initiative – Community Fund has funded and installed new alley gates at 7 locations across the city in the following wards – Lakenham, Crome, Thorpe Hamlet, Town Close, University and Nelson. These gates are providing additional security and peace of mind for 36 homes. To date the scheme has benefitted a total of 162 homes.”

Question 7

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“I am proud to represent Mile Cross which has benefitted substantially from the city council’s political agenda of building council homes. Pointer’s Field, Hansard Close, the Kings Arms site, and now the former Mile Cross depot are just a few to mention. Now that work to build on the Mile Cross depot site is well underway, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on progress towards when this important project should be completed and the significant benefits it will bring our community?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Colleagues across the council are working hard to bring forward housing development on the Mile Cross Former Depot Site. Indeed it is pleasing to see that work is proceeding well to deliver the land remediation contract that was approved by cabinet in December 2022.

The land remediation contract is ensuring the site is prepared to allow development to begin. This contract in itself is bringing forward innovation and ensuring much of the material on site is being reused. Through providing certainty of land conditions, it will considerably de risk the build of the final development so should save the council money. The remediation is expected to be completed by October this year and is on track to be delivered with budget.

Whilst the groundworks are underway, work is continuing to design the first phase of designing the housing development. The emerging design proposes 67 new council homes, and it is expected that the planning application will be submitted in July.

The new homes are being designed again to ensure the council leads the way in developing a sense of place, providing residents with a great living environment and cost effective homes to run. Although design details have yet to be confirmed, there is an expectation that there will be a continued commitment to a fabric first efficient approach to build with the introduction of renewable energy generation incorporated within the scheme.

It is planned that the start of the construction contract should be mobilised by the early summer in 2024 with new homes being delivered in late 2025. I look forward to handing the keys over to new residents in due course.”

Question 8

Councillor Prinsley to ask the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:

“Supporting constituents with disabilities in my ward is always a priority, particularly given the impact of the oppressive and increasingly severe sanctions regime this current government has instigated. I know that access to public facilities, including the Forum and all it has to offer, is particularly important to my residents and I was therefore particularly pleased that efforts by this Labour led city council to attain new funding for modern, accessible toilet facilities were successful. Can the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture comment on progress to install these new facilities and promote the benefits of them?”

Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture’s response:

“I am delighted to say that the new Changing Places toilet at The Forum opened a couple of weeks ago following the city council securing £65,000 from the government’s Changing Places toilets fund. This facility will help remove the stress, discomfort and indignity that many people with multiple and complex disabilities and their carers experience when trying to use conventional accessible toilets. The Forum is a brilliant place to have one, being so central and containing the Millennium Library. Our communications team has produced a video with The Forum that is being promoted across our four social media channels to maximise awareness of the facility.”

Question 9

Councillor Padda to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“I was pleased to see that the new contract to assist tenants to decorate their homes was approved by cabinet in March. This will increase the amount payable to each tenant, reflecting the escalating costs due to the cost-of-living crisis. Will the cabinet member comment on this initiative and whether it might be adapted further to meet the needs of residents who begin their tenancy with the city council?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“This was agreed as part of the cabinet paper in March for new tenants in mind and had been in place for some time. There was an uplift to account for the increase in the costs of materials and this was factored into the renewal of the contract. We know from the latest May update of new tenant’s satisfaction survey – when asked the following question from those who received a decoration allowance –

“Did you find the system easy to choose and select materials?” – 77% responded yes, 12% had not used it yet, 8% did not use, and only 3% responded no.”

Question 10

Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Representing a ward which has benefitted from the investment in our parks and particularly tennis court facilities I was pleased to learn that a new partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the city council will see £222,447 from the government and the LTA Tennis Foundation invested in courts in Harford Park, Alderman Walker Park and Bowthorpe Park. This will substantially improve these areas and make them more accessible for the sport to be played. Can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on the success of the partnership created with the LTA and the improvements delivered so far to enhancing our tennis facilities across the city?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“The council has been working with the LTA since 2011 to provide accessible, sustainable and high quality tennis facilities at the heart of the community.

The first project delivered four hard court tennis courts complete with floodlighting in Eaton Park. The LTA funded 50% of the project costs and in 2012 the service contract was awarded to the National Tennis Association (formerly known as EA Tennis). Comparison with similar facilities throughout the UK has demonstrated use at Eaton Park is two-and-a-half times greater than LTA expectations

In order to meet this level of demand, in 2016 a further three courts were created at Eaton Park, three at Waterloo Park and two at Harford Park.

In 2017, the council identified further expansion opportunities at Lakenham and Heigham Park as the next phase of the Norwich Tennis Expansion programme, and the new courts were opened to the public last year.

The current project to redevelop the courts at Harford, Alderman Walker and Bowthorpe is a further example of the excellent partnership working between the LTA, Norwich Parks Tennis and the council.

Working in partnership with the LTA and the Greater Norwich Growth Board the Council has delivered almost £1m of investment in Norwich Parks Tennis in the past 12 years.”

Question 11

Councillor Peek to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“I note with interest that a new planning application has been submitted for the former Earl of Leicester site on Dereham Road, following the work this council took to pursue the opportunity of a compulsory purchase order. Despite this progress on the development would the Leader agree that it would be much easier if government would enable councils like Norwich to buy up land at a fraction of its potential cost if they plan to build on it and do this through compulsory purchase orders at a price that does not reflect the value of potential planning permissions – the so-called “hope value”? Given that land worth £22,520 per hectare as agricultural land can on average be worth £6.2m per hectare with permission –such a proposal would represent a bold shake-up of the planning system and enable us to build the thousands of new council homes this city needs.”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Following cabinet’s approval to seek a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the site of the former Earl of Leicester site there has been some planning progress. This has proven to be common and welcome side effect of the council considering this action. Officers are continuing to monitor this progress of the site and a decision should be made shortly. Should planning be secured, we will seek to ensure that delivery follows shortly after or will continue towards CPO.

As members are aware we were successful in securing £5.5m in our Towns Deal revolving fund to support such schemes. So, we are resourced to purchase the site should it stall.

I’m pleased to say we have recently successfully completed the acquisition of our first site through the fund on Windmill Road. We will now proceed with seeking a developer for the site and ensuring we enter into an agreement for a quick timetable for delivery.

Under the current legislation there is a fundamental principle, within the compulsory purchase compensation guidance, that land is valued at its current market value, based upon its existing use or planning approval, and not at ‘hope value’ on a theoretical development scheme. However, current legislation is time consuming and expensive for local authorities to use, even in cases where sites have lain idle for some time.

I certainly do agree that revisions to the CPO process to simplify it, speed it up and allow authorities to purchase derelict or other problems sites at a lower cost would be most welcome.”

Question 12

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Since the introduction of parking charges into the Eaton Park there has been displaced parking causing various problems in the area around the park.

The council did promise a review to look into the consequences of imposing the charges. Please will the Portfolio Holder give details of the review?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“The review is ongoing and will be completed shortly.

The project is on target to meet the objectives that were set. Illegal parking within the park was a significant issue prior to introduction of the new charges. This meant that spaces were unavailable to park users during particularly busy times. There is now little illegal parking in the park, which has increased the number of available of spaces to park users. The take of up of season tickets from regular park users has been good.

The project is on target to exceed the financial target set in the budget for 2023/24. This will increase our ability to maintain the park to a high standard and invest in improved facilities.

With regards to displaced parking on surrounding streets, there have been very few complaints received by the council about this. Any complaints received have been investigated and appropriate action taken.

Finally, we continue to liaise with the county council about whether any further action may be required in the streets surrounding the park.”

Question 13

Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“One of the achievements of the city council has been to work to make Norwich a Living Wage City, including through the Living Wage City Action Group of major employers. City College was one of the key institutions in that Action Group.

So it has been very disappointing and shocking that City College is imposing real terms pay cuts on staff that mean that the college is no longer a living wage employer, and this particularly affects Learning Support Assistants who work with disabled students.

As a result, UCU members at City College have been taking strike action as the pay cuts are unsustainable. Does the cabinet member agree that the proposals for below-inflation pay that City College managers have made are unacceptable, and will he join me in publicly supporting the strikers?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“The Labour Group supports the UCU’s work to get the Living Wage reinstalled at City College. The Labour Party support the right of all workers to strike. However industrial action is always a last resort, and we hope that for staff and students alike, negotiations can avoid further disruption.

We have been meeting with both City College and the UCU. Through the Norwich Real Living Wage Action Group, we will work to facilitate further negotiations, and explore what support City College needs to get them re-accredited.

As is often the case with the Green Party, there is a reluctance to upset their local Green, national Tory voter base by highlighting the role 13 years of Tory Government real-term cuts have played in this. Further education institutions have seen the largest fall in per-pupil funding in any part of the education system. IFS forecasts suggest per-pupil funding in 2024-25 will be 10% down on 13 years ago.

Thus, following further discussions, I propose to write to both Chloe Smith and the relevant minister to call for an improved funding settlement to City College to reflect the vital role it plays in educating and training local residents, and driving sustainable and inclusive economic growth”

Question 14

Councillor Price to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“On busy days, people who phone the council can wait over an hour on the line, or up to ten minutes before being offered a call back. Does the cabinet member find this acceptable?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“To support customer contact, we have implemented a number of positive changes, an example of this is the call back scheme which enables customers to request a call back from our staff without having to wait in a queue. The phone service wait times however can vary according to demand at a particular given time and the phone system is set to offer a call back after intervals from one minute and occasionally up to ten, when demand has been unpredictable and is exceptionally high.

To support this, we are also piloting a new and additional service which provides automation of some of our more straightforward and frequent service requests which allow our advisers to focus on calls that require our support and assistance for example those who don’t have access to online or need specialist support. In addition to this, we are also in the process of recruiting additional staff to support the peak periods where we have become aware that demand has recently increased.

Also, in line with our digital strategy, we are working on a number of new initiatives to meet the needs of a large proportion of our customers whose preference is to access services online and this will also reduce the demand on the phone service. For example, we have recently added an online service that enables customers to arrange for the payment of council tax without the need to call us. With many customers opting to access services online, we are continually improving, reviewing, and developing additional online services to meet our customer’s needs.”

Question 15

Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“When the Easter Fair came to Chapelfield Gardens in April, many of the heavy fairground rides were parked on the grass under mature trees. I was particularly concerned about a veteran London Plane where a heavy fairground ride was parked on the grass and the tree roots, and a corner of the ride extended into the lower branches. This is no way for the City Council to treat its trees, let alone a veteran tree. The problem has been reported to the council. While it would be preferable for heavy machinery and vehicles to be banned from the park, will the cabinet member agree to at least create exclusion areas around the veteran trees in particular?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“Thank you for raising the issue of the damage that is being caused to trees in the council’s parks by poorly parked vehicles during events.

Events in our parks make a significant contribution to the city and its cultural offering and these do require large vehicles to enter our parks. This needs to be balanced with protecting the built and natural environment in our parks, and ensuring that the events are managed sustainably.

An issue has been identified with how certain events have been handled and staff are liaising to ensure that the risk of any long-term damage to our tree stock is minimised. Staff will be working closely with event promoters to ensure that measures are taken to protect the trees in all of our parks during events.”

Question 16

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“The council has at least 10 interim personnel delivering various important roles. Having interim managers is hugely costly. Senior interim positions currently include: head of building safety and compliance; executive director housing and community; head of asset management; chief finance officer; asbestos compliance manager; fire safety manager. This is not about questioning the effectiveness of these roles and the individuals, but the costs go out of the council's revenue budget and as we know there is not enough of this to begin with. Can the cabinet member for resources tell me how we measure that these contracts provide best value to the council?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“Thank you, Councillor Galvin, for giving me the opportunity to talk about the excellent work being undertaken by the interim staff we have in place as a council.

All interim and consultant contracts are subject to our procurement rules. Contracts are made through specialist agencies and assessed against the IR35 rules to make sure that all tax matters are appropriately treated. Each contractor is subject to line management in the same way that permanent members of staff are managed.

It is clear to me that all have made a significant difference to the way that the organisation operates. I want to particularly highlight the work of several of the staff you mention who have been instrumental in supporting our housing compliance work. A recent independent review of that work, the outcomes of which were reported to cabinet last week and the report specifically stated that “the pace and amount of progress against the action plan is impressive”. It went on to confirm that the interim staff that we have brought in have made a “fundamental contribution” to achieving this progress, as you acknowledged in cabinet last week.

The recent peer review also positively noted that there is a clear knowledge transfer from interim staff to our permanent staff, meaning that we are able to learn from the expertise we are commissioning which is an external view from the team of Peer Reviewers that attended Norwich only some months ago.

The peer review also recognised that fundamentally, recruitment has been challenging across local government. Rather than leave gaps in key roles, putting existing staff under pressure, we have brought in specialist expertise to help drive improvement in services. Workforces are changing, and the use of temporary and interim staff to give expertise and capacity to short term enable us to deliver is something we should embrace. Their value lies in the excellent contributions they have made to the running of this authority.”

Question 17

Councillor Hoechner to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“In June 2021, this council agreed to take several measures to address the potentially damaging impacts of advertising on people’s health and the environment. This included ‘develop[ing] and enhanc[ing] an advertising strategy for Norwich City Council which recognises the harmful effects that junk food, environmentally polluting products and activities, payday lenders, gambling and alcohol can have on local residents.’ The Council also agreed to ‘review and update’ its planning policy to regulate the installation of advertising hoardings near schools, and to ‘work with partners to phase out [potentially harmful] advertising’ as much as possible across the city. Can the Cabinet member please clarify what steps have been taken over the past two years to ensure the timely implementation of these measures?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“Following the motion to council, a review of how we take forward the proposed measures was carried out. The council currently has a single advertising contract relating to the provision of bus shelters which runs to 2026, and the supplier self regulates content in line with the Control of Advertisement Regulations. An advertising policy is being considered alongside looking at options around future advertising opportunities for the council, including advertising at bus shelters. This is currently progressing through the Future Shape Norwich Program.

The Council has the ability to control the content of advertisements on its own property and/or land in accordance with contracts; however as a local planning authority, we are not able to control the content of advertisements generally. As part of any future review of our Development Management Policies we may be able to introduce a policy which would manage the location of new hoardings i.e. prevent advertisement hoarding within a certain distance of schools or ensure that they do not impact upon heritage assets or highway safety but where new advertisement hoardings are permitted, the content of any advert could not be regulated.

In view of the current position with the emerging Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the forthcoming review of the National Planning Policy Framework there is insufficient clarity on what any review of development management policies will be able to address to commence this review.”

Question 18

Councillor Fox to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth the following question:

“Following the closure and relocation of the NHS vaccination centre, the council decided to maintain only the side entrance to City Hall, as this provides a ramped entrance and ensures access for anyone with mobility issues. However, this entrance is now shut at lunchtime, and I have met many people who are frustrated by that. And even worse, the front doors are of late permanently shut. For many years the front doors have stood open to this important civic building, yet now I often meet people standing perplexed outside, and have had to escort many in and out. The salary of a concierge seems like something worth spending money on when you compare it to the cost of having people feel welcome versus being excluded from democratic spaces. Will the leader commit to opening the front doors to City Hall and making the building accessible throughout the day?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:

“Following the vacation of the NHS vaccination centre we have reviewed the customer access of city hall and the front doors will be open from Monday 19 June 2023, 9am to 5pm. In the next couple of weeks, as soon as full arrangements are in place, City Hall will no longer be closed at lunch time. The Bethel Street entrance will continue to be open as well and this includes disabled access. Our focus has been to open City Hall up to provide support to our residents.”

Question 19

Councillor Haynes to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Flats in the St Leonards Road area have suffered from poor maintenance from the council for many years, a fact which the council themselves acknowledge in an email from May 2023 “exacerbated by the lack of maintenance, water ingress and general state of repair.” The same email also acknowledges that “repairs are long overdue.” Although some repairs have been carried out after significant pushing from myself and from residents, many remain outstanding, and the council haven’t answered my questions about when many other outstanding issues including holes in the fabric of the buildings will be fixed. Can the council commit to answering my multiple enquiries, including an explanation of why the situation was allowed to develop, as well as to making the repairs an urgent priority?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety’s response:

“Whilst we have carried out some initial repairs and will continue to undertake essential works, we are undertaking a full condition survey of the affected blocks and will be seeking to undertake an estate-based approach to block improvements including the works to the entrance porches, as the required repairs will be extensive and will require leaseholder consultation to be undertaken.

We are looking to avoid undertaking these works in isolation and take a “whole block approach” such as external decorations, high level flat roof repairs, communal decorations, lighting etc and will be looking to carry out resident engagement and leaseholder consultation. The buildings also have a local listing so we will be engaging with the conservation officers at Norwich City Council to discuss our proposals. We are planning to commence engagement by September 2023.

Outstanding enquiries from Councillor Haynes will receive a response.”

Question 20

Councillor Calvert to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“External wall insulation saves on bills, keeps homes cosy and cuts carbon, and the council has benefited from a government scheme to provide it to some homes in the city. However, some who wanted it missed out, including one pensioner who lives in a cold end of terrace home and has had to move bedrooms to stay warm at night.

They are left in the cold partly because there is not enough capacity within the relevant team to get sign ups from residents in need, in time for booking the work in with contractors. Will the cabinet member commit to urgently increasing capacity within the council so this kind of measure can be delivered to those who need it most?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change’s response:

“Thank you for this question about our Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project which is improving living conditions for our tenants who live in homes of a ‘Wimpey no-fines construction’ – a type of uninsulated concrete used in the years after the war.

I can assure Councillor Calvert that the case referred to has not been brought about by any lack of capacity within internal teams. The scheme funding was limited to 43 social housing properties and, having highlighted properties most at need from the perspective of their type of construction, the allocations were made on a first come, first served basis. GDPR rules prevented the identification of individuals tenants, and so letters were sent to addresses which met the criteria. Once our tenants had verified the authenticity of the scheme, sign up was rapid.

I would appreciate Councillor Calvert providing the detail of the case he refers to, to the Environmental Strategy Team as there may be other schemes and funding sources that can be applied in this particular case.”

Question 21

Councillor Francis to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

“Residents regularly report to me problems of bins being left on pavements after refuse collections. On the narrow pavements of my ward, this causes significant accessibility issues for people with disabilities and those with pushchairs. When residents report this, little action seems to be taken, and there seems to be low awareness amongst residents that bins need to be brought in. What action is the council taking to ensure residents bring their bins in off pavements and that the streets remain accessible to all?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development’s response:

“The issue of wheelie bins left out on streets by residents is a challenge in a city such as Norwich with its historic network of terraced houses. We recognise that the design of these streets and houses can make it difficult to store wheelie bins off-street between collection days, and the high turnover of residents in certain areas can make this worse.

The council provides clear guidance for residents in our waste and recycling communications about their responsibilities when presenting bins for collection. We ask residents to make sure that their bin is out by 6am on their collection day, but no earlier than 6pm the evening before. We also request that bins are taken back inside of a property boundary by 9am the next morning.

We investigate all reports of bins obstructing footways and engage with residents to ensure wherever that pavements are kept clear.”

Question 22

Councillor Schmierer to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Figures from Sports England show that over 1 in 4 Norfolk adults feel lonely always, often or some of the time. These are the highest figures for any county council area in the East of England. The negative impact of loneliness on lives has been gaining greater attention in recent years. Last month, in the United States, the Surgeon General labelled loneliness, isolation and the lack of connection between people a public health crisis in the country. Recent studies around the world have shown that loneliness is linked to premature mortality, dementia and even heart disease. I note that North Yorkshire is working to tackle loneliness given the impact it has on the livelihoods of its residents. Can the cabinet member ensure that tackling loneliness is added as one of the metrics by which the success of the council’s housing teams are assessed?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety response:

“North Yorkshire Council is a unitary authority responsible for adult and social care which provides them a wider remit with regard to addressing issues of isolation, in particular of vulnerable households.

That being said all Norwich’s housing staff support tenants to remain living independently as far as they are able. When we are aware that loneliness is impacting on the wellbeing of a council tenant, an officer will signpost and support them to access a range of community resources.

The Integrated Anticipatory Care Team (INTERACT) based at City Hall includes a care coordinator, Social Prescribers from Age UK, Norwich CAB, Voluntary Norfolk and One Norwich Practices and support from a clinical pharmacist. The team works in partnership with the Home Improvement Team and provides a range of measures to assist residents whose housing is having a negative impact on their health. In many cases this includes developing, expanding and maintaining social networks.

Referrals can be made via [Healthy homes referral form - Norwich City Council](#)”