



Council

22 September 2020

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Neale to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“The council has hundreds of garages across the city and rents them out to council tenants, Norwich residents and residents from outside the city.

I was made aware that a city resident recently applied to rent a garage but was told that rental to new persons was currently on hold. I made enquires with the housing department and was told that they had nobody in place to manage these rentals at the moment and that there is an embargo on recruiting which has resulted in new tenants not being accepted.

At the end of August when I made this enquiry there were an astonishing 504 garages unlet plus parking bays and with no new renters and a natural fall off of existing renters this number will climb even higher.

Garages are rented from £27.17 per month to £105.55 a month depending on location and who rents them. This means that on the lowest chargeable rental category there is a potential income loss of £164,324 a year. On an average chargeable category, it zooms to £360,000 a year.

To be fair, it would be unrealistic to expect 100% letting but even one third of the average figure would be welcome on our balance sheet.

I would like to ask whether the cabinet member responsible thinks it wise to not accept new renters or recruit staff to do this?”

Prices from 1 April 2020

Garage/parking bay	Council tenants *	Norwich residents	Non-city residents
High demand garage	£37.75	£64.75	£105.55
Normal demand garage	£37.74	£58.90	£105.55
Low demand garage	£27.17	£36.51	£40.72
Parking bay	£19.60	£47.04	£58.95

Councillor Harris deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing's response:

"Thank you for your question which is something I was already aware of .I have asked the head of neighbourhood housing to look at the issue and to see what can be done to ease the situation.

The Leaseholder team within neighbourhood housing are responsible for the letting and management of the council's 3000 garages along with their other work of dealing with Right to Buy applications, leaseholder issues and private sector lettings (LetNCC).

There is a significant backlog of work on valuations which are linked to a backlog of 75+ RTB applications which have been on hold since the impacts of the Covid19 lockdown. The amount of work this generates cannot be underestimated and is being exacerbated by an increase in weekly application numbers to almost double the usual amount. There is not usually any backlog in this area of work and there are legal requirements in terms of timescales to respond etc. that we must adhere to.

In addition, we are now preparing the annual service charges to leaseholders. If these are not issued on time or are issued incorrectly, there is a risk of some £1m worth of charges that the council may potentially not be able to recover. In terms of the team this has to be our number one priority at the moment. When the bills are issued there will an increase in queries from leaseholders requiring the council's urgent attention.

There are currently three vacancies in the team plus a new starter, so there are, indeed, some significant capacity issues. However, I do anticipate recruitment, which has been on hold over lockdown, being successful during the next few months

Making the decision to stop accepting garage applications wasn't taken lightly but for context the number of vacant garages does constantly fluctuate and over the past 12 months, we have had an average of 454 vacant units each month. For comparison, the number of vacant units in September 2019 was 500. Therefore the current number of 504 is not unusual and given the current financial uncertainty and also many people working from home and no longer requiring city centre parking, I believe there would have been a below average take-up of new garage tenancies.

At 1 March, pre lockdown, the annual figures showed that we started 306 new garage tenancies but ended 350 garage tenancies, meaning that hand back rate was higher than the demand for new tenancies. This shows a downward trend in garage rentals. Feedback from prospective tenants tells us that one of the main issues is that the units are too small for the average size of the modern day car and therefore people find them difficult to use. This is one of the reasons why garage sites are being considered for alternative uses such

as development in to affordable housing and some are held vacant to facilitate this process. However, we still rent out circa 2500 at any one time which provides a significant rental income to the Housing Revenue Account.

That said of course we are keen to reinstate this service as soon as it possible but I'm sure my colleagues appreciate that even though car parking is important, sometimes we have to prioritise services for leaseholders, our legal obligations and our work to meet acute housing need through our Let NCC service."

Question 2

Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

"In June 2019, a motion was unanimously passed by full council that requested the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment to "present a report detailing how Norwich City Council might develop new models of finance to support the local solar industry whilst also helping residents and businesses to benefit from renewable energy via the use of power purchase agreements (PPAs) and innovative behind-the-meter services". Is it possible to have an update on this work?"

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment's response:

"Thank you for your question on part 3 of the motion from June 2019.

You will be pleased to know that, as per the original motion, we have highlighted the plight of the solar industry since the withdrawal and subsequent termination of the Feed In Tariff (FIT) by central government and where practically possible, we have continued to develop new models of delivery.

Since June 2019, the Council has set up CEEEP (Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel), where we hope a future report exploring various "private wire" and new models of finance options would be debated. The new environmental strategy also outlines a number of actions which will support the delivery of this motion.

However, as previously discussed, these new models will need sufficient time to be developed and tested. They will also need to have regard to the overall position of the Council finances in the light of the challenges posed by Covid-19. The complexity of the subject and the OFGEM regulatory landscape means any meaningful reporting may be some time off, as officers research and try properly to understand the emerging technological advances and new regulations upon which any future smart low carbon and connected energy system would need to be developed.

For example projects operating within the OFGEM regulatory sandbox have two more years to conclude, after which the regulator will publish a series of findings and possible interventions to the licenced energy market. Of particular interest would be some clarity within small-scale generation and distribution systems (such as local smart grids).

Covid-19 has also slowed progress on these studies as many suppliers, the regulator, and project operators have focused on immediate delivery of energy services and the maintenance of existing systems.

As the country gradually returns to business as usual the council will re-enter into dialogue with various stakeholders to promote, encourage and stimulate the local renewable energy supply chain.

I would like to take a moment to thank our officers and contractors who during the lockdown continued to work to complete the 3rd round of the Solar Together programme, which was unavoidably interrupted by the pandemic. This innovative scheme, which started here in Norwich, has previously delivered savings to residents of over a 1/3 off of the market price on the cost of solar panels. Overall this scheme has saved over 940 tonnes of carbon in the city of Norwich and, following our lead, has subsequently been adopted by other local authorities across the country, including the city of London.

Our last scheme saw an East of England based supplier win the contract, which helped support local supply chains during a vital time where the industry was coming to terms with the FIT-free domestic solar market.

The 4th round of Solar Together, launched last week, continues to innovate and evolve. Members will be pleased to know our latest offer has also introduced battery storage – either as a standalone addition to existing solar panels, or as part of the initial installation. This means that even residents who already have solar panels can benefit from this scheme and start storing their excess electricity!

We are proud to offer residents of Norwich this unique opportunity to get involved with the emerging demand-response market, which the introduction of battery storage and smart meters enables. Battery storage allows residents to enter the new “time of use” tariffs, and other innovative energy products and services, as they bridge the gap between the time of day when generation is high, and the time of day when usage is low. Residents can also take advantage of other competitive tariffs such as Outgoing Octopus (the UK's first smart export tariff). They can then choose to sell their stored energy at the time when prices are highest. This scheme is helping our residents get the maximum benefit from their systems.

I hope this example shows how we are evolving our projects to create new models of finance for citizens and businesses to access clean and sustainable renewable energy.

Both homeowners and SME's are able to sign up for this scheme, as long as they own the roof space."

Question 3

Councillor Grahame to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

"A recent WWF report demonstrated that 68% of our wildlife has disappeared in our lifetimes. On 2nd September, Norfolk Wildlife Trust declared their official recommendation that the proposal to build a link road to the west of Norwich is stopped and that alternative options for meeting future transport needs that do not contravene multiple wildlife laws must be examined further. Meanwhile, cabinet members have claimed, hitherto, that council support for such a link road was dependent on improved public transport which can now not go ahead due to reduced funding from Transforming Cities. In the light of these facts, will support for road building, including a western link road continue to be supported by the cabinet?"

Councillor Stonard the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth's response:

"The council's stance on the proposed Norwich Western link remains unchanged from when it was last considered by cabinet in 2019. It is a scheme that we would like to see properly and fully explored as it has the potential to give residents, businesses, visitors and people travelling through the area a number of important benefits, including:

- Removing additional traffic from our congested suburban city streets and outer ring road west of the city
- Adding to the benefits that dualling the A47 will bring
- Reducing rat-running in villages to the west of Norwich, improving quality of life
- Improving people's living environment
- Improving links and journey time reliability to the west and north of the county
- Improving transport links to the A47 and beyond to the Midlands (including better connectivity to Norwich airport)
- Supporting economic growth
- Helping to encourage investment into Norfolk and encouraging further economic growth
- Improving connectivity to the hospital, university and major employment areas at the Norwich Research Park

Of course these benefits will need to be balanced up once environmental impacts, mitigations and costs are fully understood. Our support for the western link scheme has also always been dependent on securing a suitable associated package of sustainable transport improvements. We are expecting announcements over the coming weeks about funding from the

Transforming Cities Programme and for the delivery of a revised and updated Transport for Norwich Strategy.

It is premature to reconsider our position on the Western Link at this point.”

Question 4

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity says that urgent action is needed to protect the Earth’s biodiversity. It is a matter of great regret that the UK holds the status of one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. Many people are making valiant efforts nationally and locally to increase biodiversity. For example, a new initiative called WildEast has been established with the aim of dedicating 250,000 hectares of East Anglia to nature over the next 50 years by encouraging everyone, including farmers, councils, businesses, schools and residents to pledge a fifth of their land such as gardens, churchyards and industrial estates to nature. WildEast says that another way in which councils can get involved is via planning consents for brownfield land with a requirement for developers to set aside 20% of a site for natural ecosystems. Will the cabinet member consider pledging his support for the WildEast initiative, as a focus for local biodiversity enhancements and to encourage other Councils and bodies to join?”

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s owing question:

“Current planning policies already in use by the council support the aims of projects such as WildEast. For example, our Local Plan policy DM6 states that development proposals that deliver ‘significant benefits or enhancements to local biodiversity or geodiversity will be strongly supported and encouraged’. The use of this policy has resulted in biodiversity improvements to schemes ranging from bat and bird boxes to the provision of new habitats on development sites. It also means that landscaping schemes associated with new development have equal regard to biodiversity as they do to aesthetics.

Going forward, the Environment Bill is expected to introduce the concept of ‘biodiversity net gain’, meaning that development will have to deliver a mandatory positive impact on biodiversity. The Council is actively involved in reviewing what this will mean for planning and development in the city, although it is not clear how this will fit in with Central Government’s aspirations to see less regulation in planning as expressed in the recent whitepaper.

I’ll look into the WildEast initiative further and consider whether we should support it in due course”.

Question 5

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“I was pleased to see that some Thorpe Hamlet residents had successfully petitioned the county council to bring in 20mph speed limits in residential areas near schools in my ward. However, I am disappointed that I have been asking the city council to introduce 20mph speed limits on Wolfe Road and the surrounding streets for the last eight years and that, despite reassurances from the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development in response to the question I asked on this subject at a council meeting in September 2016, no action has yet been taken. Could you please explain why the city council, did not, when the Highways Agreement would have allowed it, address this issue by finding funding to carry out the project over the last four years?”

Councillor Stonard the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth's response:

“In responding to your question in September 2016, the then cabinet member for environment and sustainable development reiterated the council's objective to see all residential streets – aside from the main road network – being subject to a 20 mph speed restriction. He also made very clear that government and county funding had been severely cut since 2010 and that, at the time, the only money available was from the government's City Cycle Ambition Grant (CCAG) for the pink pedalway which the council had successfully bid for.

As part of CCAG the council undertook to introduce 20 mph speed limits on roads feeding into the pedalways – broadly on a corridor 400m either side – and this it did, firstly as part of the pink pedalway between the hospital and Heartsease. The council then went on to do the same in relation to the blue and yellow pedalways, following its successful bid for a second and larger tranche of CCAG funding for these two routes.

Unfortunately the council did not receive City Cycle Ambition Grant funding for the green pedalway which would have allowed it to introduce 20 mph speed limits in much of Thorpe Hamlet. Officers were still exploring other potential sources of funding which might have enabled such measures to be introduced but these did not come to fruition prior to the Agency agreement ending. I am pleased to note that the County have now agreed to fund speed limits.”

Question 6

Councillor Schmierer to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“I wish to raise the concerns of many residents regarding temporary events notices (TENs) in the city centre which have been granted recently. Currently,

personal licence holders can apply for up to 50 TENs per calendar year and these events can be for up to 499 guests. Given the challenges facing the hospitality sector in the midst of the current pandemic, I would be reluctant to see TENs abandoned, but nor do I want to see the system used to disenfranchise residents from expressing their genuine concerns. Does the cabinet member agree that an application for multiple events over consecutive weeks should be determined by licensing committee members, at which point residents can raise their concerns before any decision is taken?"

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

"Although personal licence holders can apply for up to 50 temporary event notices, these cannot all be at the same premises. Each individual premise is limited to a maximum of 15 events in any one calendar year, and although these events could be for more than one day, there is a further limit of a maximum of 21 days in any one year, which goes some way to minimise nuisance to nearby properties.

Temporary event notices can only be determined by a licensing sub committee if there are objections raised by either the Police or public protection officers. It is not legally possible to have a general local licensing policy of multiple TEN's being determined by sub committee, or any way of allowing members of the public to make direct representation.

The statutory licensing guidance for TEN's advises that "The system of permitted temporary activities is intended as a light touch process", and furthermore, recent changes in primary licensing legislation made by central government, have promoted the use of outside spaces for licensable activities, which many TEN's are used for. However recent events have also highlighted that these events, particularly when held close together, can be a source of nuisance to nearby properties. The public protection officers will continue to assess the notices with a view to finding that balance between Government guidance, the rights of businesses to utilise the licensing facilities available to them and the prevention of public nuisance."

Question 7

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

"I have recently had experience of a number of cases where repairs to property due to be carried out by NPS have not been carried out. In addition, it seems that rent collection by NPS has been inconsistent or often delayed. What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure that NPS is held accountable and what will be done to ensure that a more effective and better-quality service is delivered?"

Councillor Kendrick the cabinet member for resource's response:

“Council officers hold weekly liaison meeting with members of the NPSN senior management team, to review performance across a wide range of housing metrics. These meetings provide officers with the opportunity to investigate any individual cases, should there be concerns around performance or service delivery. Effective, timely and cost efficient repairs are a key requirement of the service, delivered through a number of key and specialist maintenance providers. All work is completed to an agreed service level and within an agreed priority rating, depending on the nature and urgency of the work that is required.

The immediate focus has been on completing the backlog of work following the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions. The impact of a reduced workforce, availability of supplies and materials, and the ability to access properties under lockdown, created a backlog of work across all the repair and maintenance workstreams. Lower priority and non essential work was placed on hold and the contractors have, over the past few months, concentrated on completed all outstanding work. Good progress has been made and it is envisaged the backlog will be completed by the end of September. Since the lifting of restrictions, there has been increase in repair requests and these continue to be managed against the agreed work priorities.

Should Councillor Youssef provide further details of the properties and the nature of the repair work, these individual cases can be investigated further.

Rent collection from the council's commercial tenants is something that NPSN's team, who work in this area, has been tasked with prioritising in recent months. Officers meet with NPSN every two weeks to measure performance including debt management and to hold NPSN to account.

If having after having raised an issue with NPSN about their performance you are not satisfied with their response then please contact the head of city development services.”

Question 8

Councillor Bogelein to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“Over a year ago, I was contacted by residents of Canterbury Place. They reported that Canterbury Place had not been maintained adequately for years, leading to anti-social behaviour; the paths were not swept and were overgrown with weeds up to a meter high. Also, the communal raised beds were not maintained, when they could have formed a green and biodiversity oasis. I have been in contact with the council several times since and received an apology as well as a promise that Canterbury Place would be maintained regularly and adequately. Lockdown has, again, delayed this, but I was promised it would be sorted out over the summer. Summer has gone and nothing has happened; the weeds are still there, the paths are not swept and the raised beds have not been touched. One of the contractors came on a

ride-on vehicle to clean the paths, but the vehicle was too large to fit, so the mission was abandoned and no-one ever returned. Could the cabinet member please ensure that the contractors fulfil their contract and, with a year's delay, finally come to maintain Canterbury Place, whilst also ensuring that this maintenance will continue going forward?"

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment's response:

"I am aware that residents in this area are concerned about the state of the paths and the raised beds in Canterbury Place.

The effects of the national lockdown and the furloughing of staff were particularly impactful on our grounds maintenance services as these were not considered to be critical services, in contrast to services such as waste collection and street cleaning.

In October 2019 there was an initial clearance of the beds with a plan for further works to commence in April 2020 with the intention of having the beds clear enough to replant this winter. Unfortunately COVID put a stop to that plan.

It has subsequently taken some months to return grounds maintenance services to anywhere approaching normal due to a combination of factors –

The requirement to address the deterioration of landscaped areas that occurred during lockdown at the same time as delivering the normal scheduled workload; and

Social distancing requirements which limited the amount of operatives in vehicles and also limited the proximity of operatives working together on landscaping works.

The next scheduled activity in this area will be week commencing 21 September when we will agree on the plan for restarting the work to bring the beds back to a state where we can replant all the bare areas and carry-out an effective programme of pruning the existing shrubs.

Canterbury Place also contains a network of adopted footpaths and odd bits of land which are not included in a formal maintenance schedule. These are picked-up as 'one-offs' as and when required and cleaned by the maintenance 'Hit-Squad'. This work too has been severely restricted during lockdown and furlough but will be rescheduled imminently now that the service has returned to full availability (albeit with a requirement to catch-up on a large number of outstanding tasks).

I am also aware the housing communal area inspections will be back up-and-running soon and a site visit to Canterbury Place could be arranged to consider whether it would be a suitable location for an Estate Aesthetics

project or whether there are alternative approaches that could improve the landscaped areas.”

Question 9

Councillor Wright to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:

“Eaton Park is an incredibly popular resource, but recently park users have contacted me to raise concerns about the parking at the Community Centre / Pitch and Putt end of the park. During periods of high park use, this car park can become gridlocked due to the number of vehicles and the single entrance / exit.

One possible solution is to make the car park one way – entering via South Park Avenue and exiting via North Park Avenue. Would the cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing please commit to including such a scheme in future budget proposals?”

Councillor Packer the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:

“Eaton Park has indeed been an incredibly valuable space for our residents as have many parks and open spaces across the city, particularly since the Covid crisis hit.

The council is already aware that parking issues have occurred this summer.

You will understand that the council cannot commit on your specific proposal at this moment in time. Options need to be considered, legal constraints identified (highway or the parks heritage status), costed and funding obtained. It is also important to consider the impact on the park, including biodiversity, which is well served by pedal ways and public transport. Due to the pressure on resources considering a one way system is a not a high priority project at this moment in time.

Officers are currently waiting for a cost to remark the bays and also for some additional marking to yellow line non-parking areas to try and resolve the problem. This will also include defining the disabled bays more clearly.

In the longer term, if there are any major improvement works to the car parks to be carried out a one-way system will be considered as an option, as part of any project.”

Question 10

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for social inclusion the following question:

“In July 2019, council passed a motion which recognised the importance of Free School Meals and asked cabinet to use all mechanisms under the

control of this council to promote Free School Meals and encourage parents to apply.

Could the cabinet member for social inclusion comment on what activities have been undertaken by the council since then to encourage applications for Free School Meals?”

Councillor Davis the cabinet member for social inclusion’s response:

“Encouraging take up of this county council run benefit is part of our holistic, multi-agency approach to food poverty (including that affecting school-age children), as part of the Norwich Food Poverty Alliance. In line with our role in the Food Poverty action plan, we have encouraged the take-up of Free School Meals (alongside Healthy Start Vouchers) in an article in the Winter edition of Citizen magazine. This complements other actions by the alliance, including providing community fridges in some schools. Additionally, during the period of lockdown due to Covid-19, callers to the Community Hub were encouraged to make claims for free school meals if eligible, and this was reinforced through leaflets provided in food boxes. This is an example of how the council continues to take opportunities to encourage take up of Free School Meals and other benefit entitlements through our support and advice to residents around financial issues, such as our Budgeting Advisers and the Betteroff Norwich platform.”

Question 11

Councillor Maxwell to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“Representing a ward which contains high rise flats I am ever conscious of the need for safety measures to be in place and adhered to in order to prevent the risk of fire. Given the lessons of the Grenfell tragedy which emerge from the inquiry I was therefore angered, but sadly not surprised, that the MP for Norwich North, Chloe Smith, chose to vote against an amendment to the Fire Safety Bill. This would have forced flat owners and managers to disclose to local fire services the materials and design of external walls and allow them to make regular checks of lifts and flat entrance doors. It would have also made it obligatory for landlords to share evacuation and fire safety instructions with residents. These sensible recommendations were defeated by 188 votes to 318 – a majority of 110, prompting Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer to brand the vote a “shameful dereliction of duty”. While the government shows both little interest or leadership on this issue of rightful concern, can the cabinet member for social housing comment again on the important and positive progress made to protect and enhance the safety measures in our council owned high rise accommodation?”

Councillor Harris deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:

"I can only agree with my colleague councillor Maxwell and the Labour leader that this was a shameful dereliction of duty not only to the memory of the victims of the Grenfell tragedy but also to the survivors and to existing and future tenants and residents of tower blocks throughout the country. As part of our approach as a responsible landlord, even though the council's tower blocks did not have any cladding, we acted quickly and decisively. We assessed the risks to residents in terms of fire and other hazards and immediately set to work in addressing concerns that were identified by our officers, our partners and the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.

Following those risk assessments a comprehensive programme of works was developed and delivered on time and to budget within 18 months of the tragedy at Grenfell. The assessment and programme of works confirmed what we knew about our tower blocks i.e. that they were safe secure and secure for our residents. We decided to adopt a belt and braces approach to fire safety that would leave little or no risk of fire spreading throughout any of our high rise blocks. Our programme of works concentrated on ensuring the integrity of the compartmentalisation of the flats which is the key component in stopping the spread of fire in high rise blocks as well as improving the information and clarity for residents in the unlikely event that any evacuation would be needed.

In addition to work carried out by the Norfolk fire and rescue service and educational work, drills undertaken by our staff and the emergency services the council has invested almost £2 million as follows:

- £76,643.38 on ensuring adequate smoke detection systems are in place
- £358,865.56 on internal partitions to protect escape routes
- £669,430.44 on Duct panels upgrades to create a fire rated partition between the common service riser.
- £695,492.63 on installing new fire rated doors to all tower flat entrance doors and to internal sheds where they exist.
- £57,615.11 on new electrical meter cupboards
- £2,000+ on luminescent signs as per NFRS recommendation

We have maintained the work and the monitoring of the tower blocks and continue to invest in them with further works about to commence at Winchester tower to replace the electrical infrastructure and to improve the lobby and communal areas. This work will be rolled out to Normandy tower in due course.

I am immensely proud of and grateful to the work of all of our partners and our officers in ensuring the safety and security of the tenants and leaseholders . I wish I were that proud of others who promise much and deliver little and seem cavalier about the safety of others."

Question 12

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“Representing Bowthorpe Ward, which includes the wonderful Three Score and Rayne Park developments, I was pleased to learn that the sale of new Norwich Regeneration Ltd housing at Rayne Park has rapidly increased over the summer. Can the cabinet member for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth comment further on this and update council on the continued progress this company makes?”

Councillor Stonard the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s question:

“Indeed recent sales figures being reported by the Council’s wholly owned housebuilder – Norwich Regeneration Ltd (NRL) – at the Rayne Park development in Bowthorpe are impressive. Construction activity has recovered rapidly since lockdown and this has enabled 28 properties in two phases to be released to the market since July. The market reaction to this has been very positive with 24 sold (subject to contract) already and firm interest in the remaining four properties. Assuming the provision sales complete this will represent £5.9m of property sales.

Conversion rates in terms of viewings to sales are very positive, with one in three viewings securing a deposit. In total, NRL is building 48 properties on sections three and four of the development, with further homes due to be released for sale over the coming months. The feedback from market and potential purchasers is very positive and the company is confident about sales on the remainder of Rayne Park.

The quality of the development is indeed very impressive. They are clearly some of the best quality new homes available on the Norwich market. However, it is not just the individual houses that are excellent, the wider street scene of Rayne Park is now also taking shape. You get a genuine impression of a new mixed and sustainable community with pleasant streets and common areas.

There have been some well documented challenges with the site in previous years. These now being overcome and both NRL, which has recently strengthened its governance through the appointment of non-executive director’s to its board, and the Rayne Park development are moving forward with success.”

Question 13

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“Following the recent outbreak of Covid-19 at Banham Poultry I am sure that the Leader would join me in thanking all staff who assisted in tracing those affected and providing assistance and support to those self-isolating. I note

that following this Norfolk has now been designated as an 'area of enhanced support' by the government and we will now receive access to priority data and enhanced testing capabilities. Given the vital role, knowledge and experience contained within local government, will the Leader agree that instead of relying on the persistent failures of G4S, Serco and other private providers, government should perhaps prioritise and trust us, in local government, to assist in the vital battle to contain and stamp out this awful pandemic?"

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment's response:

"Thank you for your question which gives me the opportunity to tell you about the fantastic, hard work of officers of this council which they have carried out in partnership with officers from other councils including the Director of Public Health based at Norfolk County Council. It is indeed another example of Local not Central: Councils do it best.

Thankfully, after the hard learnt lessons from Leicester City Council - who were able to show the superiority of the local council in investigating outbreaks - other local authorities learnt those lessons when they came to respond to outbreaks. Blackburn with Darwen and then Calderdale among others also shared their learning. Norwich and the other Norfolk Authorities built on those models and protocols so that the response has been rapid and effective. A staged plan was conceived and implemented which ultimately was driven by communication: one of the biggest barriers that Leicester demonstrated was the lack of sharing of information from the National Service. With the Banham outbreak sharing was better but what was shared was flawed. Here again, the local made up for the central.

Coordinated by the Director of Public Health and the Incident Management Team along with the Norfolk Resilience Forum, Norwich and the other Councils demonstrated how only a local approach will work. It was by a series of iterative steps that our officers and volunteers filled gaps and corrected errors in Nationally Supplied information, followed by intervention.

In Norwich two high priorities were identified: Shared housing where Banham Poultry employees lived; and agency staff working at Banham for whom even less or wrong information was available. It was by dogged, old-fashioned 'Boots on the ground' - made possible by local knowledge - that these challenges were overcome. As well as offering home testing kits, they offered support including financial support via the Norfolk Assistance Scheme: this might be for bills and phone credit.

Once contacts were identified and tests carried out, the EDP data suggests that 104 positive tests were sent to the Test and Track Service who managed only to contact 52% by the time that we took over the contact tracing. The Director of Public Health told the EDP that they were "working to get data from the Department for Health and the NHS Test and Tract Service". I do not know if SERCO was directly involved in the Banham case, but the Guardian is quite clear that they have the contract for the NHS Test and Trace Service.

Again, the poor performance of a privatised service had to be made up for by officers from the Council.

In fact, from what I can tell, our officers did much of the work that should have been carried out by the Test and Track Service. Officers could have waited for the “world-beating” system to grind into action but who knows how many more people would have been infected in that time.

Norwich City Council had 10 officers working on our effort. They visited 75 people and, on their first visit managed to get 11 tests returned on the day. We also had the help of 1 volunteer and 2 staff from Volunteer Norfolk. We could sorely have used more help but as our officers had only 12 hours from request to starting, recruiting was not very successful.

This has been a long but successful control exercise which could only have happened with local knowledge and local coordination. It has involved Norwich City Council, other councils in Norfolk, the two teams mentioned above, voluntary and community groups, the LEP, and the Chamber of Commerce. Using social and other media, shops and community groups, messages were got out and we are now on top of this. Since local tracing responsibilities were devolved, one case came to Norwich but, with the local, joined-up approach, they were successfully located.

I am pleased to add that, as of last Friday, Norfolk is off the Government's watch list. This is thanks to the continued efforts of the vast majority of our residents who have adhered to the rules as well the combined work of councils and other local partners.

So, in answer to your question, Yes you are, indeed, absolutely correct when you say “government should ... prioritise and trust us, in local government, to assist in the vital battle to contain and stamp out this awful pandemic”

Question 14

Councillor Giles to ask the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods the following question:

“Last month, thanks to the actions of this council, all landlords were written to in the city reminding them of their duties and responsibilities to their tenants during this difficult time but also the advice, help and support we can offer to them in their role. Given the ever growing significance and power of the private rented sector in the city can the cabinet member for safer stronger neighbourhoods comment on the continued actions of the council in this area following this letter and once again send a message of reassurance to tenants that this council will do all it can to protect those renting in the private sector?”

Councillor Jones the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhood's response:

“Norwich City Council is acutely aware of the difficulties both private sector landlords and their tenants are facing as a result of Coronavirus and we are

wholly committed to supporting them in maintaining tenancies wherever possible.

We are here to help and have been publicizing the assistance available through the 1000 letters sent out to landlords and agents and through the updated pages on our website.

My message for those private sector tenants in difficulty is that help is available. Our housing advice team, which includes a specialist tenancy relations adviser, can provide tailored advice and support to help those struggling to pay their rent or who may be unaware of their rights, particularly in light of recent changes in government rules about notice periods and evictions. This is a personalised, bespoke service with the focus on working with clients to maintain their tenancy by whatever means possible. Where there are financial issues, we can assist with getting help with Discretionary Housing Payments where there is a shortfall in rent or applying for the Homeless Prevention Fund (HPF) loan scheme where a lump sum is needed to maintain the tenancy.

We appreciate everything landlords are doing to support tenants during this difficult time and urge them to continue to show flexibility and support to tenants whose income has been affected by coronavirus. We also understand that some landlords will also be experiencing difficulties and we are here to help and provide advice to any landlords who are experiencing tenancy related issues or have any queries about government rules which may be affecting them.

Our commitment to supporting those in the private rented sector, now and in the future, is set out in our [charter for private sector tenants](#). Our efforts to enhance our service, particularly in this difficult time, are testament to our determination to protect private sector tenants and deal with the challenges that the sector faces.”

Question 15

Councillor Ryan to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“I am persistently impressed by the practical ongoing delivery on the environmental improvement agenda within this city and the focus on achieving tangible practical outcomes which enhance resident’s quality of life and their capacity to help improve the environment around them. I was very pleased, but perhaps not surprised given our record, that we achieved gold at The Global Good Awards earlier in the month. Can the cabinet member for Safe and Sustainable City Environment comment on the significance of this award and the actions undertaken which helped to secure it?”

Councillor Ryan to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“Thank you for your question.

Getting external verification that our programmes are of the highest quality is a useful process to continually improve and develop our projects and the services we deliver to our citizens. The critical eye of expert judges and our peers creates useful opportunities not only to improve, but to also share our successes and innovation with other likeminded organisations and to learn new examples of best practice from others.

Winning Gold in the ‘Climate Action of the Year’ category at the Global Good Awards is very welcome recognition of our efforts and hopefully will assist us in gaining momentum and delivering more in this area.

The key achievements noted in our award submission included details about us setting up a carbon management programme in 2007. Since then we have made impressive strides through a number of steps including decreasing our emissions by investing in renewable energy, retrofitting various buildings to increase energy efficiency and lowering the emissions of our fleet. Through these actions and others, the council’s emissions have fallen by 59.6 per cent since the 2007 baseline.

Meanwhile, numerous other projects across the city have continued to support the ongoing fall in the city-wide emissions which have fallen by 48 per cent since 2005. We are delighted that our ongoing work throughout the city to support and promote sustainable living, as expressed in our 2040 vision, has been recognised as part of this award.

This success is the latest recognition for the city council’s environmental agenda; including a respected Edie Carbon Reduction award, Energy Manager of the Year from ESTA, and a number of other energy efficiency awards for social housing retrofitting. This obviously includes the council’s Passivhaus social housing scheme at Goldsmith Street which won the prestigious Stirling Prize last year.

To conclude we are absolutely delighted to have won this award and been commended at such a ceremony. We are very proud of our record in this area, and we have achieved much success in recent years. However, we are not resting on our laurels – as shown by the recent publication of our ambitious and forward-thinking Environmental Strategy and our ambitious 2030 operational net zero target – and plan to work as fast as practically possible to keep our ongoing momentum delivering practical environmental improvements with tangible outcomes.”

Question 16

Councillor Brociek-Coulton to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:

“Building on the work of the new Safer Neighbourhood Initiative launched last year I was pleased that our bid for additional funding of over £256,000 to further enhance our capacity in the city was successful. This will allow for more alley-gating and measures to tackle crime and protect our communities. Taken together, can the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment comment on the hoped improvements this will make and the ways in which residents should contact the council if they wish to benefit?”

Councillor Maguire the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment's response:

“The successful bid for £256,000 to the Safer Streets Fund (SSF), in partnership with Norfolk Office of the police and crime commissioner (OPCC) and Norfolk constabulary is indeed very welcome. The Safer Streets Fund criteria was set by the Home Office and is focussed on reducing burglary and acquisitive crime in the target area. Maps of the target SSF area and a detailed briefing will be made available on e-councillor. The area was identified by OPCC as the focus for the work due to the high incidence of burglary.

Specifically, the money will provide secure doors entry systems at 8 city council housing blocks on Clifton Close and Midland Walk – benefiting 56 households and new more secure shed doors for up to 35 properties on Midland Walk.

There is also £24,000 in the fund for new or replacement alley-gates for private properties in the Safer Streets Fund area. Applications for this will be managed by the Safer Neighbourhoods Coordinator and a promotional postcard has been created to target households which might benefit from an alley-gate. These will be delivered by Council officers and beat managers from the local safer neighbourhood team. They will also be available for the ward councillors in the area.

The other workstream within the SSF bid will be led by the police who will be visiting every property in the target area to give advice about home security, property marking and promoting neighbourhood watch schemes..

The Safer Streets Fund activity will support the wider city council-led Safer Neighbourhood Initiative which is now being rolled out into the target areas.

Work has started in the Mousehold/Heathgate, Magdalen Close/Bull Close/ Leopard Court and Marl Pit areas. The Safer Neighbourhoods Coordinator is working with residents, councillors, council services, police and other agencies to identify opportunities to make to improve residents' feelings of safety in the target areas. Work will include physical improvements to deter access by those who cause anti-social behaviour and increase natural surveillance and equally importantly to encourage greater use of the public space by the residents themselves. Work is continuing in the project pilot area of Dolphin Grove and Watson Grove.

A key element of the work is to coordinate the council's investment in our estates and to avoid the 'broken window' effect whereby estates look neglected and encourage anti-social behaviours. Obviously the response to anti-social behaviours and crime needs a coordinated response with the police and this partnership work is being strengthened through the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative. We are also engaging with outreach drug and alcohol services and the detached youth worker services.

Surveys have gone out to all households in the target areas to find out in more detail what factors affect people feelings of safety in, and satisfaction with, their neighbourhood. – and also to find out what activities residents might like to get involved in. This will feed into joint action plans with residents and partner agencies.

The targeted area work will continue into the Lefroy Road/Bowers Avenue area, Russell Street area and Suffolk Square soon. The Safer Neighbourhoods Coordinator will be contacting the relevant ward members in the next two weeks.

In support of the Safer Neighbourhood Initiative and in addition to the resources already available through our contracted services, housing budgets and through the Safer Streets Fund there is also the Safer Neighbourhoods – Community Fund. This fund can also contribute to target-hardening measures (e.g. alley-gates) that benefit more than one private property – anywhere in Norwich. It can also support activities that encourage residents to make greater use of the communal spaces in their neighbourhoods – complementing the existing Get Involved funds.

A promotional postcard for this fund is also being finalised and will be available for ward members to distribute in their neighbourhoods if they wish. Some targeted social media promotion is also being finalised. Information will also be going out on e-councillor.

The community fund guidance and application forms are on the council website – www.norwich.gov.uk/SNI

If councillors or residents would like to know more about any of this work or would like some promotional postcards they can email communitysafety@norwich.gov.uk or call the Safer Neighbourhoods Coordinator on 0344 980 3333."

Question 17

Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister to ask the leader of the council the following question:

"Please could the leader of the council comment on the actions taken by Norwich City Council during the pandemic to keep the public safe?"

Councillor Waters leader of the council's response:

“Thank you for your very topical question, Councillor Fulton-McAlister. In response, I have provided a series of bullet points listing the actions the council has taken during the course of the pandemic. I also make reference to announcements over the weekend, charging councils like Norwich with additional responsibilities, in relation to tackling the public health crisis caused by Covid-19 for those citizens on low incomes who have been required to isolate.

- Norwich City Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to publish a comprehensive Covid-19 recovery plan, which was agreed by cabinet and council in June 2020 and is available [here](#)
- The council’s response to Covid-19 has been comprehensive. Over the period April – July, the Norwich Community Response Hub made 6,653 welfare calls – many of which were repeat calls to check in on people who required ongoing support – 723 emergency food parcels were delivered and 529 medicine prescription drops made.
- Around 30 – 40 officers from across the council were involved in the work of the Hub during its 4 month duration, from teams including parking, planning, events, strategy, elections, customer service and housing.
- In terms of support to businesses, to date, the council has distributed £38.47m via 2,995 grants to businesses via the Government’s business grants scheme – ranking us the highest performing authority in Norfolk in terms of % of funding allocated. In relation to discretionary grants, so far we have allocated £1.551m to 164 local business and expect to make a further £50k in payments before the Government’s deadline on 30 September.
- Since March, the council has accommodated 120 rough sleepers, or those at risk of rough sleeping, through the ‘Everybody In’ emergency measures.
- In terms of homelessness, of the 120 rough sleepers who were placed in emergency accommodation during lockdown, 104 have now been assisted into more settled accommodation. Only 8 clients remain in emergency provision, 4 of whom have extremely complex issues and 4 of whom have no recourse to public funds. In each case, we are working with partners to source a sustainable long-term solution.
- The council continues to work hard – in partnership with Public Health Norfolk and other agencies – to protect the residents and businesses of the city. Most recently, city council officers have worked in partnership to put in place a local contact tracing system which is now up and running in the city and has formed a crucial element of the response to the recent Covid outbreak at Banham poultry.
- Our Environmental Health Officers continue to play an active role in ensuring that local businesses are compliant with Covid guidelines and will take action where standards fall short.
- Both myself, other council colleagues and the Chief Executive and his team continue to work with partners across the county to ensure that contingency plans are in place as we head into autumn and winter.

- Over the weekend the Government made a number of announcements in relation to a new legal duty requiring people to self-isolate. We will begin working up a scheme to administer payments to those who need financial support to self-isolate.
- Politically, adequate financial provision for those people on low incomes who have to isolate is an issue that has needed addressing since the start of the pandemic. It has been raised by local councils, including many Labour authorities, including Norwich. We are pleased that the Government have at last responded to this concern. It is also noteworthy that responsibility has been given to local councils to administer the support scheme rather than private contractors.”