



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **COUNCIL**

**30 September 2008**

### **Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs**

#### **Question 1**

##### **Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-**

"The residents of the Rosary Road area in Thorpe Hamlet Ward are raising concerns about the imminent closure of the Post Office there and the adverse affect upon their community, especially to the elderly and vulnerable. They see the service as a vital part of their community both as a Post Office and a local store. Post Office Ltd promised to improve the services at the Castle Mall post office in order to cope with the increase of customers. Is the Executive aware whether this has taken place?"

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

"Post Office Ltd reports that service improvements have been implemented at the Post Office in Castle Mall and Postwatch have commissioned mystery shoppers to assess the impact of these service improvements in relation to queuing times and the number of counters open at any one time. The initial feedback from Postwatch shows that the services have improved with more counters open and waiting times limited to less than 10 minutes.

A more detailed report on the findings is currently being produced and Postwatch will be meeting with Post Office Ltd to discuss the findings. The report will then be made available to interested parties including the City Council. The report will be placed on the Council's system and made available to all Members.

Earlier this year Scrutiny Committee undertook some very useful work on the potential effects of proposed post office closures and raised a number of questions about the efficiency of the Post Offices that would remain. Councillor Offord might like to ask the chair of Scrutiny whether they intend to follow up on their previous work by assessing the impact to the network provision as this would seem an entirely appropriate extension of the their work.

Members may also like to know that as from 1 October 2008, Postwatch will be merged with the National Consumer Council and Energywatch to create a new consumer champion called Consumer Focus which will continue the work of Postwatch. The Council will be seeking clarity and reassurance from Consumer Focus on how it will work to ensure that service improvements, such as those implemented at Castle Mall, are not short term but ongoing."

## Question 2

### **Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"On 11 September, the Evening News published an article highlighting that the City Council had £1,854,000 in uncollected council tax in 2007/08, a collection rate of 95.9%, compared to the previous year when £1.6m was not collected (a 96.2% collection rate). I appreciate that the decrease in the proportion of money collected compared to last year is very small, but the amount of money involved is substantial. What measures are officers and the Executive putting in place to increase collection rates in future years?"

### **Councillor Brian Watkins to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"A survey by the trade union GMB reveals that £1.8 million of council tax has gone uncollected by the Council in 2007/08 compared to £1.6 million the previous year. Could the Executive Member assure Council that this figure will improve in 2008/09?"

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

"Uncollected Council Tax is only uncollected in cash terms; in that the council has not received the cash income. The uncollected council tax remains as a debt outstanding until the debt is cleared by the council tax payer having been subject to effective recovery action by the council.

Up until the end of September 2007, the council had collected 55.67% of the Council Tax debit. From July 2008 the council has started to implement a Service Improvement Plan for Council Tax debt recovery. It is anticipated that by the end of September 2008, having implemented some new debt recovery measures, the council is expecting that the debt recovery rate will have marginally increased to 55.7%. However, as these improvements become more fully embedded in the debt recovery process, it is expected that there will be significant improvements in Council Tax debt recovery performance by the end of this financial year.

The programme of improvements that started in July 2008 includes:

1. Improving service efficiency by better utilising Information Technology e.g.:
  - automating the manual procedures within the refund process;
  - improving document indexing by implementing document bar coding;
  - reviewing the wording of all standard letters;
  - automating property processes and data exchange between departments
  - pre-printing messages on bills instead of hand-writing.
2. Changes in working practices to reduce outstanding correspondence; therefore once cleared, allowing more targeted recovery to take place on outstanding debt.

3. Recruitment of a Property Inspector who will inspect all non-occupied and new properties, and serve completion notices to allow an unoccupied rate to be charged.
4. Implement an ongoing legislative training programme for all staff.
5. Reinvigorate the committals, bankruptcy and liquidation procedures; including debtor follow-up procedures.
6. Resources within the customer contact team have been reviewed to allow increased concentration of Council Tax related work; resulting in an increase in the number of reminder notices being issued each month.

In addition to the above, with the start of the next financial year it is proposed to implement improvements to the Revenues system which will include:

1. A new process that will allow late payers two opportunities to pay late during any financial year before cancelling their right to pay by instalments. The effect of this action will be that internal recovery procedures will be streamlined to reduce the time between each recovery stage which will ensure that legal proceedings commence at the earliest opportunity to recover the balance of the annual charge much earlier in the year.
2. The timing between each stage of the recovery process will be reduced to maximise the collection rate.
3. For genuine cases where a person cannot pay immediately, we will make arrangements for settlement and encourage the take up of benefits and other allowances. In some circumstances, debt counselling may be more appropriate and therefore the payer will be advised to seek independent advice to help manage their finances.
4. The Direct Debit scheme, whereby payment is made automatically by the bank, is a more successful method of collection. Whenever a reminder is issued we will encourage the late payer to switch to payment by direct debit."

### **Question 3**

#### **Councillor Howard Jago to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"A number of residents on certain phone tariffs have complained to me that calls to the new Council phone number cost them more than calls to the previous number did. Were the Executive and relevant officers aware of this problem when the decision to introduce the new phone number was made?"

#### **Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"When the Council launched its new 0844 number in July publicity material stated that 'no one will pay more from a landline'. Since 1 July, Liberal Democrat Councillors have been contacted by residents who are paying more to call the new number from mobiles and landlines. Does the Executive Member accept that promises made to residents were inaccurate and misleading?"

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

"The new 0844 number does not cost any more for people to call from a BT landline. The charge for this is 3p a minute. The previous charge was 4p a minute. By using an 0844 number the Council does not profit from these calls, unlike the County Council's where an 0845 number is used which makes a profit of 2p per minute. Residents in Norwich are also able to use phones at council offices across the city free of charge to ring the council.

Charges from mobiles vary depending on the contract provider. What has become apparent is that some phone "packages" have free calls to local numbers, and people with these arrangements now have to pay a call *charge*. The Council is pressing the Ofcom regulator for some consistency on this issue.

The Council has only received 11 written complaints about the 0844 number. This compares to, July where the Council were handled 43,700 calls, and August 42,000 were handled calls.

Since 1 July when the new number went live the service delivered to callers has been significantly improved with average waiting times for July being 1 minute 33 seconds and August 1 minute 48 seconds and more people are able to get through to our Customer Service Advisers the first time they call. At peak times, which are 10 a.m. and 12 noon people may experience longer delays, this also means that there are times during the day that people do not wait at all. The new telephony functionality provided with the 0844 number means we can route calls to people who are trained in specific areas and this gives us the scope to make further improvements to the service.

These service improvements include the recruitment of 5 new team members, and the new telephony means that we are able to train these staff in specific areas, so they are able to deal with calls on the busiest lines, and they are operational much faster than in the past."

**Question 4**

**Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Chair of the Licensing Committee:-**

"I have received complaints about alcohol delivery services selling alcohol to inebriated persons. Given that the transaction takes place on the doorstep rather than at the licensed premises, could the Chair of Licensing review whether policy can be updated to address these problems, and to consider whether the current consultation method prior to granting of these licenses is appropriate?"

**Councillor Keith Driver, Chair of the Licensing Committee's reply:-**

"The retail sale of alcohol is controlled under the Licensing Act 2003 (the Act) and a premises licence is required before any sales can take place. When considering an application for a premises licence the council, as the licensing authority, must have regard to the statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media

and Sport under section 182 of the Act, the council's licensing policy approved in December 2007 and the four licensing objectives, which are:

- The prevention of crime and disorder
- Public safety
- The prevention of public nuisance
- The protection of children from harm

The council's policy addresses in detail the influencing factors on the achievement of the four objectives, a list of possible control measures and series of draft conditions that may be attached to premises licences when objections have been received.

The council has received applications from a handful of businesses operating as 'alcohol delivery services' and, has considered the proposals in accordance with the statutory guidance which states at paragraph 3.6:-

*"3.6 The place where the sale of alcohol takes place may be different to the place from which it is appropriated to the contract, i.e. specifically and physically selected for the particular purchaser. Section 190 provides that the sale of alcohol is to be treated as taking place where the alcohol is appropriated to the contract and this will be the premises that needs to be licensed. So, for example, a call centre receiving orders for alcohol would not need a licence, but the warehouse where the alcohol is stored and specifically selected for, and despatched to, the purchaser would need to be licensed".*

Examples of conditions that have been imposed on premises licences for this type of operation are:

- Alcohol will not be supplied to public places - an address must be provided.
- Names, addresses and contact numbers of customers will be taken before delivery.
- Alcohol sales will be refused to anyone who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Photographic ID will be required from anyone who appears to be under 21 years of age.

The controls that have been put in place are to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors and those who may already be intoxicated. The council carries out regular enforcement of premises licences and works closely with Norfolk Constabulary to target those licence holders who may be operating in breach of their conditions.

The Act itself sets out the consultation process in respect of premises licence applications and any amendment to this would require a change in primary legislation.

It is worth noting that an application has to be advertised in the local press and outside the application premises and, as a matter of policy, the council has enhanced the notification process by sending written details of the application to local residents and businesses in the vicinity."

## **Question 5**

### **Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

"Holls Lane, Regina Road and other similar properties across the city have been waiting for testing and remedial work to be carried out on structural concrete. As a result, unsightly and visually prominent supports have been in place for well over a year along frontages, in stairwells and in some cases in the properties themselves. Garages are also out of use as a result. Could the council provide a definite timetable for when the work will take place and assure residents that the matter will be treated with the high priority it deserves?"

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

"Surveys have now been completed and a summary report provided by the engineering consultant. The Council is expecting the full report within the next two weeks.

Time will then be taken to consider the findings and programme any necessary remedial work. Unfortunately at the moment it is not possible to give an exact timetable, however assurances can be given that the matter is being treated with the highest priority and we will brief ward members as soon as possible."

## **Question 6**

### **Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Service:-**

"Back in June 2006 my attention was drawn to the excessive height (50+ feet) of the leylandii hedge bordering part of the garden of the Eagle pub in Newmarket Road. It is casting considerable shade and annoyance on to the tenants of Hanover Road who back on to the pub garden and some tenants in Eagle Walk. I contacted the landlord who was unhelpful, and having struggled to get a response from a council officer eventually received a response from the Pollution Control Officer to the effect that the residents do have a case but would have to pay £200 for the council to take it up on their behalf. As many of the tenants are affected and many of these are pensioners, it would be extremely difficult to administer the £200 charge. I have contacted the Residents Service Team (RST) on the subject several times recently but have had no satisfactory response. So could the Executive member please arrange for the charge to be waived and for the case to be taken up by the council on the residents' behalf?"

### **Councillor Brian Morrey to reply in the absence of Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

"The high hedges legislation was introduced under the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, and is very prescriptive in how it is to be applied by the enforcing authority.

The applicant complaining about an alleged high hedge has to satisfy certain criteria and must pay a fee before the Council will even consider the case.

The fee set by Norwich is £200. This is partly to discourage frivolous complaints and also to cover the City Council's costs. It is in the power of the Director not the Executive member to waiver or reduce the fee of the Council. I suggest Councillor Bearman makes her case out directly to the Director of Corporate Resources who I am sure will use her discretion appropriately to get a balance between the costs to the Council and the realistic ability to pay by the residents.

However if the hedge affects more than one property, each person affected must make an application for their part of the hedge to be investigated and pay £200, so if the hedge in question is affecting more than one property any reduction or waiving of the fee may be considerably larger than £200.

If on the completion of the investigation, the hedge is considered to be too tall it will be reduced in accordance with the calculation made during the investigation. The hedge will not automatically be reduced to the minimum specified level of 2 metres.

The Council will serve a notice on the owner of the hedge specifying the height by which the hedge has to be reduced and the time period for the completion of the works."

#### **Question 7**

#### **Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-**

"Research by the Fawcett Society has shown that women, in particular young women, lone mothers, women who have gone through relationship breakdown and Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) women, are disproportionately affected by rent and council tax arrears and that this damages their financial independence. What data does the council currently hold to show whether this is true for Norwich?"

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

"Councillor Makoff will be aware that there are strict rules governing the holding of personal data. Personal information held against individual residents needs to be carefully collected and stored, and this is regularly monitored by the Audit Commission.

As part of a continuous review of data handling, in order to better understand how our services are delivered to a diverse range of Norwich citizens, we are about to start a process which more consistently asks for personal information. However, in the light of the constraints mentioned above, we will not be asking for full details of people's personal circumstances.

At present, therefore, we do not hold any information which can verify or otherwise this situation in Norwich. However, our housing information shows that single males are more than 3 times more likely to be evicted from council homes for non payment

of rent than single females. We cannot know how this plays out in the private rented sector or indeed for mortgage arrears.

Councillor Makoff will be aware that financial inclusion is one of the Executive's priorities set out in our Corporate Plan 2008-10. We are currently scoping out where we should put the emphasis of this work, but this project will enable us to better understand not only debt and arrears but also the root causes and possible solutions to those problems."

#### **Question 8**

##### **Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

"What proportion of the paper that Norwich is 'recycling' is actually making it through to the other end of the process and emerging as paper again, rather than being burnt or discarded?"

##### **Councillor Brian Morrey to reply in the absence of Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

"All of the paper collected from our households is sorted at Costessey by NEWS and sent to Shotton Paper Mill on Deeside where it is turned back into paper. There is some contamination which is removed before being sent. Overall approximately 6.5% of material passing through Costessey is deemed to be contaminated, however, very little of this is paper.

It is not possible to determine the fraction of contaminants that is paper as the information is not collected by NEWS. However NEWS tell us that the contaminants are normally made up of things like bricks, rubble, toys, plastic, that they can't send for recycling etc. Very little is actually paper.

It might be of interest to note that for every tonne of newsprint that is recycled, it is turned into 0.8 tonne of new paper. The difference is due to the ink being removed and the fibres making up the paper becoming too short and consequently not having enough strength to be made into paper again. This means that on average 5 old copies of the 'Evening News' are needed to make 4 new ones. The sludge that is made up of the ink residues and the fibres that cannot be used are burnt to heat the water used in cleansing process meaning that no waste paper from the process is discarded."

#### **Question 9**

##### **Councillor Rupert Read to the Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

"What proportion of the glass that Norwich is 'recycling' is being ground up for use in roads rather than recycled into new glass?"



**Councillor Brian Morrey to reply in the absence of Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

“At present our bottles and jars collected through bottle banks and separate kerbside collection schemes are turned into new glass. However, any glass collections that are heavily contaminated will be used as an aggregate for use in road construction and other building schemes.

The proportion of Norwich’s glass currently sent for road building is therefore difficult to quantify since it does depend on the contamination of the loads and the market place.

Both are legitimate uses for glass also the using of glass as an aggregate reduces the need to use virgin aggregate that is extracted either out of the ground or dredged from the sea.”

**Question 10**

**Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Resources and Governance:-**

“What is the Council doing to comply with the duty in the Public Involvement in Health Act (2006) to 'inform, consult and involve' when making major decisions?”

**Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Resources and Governance’s reply:-**

“The council carries out approximately 60 different consultations each year which feed into the annual Corporate Plan and the financial strategy of the City Council.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act was passed in November 2006, but formal implementation of its contents is still underway in a phased programme.

Section 7 of the Act states that local authorities will be required to involve representatives of local people in the exercise of their functions, where they consider it is appropriate to do so. Authorities will be able to determine if and how representatives should be involved, taking account of guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

The duty to involve goes further than consultation, setting out three ways of securing the involvement of representatives of local people, informing them, consulting them or involving them in other ways. Authorities will need to provide support for the process that is adopted.

Section 7 of the Act is not due for implementation until 1 April 2009. Guidance on the proposals was only published very recently, and is being actively considered by council officers.

In anticipation of the proposals Norwich City Council has already begun to review its consultation and engagement activity. Some new developments are already underway or planned, including:

- taking part in the national Place Survey which will run in October 2008
- re-joining the countywide Citizen's Panel which will run up to 3 consultation exercises per year
- implementing a new Community Engagement team, with officers deployed in each of the 7 Safer Neighbourhood Areas in the City Council area
- preparing a draft Community Engagement Strategy."

#### **Question 11**

##### **Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-**

"Is the Council doing as much as possible to promote the excellent advice offered by the Energy Saving Trust's Freephone helpline?"

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

"The Council is working very closely with the Energy Saving Trust (EST) to provide information to the public about saving energy in the home.

We will be putting the free phone number on a catalogue to be mailed out to 4,000 homes in the Norwich area as part of a joint promotion with Norwich City Football Club at the beginning of October. We are also currently designing new web pages which will have links to the EST web site and to their help line. We will also be referring our callers to the line where general home energy efficiency advice is being sought which will enable us to concentrate on organizing improvements to insulation and heating.

The EST will be providing details of the Norwich Warm Homes project to callers to their help line and will be referring Norwich residents to the Private Sector Housing Team to ensure that they are helped through the process of improving the energy rating of their homes. In addition they are also taking an active part in the Warm Home Team's promotional work. For example, they were involved in the recent staff energy clinic and have a key role in a one day home energy event that we are organising at the Forum on 24 October during which the Warm Homes Project will be officially launched.

In summary, we plan to work together closely to ensure that we maximize the benefits that we can jointly provide without duplicating effort.

The EST advice centre is currently going through a transition period as the contract has been won by a new provider. We have, however, met with the new managers to ensure continuity of service and approach and are confident that our working relationship will continue to develop.

To put it bluntly we are doing far more than the questioner asks as we are giving practical assistance as well as offering advice.”

## **Question 12**

### **Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-**

“In October 2005, this Council adopted a motion I proposed in support of the Sustainable Communities Act (which was at that time a Bill) and agreeing that the Council wished to make full use of the powers in the proposed legislation. Can we therefore assume that officers will automatically opt the Council into the Act when invited to do so next month?”

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

“As has been discussed on two occasions at Council, the Sustainable Communities Act aims to promote the sustainability of local communities.

It begins from the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area, but that sometimes they need central government to act to enable them to do so. It provides a channel for local people to ask central government to take such action. It is also a new way for local authorities to ask central government to take action, which they believe, would better enable them to improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area. This could include a proposal to transfer the functions of one public body to another.

The scope of the Act is very broad, covering economic, social and environmental issues. It does not limit the type of action that could be put forward, provided the action is within that broad scope. It is for local people to decide what they think needs to be done to promote the sustainability of their area.

The Act is thus designed to strengthen the role of communities. It provides a simple process by which the ideas generated by local communities are fed through their local authority and a body known as the “selector” (which it is envisaged will be the LGA) to central government. As it will not be possible for all suggestions to be put direct to central government, local authorities and the selector will have a “short-listing” role.

The government will consult the selector and try to reach agreement on which of the proposals on the short-list should be implemented. The government will respond to all of the suggestions that are short-listed by the selector and will publish an action plan setting out how it will take forward the suggestions that it adopts.

As well as enabling local communities and local authorities to make suggestions for government action, the Sustainable Communities Act also ensures that communities are better informed about the public funding that is spent in their area. New “Local Spending Reports” will provide quick and easy access to information about where public money is spent. This will enable local authorities, their partners and

communities to take better informed decisions about the priorities they choose to pursue to promote the sustainability of their local community.

Under the Act the Secretary of State must issue the first invitation to local authorities to make proposals on or before 22 October 2008 and it is assumed that that further invitations will be issued periodically.

At previous meetings Council has agreed to make full use of the powers contained within the Act; however it is important to establish long term ways of making the principles and provisions of the Act work for this Council and the communities that it serves. We all know that as well as the immediate matters in hand we are awaiting the results of the government decision on establishing new unitary local authority for the city. It is a clear and I assume a shared ambition that the design of the new council should enshrine community engagement at its core and perhaps in ways that exceed the requirements set out in the Sustainable Communities Act. Clearly there is little point and certainly not the resources to introduce too many new arrangements for this council when it will be short lived and resources would be better spent on preparing for new arrangements. The position will be clearer by the time we reach the time to decide the council's policy and financial framework and it is at that time we also determine the service plans. Those intervening few months will also give us a chance to make preparations, understand exactly how the government intends the new legal framework should be used and will also enable us to assess it against the proposals included in the recent White Paper - 'Communities in Control'."

### **Question 13**

#### **Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Cohesion:-**

"The Castle Gardens are one of few remaining green areas in the city centre. They house sculptures, memorial benches and flowerbeds. However over the last year this area has become a home for vandalism, intimidation and yob culture. It is recognised that young people need places to meet and socialise but the behaviour in the castle meadow area is beyond reason. Residents of Norwich feel intimidated and scared to pass through this area. Visitors to Norwich castle are harassed and the only accessible entrance to the museum is regularly obstructed by uncooperative groups. Vandalism of benches and the bridge leading to the castle is an upsetting site to witness, along with the rubbish left each day and the desecration of the Children in Need flowerbed. This is a site of recreation, but it is a place where everyone in Norwich should be able to use without fear of harassment or worse. Measures need to be taken to address these problems- and not just by moving these groups from one site to another. The young people need an area where they can express themselves and socialise where they do not impact negatively on the residents of Norwich or visitors to our city.

What steps can the administration take to relieve these problems of anti-social behaviour, littering and intimidation in the Castle Gardens and to return this area into a place where all the citizens of Norwich feel safe to use?"

#### **Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Cohesion's reply:-**

"I agree with Councillor George that the Castle Gardens is a wonderful area in the City Centre, though he must agree it is complemented by many green and open areas such as Chapelfield, the Cathedral Close, etc. The use of the phrase "one of the few remaining green areas" does give a strange impression of the City centre as a concrete jungle which is certainly not the case and one which I am certain Councillor George did not mean to give.

I believe that his comment that the area has "become a home for vandals, intimidation and yob culture" has been exaggerated for political effect, though there clearly is a problem there that needs sorting. I have spoken to many people about their feelings about the area, and they do not feel "intimidated and scared."

But there are problems, and these were recognised some time ago, and this has led to the City Centre Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel at its August meeting identifying anti-social behaviour in Castle Gardens as one of its three priorities.

The problems that arise there are not caused by just groups of young people and it would be completely unfair to represent problems there as one of unruly youth or Yob Culture as Councillor George prefers to call it. Some may look different but it does not automatically make them bad and we all should be able to distinguish between the way people look and the way they behave – let's make sure we judge them on what they do not on the way they look.

As you read further through this in depth reply you will see that much of the problems in the area come from drug taking and rough sleepers. The report of "the desecration of the Children in Need flowerbed" seems to result from natural causes and not from criminal damage, and this will be moved to a new, more appropriate location. When it is back in place let's have a bit of publicity so that we can all recognise the great work that the charity does.

In answer to your question "What steps can the administration take to relieve these problems?" I can report that a multi-agency approach to address problems in the gardens has been adopted as the City Council alone is not able to resolve all of the problems that have been identified. There is a major responsibility for the Youth & Community Team at County Hall, and the Police, of course, have a very important role here. The work detailed below has been developed by the Safer Neighbourhood Team, City Centre Management Partnership and Green Spaces Team.

### **Green Spaces**

A site visit has been held involving officers from the Council to discuss the issues and consider possible adaptations and improvements which can be made in the gardens to:

- improve the appearance of the gardens;
- deter antisocial behaviour;
- provide an area for the young people to use.

Work has already been carried out to clean up areas which are currently being utilised by drug users. The number of bins in the area has reduced over time due to vandalism and Officers are working with CityCare to review the number and

locations of bins to agree what is required to continue to reduce the problems of litter. Consideration will also be given to the style of bin to ensure it is of a robust design.

The gardens also contain some “hidden and shady” areas that are being used for drug taking and rough sleepers and work is planned to open these up by the removal of some trees and shrubs and an improved planting plan using appropriate species to deter undesirable activities in ‘hidden’ areas.

The standard of contract cleaning in the area is also being monitored more closely to see if there may be a case for more frequent cleaning.

The “Pudsey Bear” flower bed has suffered from rainfall run off down the steep slope and washing out the bedding plants and a new location for this bed within the gardens is being considered.

The CCTV camera present that is fixed facing the lift entrance would benefit from being made a rotational camera so that intelligence can be gathered from the gardens. This is not a Council camera and the owners are being contacted to ask them consider this proposal and also associated signage which may act as a deterrent.

Damage to the bridge and the thatching on the Whiffler Theatre has been assessed by Asset and City Management and an order placed to repair it.

The area of grass bank adjacent to the steps leading up to Castle Green is heavily worn as result of people passing up and down it. It would benefit from improved landscaping and the provision of a more durable surface that could also be used as an area for people to sit.

There would be considerable expenditure for this work, and it would be subject to resources being made available. Investigations are also being made with Asset and City Management to look into the possibility of a “coffee cart” concession to operate in the area, as this would provide a regular presence in the gardens and may also help with changing the user profile.

### **Police**

Daily uniformed patrols are ongoing in the whole area to reduce incidents of ASB, drinking and other anti-social activity. Police officers are to implement Restorative Approaches when dealing with repeat offenders in the area and the Police will also be looking into multi agency enforcement for continuation and expansion.

### **Youth Workers**

The Youth Service will start to engage with young people who congregate in Castle Gardens and discuss options of where they can go for meeting and gathering.

### **Education**

Visits are to be arranged to local schools around the City Centre by the police and police community support officers and members of the public to speak with young people to talk about acceptable behaviour and the consequences of their actions behaviour and actions.

An event has been held within the “Hear by Right” young people’s programme to establish the issues that are encountered with young people within the city centre. The issue was raised of how to engage involve young people interact on the issue of anti-social behaviour and looking at how young people should be involved in the decision making process

A press release has already been released by Evening News on young people having their say. The Chair of the Central Norwich Citizen’s forum is working on how young people can be included in the work of the Forum and plans to ask for participants through schools in the area.

In addition Scrutiny Committee has asked for this issue to be investigated. Maybe this detailed reply will be of assistance to their work.

This question gives us all a chance to recognise the excellent work of the Police and the City Officers, and all the other agencies, working in cooperation, making our City safe and secure, and an enjoyable place in which to shop, work, live and play.”

#### **Question 14**

##### **Councillor Evelyn Collishaw to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-**

“In a reply to Councillor Antony Little last year, the former Executive Member for Housing said she would update the Council on what progress the administration was making in bring empty council houses back into use. Could the present Executive Member please provide us with that update?”

##### **Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services’ reply:-**

“Choice Based Letting has now been in operation since November 2007. This process has offered both challenges and opportunities. In order to further improve performance a temporary Void Operations Team is in the process of being established. The team’s sole task will be the management of voids and the improvement of turn around times. There will be four staff working directly for the Void Property co-ordinator; their main tasks will be:-

- Checking the number of voids
- Progress monitoring
- Advertising
- Tenant assessment

Establishing the Voids team; transfer of duties; training and trial operations are due to begin in October for a 3 month trial to be assessed in January 2008.

As predicted by the former Executive Member for Housing in response to your question last year there was an increase in turnaround times after Choice Based Letting was introduced. This is now starting to decrease again and we expect the new team to both drive down the time taken for turnaround and drive up the quality

and condition of the properties. In particular we expect to introduce a system where properties in good condition can be fast tracked while those needing more extensive work before being fit to let can be progressed with minimum delays.

In addition the work to improve void standards, quality of work, customer care, and overall turn around times continues. Additional post inspections are being carried out and in the near future questionnaires will be sent to each new tenant with the resultant comments being analysed and used to further improve the service.

Work is also continuing in the private sector to tackle empty homes. Twenty eight homes have been brought back into use this year, twenty six of which are now occupied by families who were at risk of becoming homeless. We have also successfully applied for empty dwelling management orders to tackle five dwellings which have been empty for many years and which have been causing particular problems to the surrounding area."

#### **Question 15**

##### **Councillor Antony Little to the Leader of the Council:-**

"I am sure that both residents and councillors were pleased when Norwich City Council said it wanted to be "first in the queue" to qualify for free swimming for under-16s and the over-60s. Could the Leader of the Council outline the process for implementing this new scheme? Does the Leader of the Council have any information on the numbers of people likely to take up this offer and the corresponding central government funding?"

##### **Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Leader of the Council:-**

"In view of the decision by UEA to withdraw from the Council's Go4Less scheme and the announcement that due to funding issues the City Council will not be applying for the government's 'free swimming for the over 60s and under 16s' scheme. Could the Executive Member please indicate how the Council will reassure Norwich residents, workers and visitors that it is serious about its commitment to widening access to sport and how it will signal our displeasure to the government that it is letting down local people by refusing to fully fund the free swimming scheme?"

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

"The Council did apply for the free swimming scheme for those 60 and over and under 16's on the basis that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) reconsidered the criteria.

It is not entirely true to say that the funding problem is down to the government although the way the scheme has been designed has not helped. The problem for Norwich is that Broadland District Council are unable to access their allocation of £45K per annum (for the two year period) as they don't own any swimming pools. So if Norwich introduced the free swim programme at Riverside Swimming Centre, anybody over 60 would be entitled to free swimming, but clearly those living close by in Broadland without council provided facilities would be most likely to use the Norwich City Council pool at Riverside. Broadland residents would be entitled to



access free swimming at the centre, with the total cost being met by Norwich taxpayer's council tax. The DCMS have said that they cannot change the criteria of the scheme to meet Norwich's special circumstances. I will be writing to the minister to point out that because greater Norwich is not unitary council local taxpayers will lose out yet again.

In addition the extra swimmers from outside the City Council area would increase pressure on the capacity of Riverside and could lead to restrictions on times and access for Norwich people. This could lead to the perverse outcome of those footing the bill getting worse services and reduced access. I am sure our residents and council would find that unacceptable.

As council well knows, Norwich residents already subsidise facilities widely used by residents from neighbouring authorities who pay little or nothing towards their upkeep. At the same time those councils that provide few services and whose residents use those services subsidised by Norwich residents make great play of lower council taxes. I think Norwich residents would prefer to see their council tax being used for purposes other than subsidising our neighbours.

As a result I am proposing an alternative that in effect means we would use money that might otherwise go towards picking up the tab for swimmers from outside the City council area to fund swimming for over 60's who pay their council tax in Norwich.

All Norwich City Council residents over 60 are already entitled to a Go4Less card – which is free on application since Labour abolished the charges two years ago.

We are proposing that all over 60 Go4Less card holders should be entitled to free swimming at the Riverside pool from April 2009 onwards. We intend it as a permanent measure and not time limited by government funding.

Existing Go 4 less swimming income for this category of users at Riverside Swimming Centre is in the region of £30K per annum. A budget would need to be identified for this purpose, as part of the up and coming budget setting process for 2009/10. If the scheme attracted a modest 20% increase in use by existing and new Go4Less card holders the annual cost to the council would be £36,000, rising to £45,000 if there was a 50% increase. If this proposal was implemented at Riverside Swimming Centre it would be a considerable step to confirming the Councils commitment to providing accessible sport. It is hard to assess how much it might otherwise have cost to fund swimmers from neighbouring authorities, but this will go a very long way to offset it.

The free swim programme confirms issues regarding capacity at Riverside Swimming Centre which already struggles to balance its programming of water space to meet the needs of individuals, clubs and its learn to swim programme. This has heightened the awareness of the need for an additional community swimming facility in Norwich We remain committed to getting two more swimming facilities for the city and work is actively being done to seek ways of achieving that."

#### Question 16

**Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Resources and Governance:-**

“Could the Leader of the Council tell us what the turnover in council staff has been in the last year, broken down into grade if possible?”

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

“In the last year turnover across the council has been 14 %.( Most local authorities have a turnover rate at 12 %.)

Turnover of staff by grade: 1st Sept 07 to 31st August 08

| Grades  | % Turnover |
|---|------------|
| All council turnover                          | 14.10%     |
| Chief Executive, Directors & Senior Directors | 37.50%     |
| Heads of service                              | 10.91%     |
| Principal officer grades/JE3, 2 & 1           | 13.40%     |
| Scale SO1/2 JE 5 & 4                          | 10.65%     |
| Scale 4-6/JE 7 & 6                            | 14.92%     |
| Scale1-3/JE 9 & 8                             | 16.91%     |

As part of good practice HR conducts exit interviews with staff to assess the main reasons that people leave the Council. The main reasons why staff move on are to improve their pay or career prospects.

#### Question 17

**Councillor John Wyatt to the Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

“Residents in Freshfield Close, West Earlham, first complained about the state of the drainage and overgrown bushes at the rear of their homes 4 years ago. My ward colleague Councillor George has chased this up 3 times since being elected and nothing has happened despite assurances. When Councillor Little followed it up the issue was pushed to one side. Now, as ward councillors, we feel we have no choice but to bring this to full council. Will the Executive Member take a personal interest in this problem and arrange for the work to be done as soon as possible?”

**Councillor Brian Morrey to reply in the absence of Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Customer Care and Residents Services:-**

“A Councillor's enquiry was received by the Green Spaces Manager in relation to this matter on 11 September 2008 which was the first time he was aware of the raising of this issue. It was returned to the Councillor on 15 September requesting further information to help identify the location of the

problem. Councillor Wyatt says Councillor George has chased this up three times. Would he mind letting me know when Councillor George did this so that I may ascertain the facts of the allegation?

This was followed up on 25 September saying that the Natural Areas officer would contact Councillor Wyatt to ascertain the location of the problem and offering a site visit with the Councillor and the resident who had raised the concern about the drain and the woodland vegetation.

The Natural Areas Officer will arrange for a Building Surveyor to visit the site, as a priority, determine the problem with the drain and the cost of remedial works.

Some of the vegetation along the rear access tracks through the wood along St. Mildred's Road, Rolleston Close and Freshfield Close has recently been cut back, and the removal of some dead elms is planned for the autumn.

Bunker's Hill Wood has been neglected in the past, but, earlier this year a programme of work was started to improve the site's management and involve local people in its care. A very successful series of 'Saturday clean ups' events were organised, which involved leafleting all the houses adjacent to the wood, and removing a large amount (over 12 tonnes!) of fly-tipped waste with the volunteers who responded to the appeal. Since then, the amount of ongoing fly-tipping has been drastically reduced and the wood is now a more pleasant and safer place. Annual cutting of the vegetation bordering the access tracks through the wood has been introduced at the request of local residents. Council has already set the budget for formally contracted grounds maintenance for 2008/2009 but it is anticipated that as from next year this work will be undertaken through the CityCare contract."

#### **Question 18**

##### **Councillor Roy Blower to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-**

"Could the Executive Member for Community Safety and Cohesion explain the progress in installing the new CCTV in the outlying shopping areas for the City, and explain any problems or hold-ups."

##### **Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion's reply:-**

"On 22 November 2006, Councillor Morpew officially opened the new CCTV Control Room at Swanton Road. This marked the end of phase one of the two-phase CCTV project in Norwich which through an investment of £500,000 provide a CCTV system that would replace the existing equipment, which was coming to the end of its useful life. The project included:

- The replacement of existing analogue equipment with upgraded digital technology to enhance the ability to provide stakeholders with better quality evidence for court and other evidential purposes
- Provide capacity within the system for future expansion

- Provide a larger, more modern and comfortable modular building to house the new equipment

During phase one, various options for expansion of the system into other areas of the City, including housing estates, green and open spaces, housing and other areas in neighbourhoods were identified.

A system of demountable cameras at 'hotspots' in these areas was established where pictures could be beamed to the CCTV control room from strategically placed nodes which do not have any on-going transmission costs.

At the meeting of Council on 28 November 2006 six service commitments were approved which included the commission of phase 2 of the CCTV with mobile cameras and this was approved by the Executive on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2007. These were the political priorities of the Labour executive.

Over £113,000 has been secured from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Home Office Anti-social Behaviour Unit/Respect Task Force/ and the Safer Norwich Partnership and in 2007-8 £335,000 was secured from the LEGI programme (Local Enterprise Growth Initiative) for CCTV. These are Labour Government initiatives that the City is benefitting from.

A number of areas in the neighbourhoods have been identified for CCTV in conjunction with the Safer Norwich Partnership. The locations of these and progress to date are:

- |                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| • Mile Cross (Lefroy Road area)   | completed |
| • Chapelfield Gardens (2 cameras) | completed |
| • Eaton Park                      | completed |
| • Waterloo Park                   | completed |
| • St Giles/Guildhall              | completed |
| • Pottergate                      | completed |
| • Heartsease (1 of 2)             | completed |

The LEGI programme has agreed to fund the following:

- |                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| • Mile Cross/Drayton Road shops   | completed |
| • Vauxhall Street – 2 cameras     | completed |
| • Earlham West Centre - 2 cameras | completed |

At a number of locations where CCTV installation has been agreed and works are in progress but have been delayed. At the following sites the Council is working in partnership with EDF to finalise electric supply and it is anticipated that the supply will be connected by the end of October 2008. Cameras should be installed within two days of works being completed. These are:

- Knowland Grove shops
- Waldegrave shops
- Bishopbridge Road shops/ Ketts Hill roundabout area

At the following locations the electric supply will come from street lighting and the Council are working with Norfolk County Council's Street Lighting Team and their contractor as the County Council are implementing a programme of lighting column replacement. To ensure the CCTV installation continues on programme the City Council are funding the purchase and installation of new lighting columns in the following areas and are waiting for these to be delivered to accommodate the cameras:

- Hall Road, St John's Close
- Long John Hill, Lakenham
- Colman Road
- Dereham Road/ Distillery Square
- Witard Road

All the information from all the cameras is beamed to our CCTV HQ and can also be beamed to Police at Wymondham as live pictures. For the information of councillors one of the instructions that is given to Police Officers, if there is an incident, is to call into the CCTV HQ so that any cameras can be targeted in to follow them.

All this new provision will improve the detection of crime and disorder and provide valuable evidence for the police to take action and also provides reassurance for local residents and businesses.

But we will not stop there. We must study the results of the work so far, the needs of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panels' priorities, and the crime statistics to see whether further expansion is needed – and remember these cameras are demountable and are able to be set up in other areas, but only if the perceived problem in an area has improved – and they can be move back as well, if that becomes necessary!!

As a final comment, I wish to commend all the officers involved for their stunning work in developing and expanding this system, and I am certain all members of Council would want to add their thanks too."

## **Question 19**

**Councillor Brenda Arthur to the Executive Member for Children and Young People:-**

"There has been coverage in the press recently suggesting that a move to a unitary model of government in Norfolk could bring an additional £14m for education and schools in the City. Could the Portfolio Holder please elaborate?"

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

"This Council has long had concerns about levels of educational attainment in city schools. Whilst education performance in city schools begins at above national average levels at age 7, performance plummets over time with a widening gap between the greater Norwich and national achievement levels such that on average, pupils in greater Norwich schools lag behind their peers nationally by 6.3% in terms

of 5+ A\*-C grade GCSEs at age 16. Perhaps of even greater significance is the fact that our statistical neighbour authorities (all of which have unitary status) show the opposite trend of improving performance as children grow older.

There are also other issues. School attendance is also a significant issue within greater Norwich with average levels of non attendance at secondary school standing at 9.5% against a national level of 7.8% and a statistical neighbour level of 7.6%. There are also a disproportionately high number of city schools in the Ofsted special measures category. Currently there are 4 schools in the greater Norwich area in a Special Measures category of concern. This is compared to a rate of 1.69 schools per authority nationally and only 0.83 per statistical neighbour authority.

This situation is of major concern, and is something that must be tackled hard if local children are to be able to benefit fully from the economic potential and jobs growth in the city over the next 20 years.

We strongly believe that unitary status will be a major boost, as it will enable full integration between schools and related council services such as family support, housing, neighbourhood services and so on. Furthermore, we also believe it could lead to a significant financial windfall for city schools, consistent with increases to school budgets seen in other areas where an urban unitary authority has been established. The recent financial disaggregation work for the Boundary Committee has revealed a £14m gap between what Norfolk County Council believes should be spent on schools in the greater Norwich area, and what the City Council believes should be spent based on the high level of needs in the city. We believe that this represents the gap between what the County Council has been spending on city schools and what should be being spent.

Of course, money is not the only answer, but this potential 10% uplift in funding would make a huge difference for the effectiveness of city schools.

My concern is that under the single county unitary model, being proposed by Norfolk County Council, this funding gap would continue, and city schools and city children would continue to lose out. A countywide approach to education has already failed, meaning that for the last 10 years or so city schools have been performing below county schools, and both city and county schools continue to perform below the national averages.

Under a doughnut model (i.e. a greater Norwich unitary, and a rural Norfolk unitary), the funding gap would be removed, and city schools would receive the funding that their levels of need justify. This is one of the main reasons why the City Council is supporting the doughnut model of unitary governance for the city and the county.

Furthermore, we believe that our "Campus Norwich" approach for the whole city - in which the 11 secondary schools, 68 primary age schools and 5 Special schools in the city would work together as part of a citywide partnership, and operate as a supportive family of schools, would bring other benefits such as:

- extending family support within schools;
- shared training and professional development;
- sharing best practice across schools;
- peer support for weaker schools;

- exploring common approaches such as timetabling and sharing pupils.
- with the opening of the 'Open' Academy and the possibility of more academies being created in Norwich along with schools applying for 'Trust' status, the partnership model will:
  - involve all Norwich schools and educational institutions
  - be inclusive of families and neighbourhoods in future decisions
  - firm guidelines will be set down for any future shaping of our city education.

We have already been developing this concept in collaboration with city head-teachers, but we look forward to working even more closely with city schools to develop a better model for our children in the future.”

#### **Question 20**

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

“Many shops in the city and some other local authorities have battery banks for disposal and recycling of batteries. Other workplaces collect plastic cups and similar items in special containers. Are these measures that we could introduce in City Hall?”

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

“A scheme to install recycling bins in the kitchens on each floor of City Hall and St Giles House will take place in early October. The bins will collect plastic bottles and cans. At the same time all waste bins will be removed from under desks in order to encourage staff to take their waste to the kitchen where they can separate and recycle it.

This scheme should be cost neutral since less trade waste will be collected from City Hall which will offset the cost of the new recycling collections. Officers will continue to investigate other ways of recycling including batteries and plastic cups.

In addition as part of the environmental improvements devices which contain battery packs will be discouraged with preference to devices which contain built-in rechargeable energy storage. Thus removing the requirement to have disposable batteries.”

#### **Question 21**

##### **Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member Sustainable City Development:-**

“The Liberal Democrat Group have invited the cycle hire company OYBikes to come to Norwich on 14 October to demonstrate its Cycle Hire scheme. It is a company with proven success with schemes in Reading, Cheltenham and parts of London.

The OYBikes demonstration is open to all who are interested, local authority officers, cycle groups, those responsible for travel to work plans, businesses and of course councillors. Given this Council's commitment to introducing a cycle hire scheme will the Executive Member attend the demonstration and briefing at 5.30 p.m. in the Council Chamber on 14 October?"

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

"Yes I will attend as an information gathering exercise. We have procurement rules that have to be followed and also need to ensure that local suppliers are made aware of contract opportunities such as this. Remembering that and the realisation no commitment to their company can be given by this Council I am happy to attend."