

Council
18 July 2017

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“I was contacted on 1 July by a couple of tenants of a sheltered housing scheme asking for help understanding the council's intention to cut back support for those living in sheltered housing. What would it mean for them? What specific services would be affected? I understood this related to the government's cut in funding to the county council which in turn has meant the withdrawal of the 'Supporting People Grant', helping the elderly live independently. But that was the extent of my knowledge.

There had already been one meeting in Blackfriars Hall for those who could attend with follow up meetings in each of the sheltered housing schemes to follow. This was communicated to all tenants via a letter.

As a Councillor I was dependent on seeing the letters that the tenants had received and also the dates of the meetings. The first point is that as a councillor it would have been helpful to see that which the tenants had received in order to at least have some knowledge that the changes were coming.

The second point of my question is that on sending an email request through the councillor enquiry system to housing to request further information about the changes so that I could begin to help tenants, I received the following response:

“Thank you for your enquiry regarding the sheltered housing meeting being offered for all sheltered housing tenants, including their friends, family and support networks. 'Please can I confirm that we are unable to advise on an individual bases what the meetings are regarding, and wish to encourage our tenants to attend a meeting to ensure they hear a consistent message about the approach Norwich City Council is taking in relation to the withdrawal of the 'Supporting People' grant from Norfolk County Council. Dates, times and venues of meetings have been included in a letter sent to all sheltered housing tenants in June to ensure they have an opportunity to attend at least on of the session.”

At best this is making a lot of extra work for councillors having to attend the meeting to find out the details, even if they are available to do so. At worst it is being downright obstructive in getting information out to councillors. The reply did not give the details of the dates, times and venues of the meetings. The information had already been given to those tenants who attended the Blackfriars Hall meeting. However this created anxiety amongst some tenants who didn't attend and thus asked their councillor for support.

Does the cabinet member for social housing agree with me that this response was unhelpful to me as a councillor and to the tenants that I was trying to help and that communications between housing and councillors should be improved?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing's reply

"Yes, I have to agree that the response on the face of it was unhelpful and I apologise for that. I would like to reassure Councillor Lubbock that it was not the intention of officers to be obstructive.

The discussions that are being held with the residents of sheltered housing schemes are about the cuts imposed by Norfolk County Council who have withdrawn funding of £292,500 to the city council for housing related support in sheltered housing. This issue is clearly very sensitive and officers are being careful not to cause alarm. These discussions are to explore tenants support needs so that the council can consider how best it can continue to support the residents to live independent, full and active lives.

I have relayed your thoughts to the head of neighbourhood housing who will take on board your comments including that ward councillors are informed of future such events."

Question 2

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

"The roots of a Cedar of Lebanon tree which had a Tree Protection Order, (TPO) for its protection have been significantly damaged by developers McCarthy & Stone whilst constructing a roadway beside it. The developers have offered £3,000 in payment and accepted liability. Whilst the tree is still standing there is concern that its life expectancy has been affected.

I would like to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth why such a small sum should be accepted in compensation of a breach of a TPO and why wasn't a closer watch kept on the developers when the plans clearly show an exclusion zone around the tree encroaching into the roadway?"

Councillor Ryan, cabinet member for health and wellbeing's response:

"The Cedar of Lebanon tree is in a private garden and is protected with a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The council was contacted by the resident and owner of the tree as he had some serious concerns that the working practices of McCarthy & Stone would damage the tree.

Upon investigation it was difficult to determine whether any damage had been done to the tree in question as the tree is coming to the end of its life and is not in the greatest of health.

A generous offer was agreed between the owner of the tree and McCarthy & Stone as a gesture of goodwill and this was agreed as an act of good faith with the council so that

instead of going to court the contractors could make a donation to tree planting in Norwich. By going to court the council would have had further expenses with no guarantees the council would receive all, or indeed any, of its cost. In these circumstances, the court can determine how much is paid by the guilty party; no court fines are received by the council as they are retained by the Ministry of Justice and no compensation would have been awarded to the council since this would have been considered a civil matter between the owner of the tree and the contractor.

Through the generosity of the owner and by a pragmatic and sensible approach, the council received a contribution of £3,000 for tree planting in Norwich. The additional tree planting will benefit many people in Norwich whereas a conviction for what was essentially a technical offence would have been high risk, potentially costly for the authority and would not have benefitted anyone.

Anyone convicted of breaching a TPO is liable to a maximum fine of £20,000 and although the council may have secured a successful conviction, any fine is subject to mitigation by the defence. They would receive a reduction of a third for pleading guilty and further reductions for their cooperation, lack of demonstrable harm to the tree, low culpability and so on. If found guilty, the fine would have been modest and probably less than the amount of compensation offered.

Officers could have pursued this matter further but the outcome would have been very uncertain due to the lack of obvious damage to the tree and McCarthy & Stone's willingness to comply and engage with our arboricultural officer once the matter was brought to their attention.

It is impractical and would be extremely resource intensive to have officers keeping a close watch on all trees covered by a TPO where building works are being undertaken just in case a tree was damaged and instead officers will prioritise where and when preventative action is taken according to the resources available."

Question 3

Councillor Raby to ask the cabinet member for social housing the following question:

"I have recently received complaints from council leaseholders in Town Close regarding expenses to which they have been subjected by a series of decisions on maintenance and upgrading of their properties. These include door replacements, new access control systems, re-roofing and redecoration of communal areas. The residents complain that these schemes are very expensive and that communication with the council and with NPS has been very unsatisfactory.

A recent meeting of the Norwich Leaseholders' Association (NLA) also emphasised these complaints, pointing out that "the receipt of large demands for payments causes undue stress and worry for many individuals" and called for the reimbursement of all leaseholders who have been "grossly overcharged" for work over the past five years; for the reduction of management fees; and to ensure that leaseholders do not have to shoulder costs for contract management.

Although I am corresponding with officers regarding individual pieces of casework on this issue, it is clearly affecting a large number of residents and requires a wider response from the council.

Would the cabinet member for social housing please give her opinion on whether the council is doing enough to ensure leaseholders are getting value for money on such maintenance work?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing's response:

The council through NPS Norwich is concerned with getting best value for all of our tenants and by extension all leaseholders. NPS Norwich are a joint venture between the council and NORSE and act as the client side for works to the council's housing stock and in this context, they specify and let the contracts for major capital programmes and maintenance programmes. The work itself is carried out by external contractors who have won the work in open tender. NPS performance includes the value the council receives from these contracts so it is not in their or anyone else's interest for that work to be anything other than the best deal for tenants and leaseholders.

The council's procurement arrangements include consortia arrangements to maximise economies of scale and competition to ensure they are robust, transparent and are very successful in achieving this. The council's inspection regime is also of a high standard in comparison with sector norms.

As one would expect with the volume of work carried out, the council does, from time to time have issues with contractors. These are picked up by inspection regimes as well as complaints from tenants and leaseholders. The council always rectify the issues and have indeed barred some contractors from bidding for future work, driving even more value and quality into the process.

Where residents have the right to buy a flat or maisonette, and become a leaseholder the council provides information on the responsibilities of the leaseholder and those of the council including that a leaseholder will have to pay a proportion of the council's reasonable costs of managing and maintaining the block and estate, and of the council fulfilling the lease requirements. Leaseholders have a right to challenge the reasonableness of any service charge or of the standard of works or services and there are safeguards to protect leaseholders with the existence of an external tribunal which sets out to resolve disputes between leaseholders and the council (the tribunal can decide whether the charges levied on a leaseholder for services or repairs are reasonable).

If leaseholders have difficulties paying the service charge, they are requested to contact the council to discuss how payments can be made."

Question 4

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

“The new master plan for Norwich City Airport released last week states the ambition to treble passenger numbers over the next thirty years. Could the cabinet member please comment on whether they support this ambition and how this plan can be compatible with the council's principle of a low carbon city and the need to reduce carbon emissions to urgently tackle climate change?”

Council Stonard, cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth's response:

“The government's aviation policy was published in 2013. It emphasised the government's support for aviation growth across the country and recommended airports prepare master plans; to address such growth by making sure the necessary land and infrastructure is available and to ensure impact on people and the natural environment is minimised and mitigated.

The recent Norwich Airport draft master plan is a product of this recommendation. Whilst we have yet to fully digest the details contained in the master plan I fully support its production; as a sound and responsible response to the government's estimates of growth in aviation over the next 30 or so years. I am happy to debate the desirability of aviation growth, however, it is a national and possibly international issue rather than something to specifically associate with Norwich Airport.

Assuming that aviation growth occurs as the government supports, Norwich Airport have applied a sound approach to their forecasting. This includes anticipating an increase in their share of the core catchment market from the 18% currently to over 36% by 2045. This results in higher passenger numbers than department for transport growth estimates alone might suggest but in my view it is entirely desirable.

Whilst emissions from aviation are, of course, of concern, it is worth remembering that home/airport transport emissions can be just as significant as aviation emissions, especially if the mode of transport is via under occupied cars or taxis which have to return to their original point of origin. Far better, therefore, that as many passengers as possible choose their local airport rather than travelling to Stansted or even further afield. This is clearly also a prudent approach; ensuring that what is required to accommodate such growth is in place, whilst it has the added advantage of helping to ensure the future of the airport and the economic benefits this brings to Norwich and the region.”

Question 5

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

“In the government's budget this spring, a £300m relief fund was announced to help businesses hardest hit by the business rates revaluation. This was to be allocated to councils, who could draw up their own rules for determining which businesses should

benefit. However, there has been some concern nationally that many councils have not yet begun to distribute this money to businesses. I submitted a councillor enquiry on this matter on 27 June but am yet to receive a response. How much money has the council received from this fund, and has it been passed on to businesses?”

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resource’s response:

“Officers have been unable to find any record of your enquiry from 27 June and I have asked for this to be investigated.

As you have identified this is an issue nationally and here in Norwich we find ourselves in the same position as many other councils trying to implement government policy at short notice and without all of the information we need.

A consultation paper was issued by the government with views sought by 7 April 2017. Due to the general election being called on 8 June 2017 the government have not been able to publish the results; however they have advised that they do not expect billing authorities to delay designing their schemes!

In order to ensure that the available funding is not exceeded it has been necessary to carry out extensive modelling which had to be done manually using data from the revenues system. The pot allocated to Norwich city council is £484k in year 1 reducing to £235k, £97k and £14k over the next 4 years. It is important to ensure that this work is completed accurately as any over spend would have to be met by the council. It is therefore crucial that the final scheme is affordable within the allocation from government but that it helps those businesses most in need as a result of the revaluation.

The government did expect billing authorities to have identified and contacted those businesses qualifying for help from the scheme however this was unrealistic given the amount of work involved and the risks of not getting it right.

The scheme is expected to be presented to cabinet in September for consideration.”

Question 6

Councillor Henderson to ask the cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“On 27 April I asked via the councillor enquiry system how sheltered housing costs of around £15 per week are calculated in view of the massive cuts to the service; I received no answers, either to this enquiry or to my follow-up emails on 30 May and 20 June.

I have recently been told by residents of St James House that the council no longer provides a sheltered housing service and now tenants are designated as ‘independent living’. They were very concerned and uncertain about the possible implications of this. Unfortunately, I was unable to reassure them or provide further information, as I myself had not been informed of this development.

It is extremely difficult for ward councillors to do our jobs and represent residents effectively when we are not informed about changes to council services. Could the cabinet member please clarify what changes to the sheltered housing service have been made, or are planned, and whether the cost to tenants will remain the same?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing's response:

"The council clearly still provides sheltered housing throughout the city and I would welcome a discussion with Councillor Henderson to reassure her of this. Some minor changes to the housing service management structure were reported to and agreed by cabinet in June last year which from September mainstreamed general housing work including lettings, void turnaround and routine management queries. There have been no adverse effects to any service because of these changes and indeed there have been improvements in letting times and the speed and response of dealing with housing related management issues. More importantly, this did not result in the council ceasing the sheltered housing service.

With regard to Councillor Henderson's initial query I can only apologise that the query was not answered. The employee that the enquiry was allocated to has recently undergone surgery and the query was not dealt with as it should have been and I have asked the head of neighbourhood housing to ensure you receive a full reply.

The service charge elements for sheltered housing vary from scheme to scheme from under £3.00 per week to £10.00 per week depending on the facilities at the scheme and the level of additional communal services delivered. I am more than happy to meet with Councillor Henderson to brief her on the charges for each scheme if that would help her understand the current system of funding and charges.

Councillors will be aware that Norfolk County Council budget cuts to supported housing may affect tenants from March 2018 and a series of meetings have been arranged at each scheme so that the council can explore both the impact of these cuts and tenant support needs so that the council can consider how best it can continue to support the residents to live independent, full and active lives.

Officers and my cabinet colleagues will continue to lobby Norfolk County Council on the senseless nature of these cuts and any proposals the council needs to take to support tenants in these difficult times will be reported to cabinet."

Question 7

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

"Given the alarming rise in homelessness and rough sleeping in this city and elsewhere, it is clear that we need to do all we can to help these individuals. Norwich City Council activates its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) when a temperature of zero degrees Celsius or lower is forecast for three consecutive nights. As part of this, the council works with other partner agencies to ensure that people who are out on the streets are offered emergency accommodation. However, wet, damp and windy weather, or long periods of

cold (but not sub-zero) conditions may be as damaging to human health as freezing conditions. Does the cabinet member agree that it would be better to broaden the definition of what constitutes severe weather for the SWEP to come into effect?"

Councillor Maguire, cabinet member for safe city environment's response:

"The council's current SWEP provision, as outlined in Councillor Schmierer's question, runs in accordance with government guidance, which places a humanitarian obligation on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by winter weather. The focus of SWEP is twofold:

- To ensure that no one dies on the streets due to severe weather.
- To ensure that every effort is made to engage individuals with support services during the winter months when entrenched rough sleepers may be more likely to accept support.

Naturally, I agree that, regardless of SWEP, the council has an obligation to do all it can to address rough sleeping at any time of year and am confident that this authority fulfils its obligations in this regard. We are committed to preventing rough sleeping and dedicate significant resources throughout the year to preventing homelessness, as well as providing support to anyone who finds themselves on the street. This includes the employment of a specialist rough-sleeper co-ordinator to provide intensive support and assistance to rough sleepers, the funding of hostel and supported accommodation, reconnection to home areas, and provision of outreach support through our partners at St Martins Housing Trust.

I should point out that it does not take a period of severe weather for this council to provide this degree of assistance or accommodation to rough sleepers and this offer is available all year round.

The council is not complacent and equally recognises the challenges ahead. We are continually seeking to improve what is delivered including within the last few months, through our partners at St Martins Housing Trust, increasing access to accommodation for vulnerable rough sleepers through the provision of seven 'sit-up' beds at Bishopbridge House hostel. This 'No second night out' approach to providing immediate accommodation for those in emergency need effectively mirrors SWEP on a year round basis.

Alongside such committed partners, the council is able to work intensively with individual rough sleepers and, for those that are willing to engage, ensure there are short and long term solutions available.

I am gratified that, in this local authority area at least, the provision of such a high level of support and assistance to vulnerable rough sleepers is available every day and not dependent on the weather conditions."

Question 8

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

“I am aware of the considerable and fast moving work being undertaken by the city council and partners to ensure our council owned tower blocks remain safe and comply with all safety standards. Since our last meeting can the cabinet member for council housing comment on the continuing progress made?”

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“A comprehensive review of fire risk and safety in residential tower blocks in Norwich was commissioned on 15 June and an initial draft report has been produced by NPS Norwich. This has been issued to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service for comment.

During the period of the review, there has been regular contact between NPS Norwich the Council and Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service whilst consulting and collaborating with a number of technical organisations and individuals who specialise in fire safety and fire prevention and control.

The key recommendations focus on the importance of taking an holistic fire safety management. In other words, compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is not just about being able to produce a fire risk assessment for the premises. but also requires the ability to demonstrate that the fire safety of premises is managed in a total and holistic manner.

Total fire safety requires a full understanding of the impacts and implications that issues such as maintaining fire safety provision, training staff, and communicating and collaborating with all building users will have on our residents. Complete fire safety awareness will only be achieved through understanding how these factors interact with one another and impact on the building and users as a whole. This includes an understanding of the resilience of a building to fire in respect of protecting property, residential continuity and potential environmental impacts.

In practice the Council will

- conduct a full-scale physical detailed inspection and specialist survey of all 8 residential tower blocks which are in the property portfolio
- inspect all individual flats in tower blocks. Residents have been informed of this and indeed some had requested that the Council undertook this task. This work will take place over a 12 week period and will give clear knowledge to the Council to ensure the safety and well-being of residents who live in the tower blocks
- identify any breeches to ‘compartmentation’ will be noted and reviewed against historic repairs and maintenance work programs to understand any gaps

- investigate the needs and challenges of implementing any upgrades that may be required in the towers to improve and install fire safety measures such as alarms, detection and suppression systems.

To ensure ongoing safety the council in conjunction with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service will develop a “fit for purpose” methodology of risk assessments for each tower ensuring that there are clear protocols produced for annual sign-off related back to the holistic fire safety management of the tower blocks, including developing a refreshed evacuation plan and a clear means of escape policy giving clear consideration on advice and guidance to “stay put”, the specific needs of vulnerable residents and escape routes.

Officers from the council, NPS Norwich and Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service will be meeting regularly to review progress on this work and the council’s caretakers and housing officers will continue to provide reassurance and respond to questions that residents of our towers may have.

The council will continue to monitor any emerging recommendations from the Norfolk fire and rescue service and the Department for communities and local government and consider how it responds to any changes to guidance or legislation that results from the public inquiry for Grenfell Tower.”

Question 9

Councillor Packer to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“It was reported that Norfolk County Council will make a further £125m cuts on top of the £334m already achieved by 2021, transporting Tory central government austerity upon the wider city and county. We have already begun to see the impact of these cuts upon many jointly commissioned services of this council, including supported housing. Can the Leader give assurances that he will continue to make the strongest case possible for protecting valued Norwich services and highlight the damage and additional, often preventable, costs which will be caused by these changes?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council’s response:

“Can I thank Councillor Packer for his timely question and can I assure him that I am making every effort in my role as leader of the council to challenge the ruinous and frankly inhumane policies of the Conservative Government and specifically the impact on the citizens of Norwich. We may have a hung parliament but the cuts machine roles on. The motion on an ‘alternative Queen’s speech’, unanimously passed at the June Council, illustrated how technical changes and local freedoms and flexibilities can be a first step in stabilising the city council’s budget (and for that matter the county council’s) and start restoring much needed investment in social fabric.

We also know from the Queen’s speech that the funding model for local government based on a localised system of business rate retention has now been abandoned at a halfway point in the timetable for its full implementation. Besides being an intrinsically flawed and unstable system for funding councils it leaves the question as to whether the Conservative

government will continue to cut Revenue Support Grant. Tory and coalition governments over the past seven years have abandoned this equalisation mechanism – based on need – multiplying damaging social, economic and environmental consequences for communities.

There is of course an alternative: known by its shorthand as ‘inclusive growth’, or ‘good growth’ which sees social investment as integral to building a society that everyone benefits from and one which invests in people to create a successful economy and a fundamentally more equal society. We are advocating this approach not just for ourselves but also in working with our partners to shape the future direction of the city.

Councillor Packer’s question specifically referenced the impact of central government funding cuts on jointly commissioned services between the city and county councils. The ramifications of these budget cuts will ultimately cost more than the ‘savings’, shunting costs elsewhere and with a serious impact on the lives of those people relying on these services – as detailed below.

Building Resilient Lives is Norfolk County Council’s programme to reshape housing related support services. The amount the county spend on housing related support will reduce from £10.5m in 2016/17, to £7.925m in 2017/18 and £4.7m in 2018/19. This will be achieved by:

- a) Investment of £3.2m (a reduction of 20%) in crisis accommodation (homeless hostels) for young people and single adults who are homeless (Dec 2017)
- b) Reinvestment of around £1.3 - £1.5m in interventions which will positively impact on needs for people on the edge of more formal care (March 2018 at the earliest)
- c) Decommissioning of:
 - I. Support in sheltered housing (Feb 2018) and outreach for older people (Sept 2017)
 - II. Generic floating support (Nov 2017) and mental health floating support (Sept 2017)
 - III. Support to move on accommodation for homelessness and young people’s services including supported lodgings (Dec 2017)

The Care Act says that the county have to make sure there are **prevention services** available in Norfolk, but they can choose how this is provided.

The **supported housing cuts** are:

Year	Supporting People budget	Diff
16/17	£10m	
17/18	£7.925m	- £2.075m
18/19	£4.5m	–£5.5m

The budget currently pays for housing related support costs for the following services across Norfolk:

- Sheltered housing
- Hostels and supported housing for homeless people
- Supported lodgings
- Floating support for people living in their own homes that have mental health problems or need help to live independently

The cuts will mean that the following services will be closed:

- Mental health floating support service
- Generic floating support service
- Some supported housing services
- Removal of housing related support funding for all sheltered housing

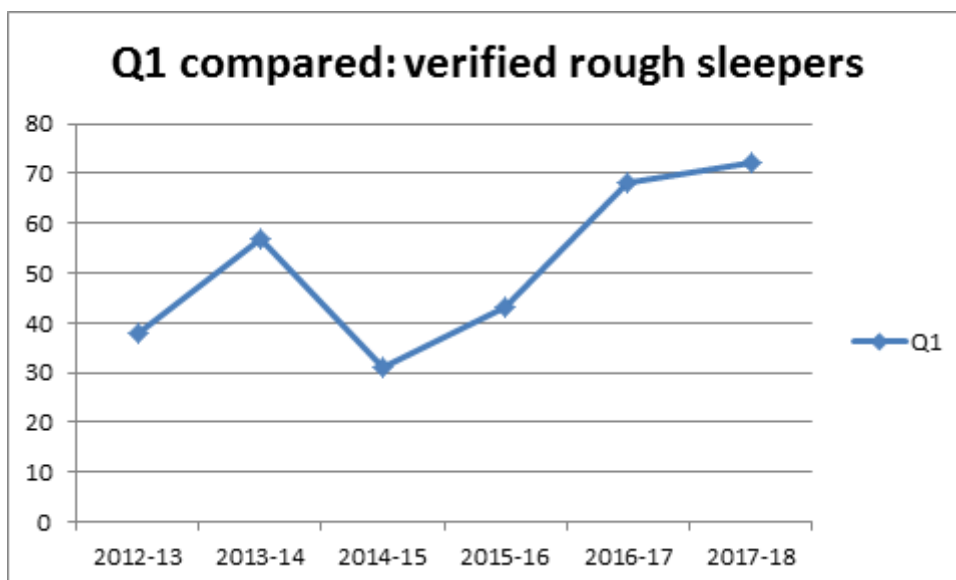
The following services are likely to remain but will be faced with a 20% cut in their housing related support budget:

- Main direct access hostels
- Hostels (dependent on business model)
- Supported housing with clients who have a higher level of need

In terms of sheltered housing the funding being lost to the city council is £292,500. As you know, discussions are in progress with tenants of sheltered housing schemes to understand their support needs so future options can be considered.

Rough sleeping

The latest rough sleeping report shows record numbers of rough sleepers.



The above chart shows the number of “known” individuals. The table below shows the number of known and unknown individuals in Q1 16/17 and 17/18.

Q1	2016/17	2017/18
Known	68	72
Unknown	28	54
Total	96	126

There are a number of reasons why Norwich is seeing such large increases including:

- Austerity-driven welfare reforms
- Overall increase in poverty
- Structural issues in the housing market (affordability, ending of assured short hold tenancies)
- Tightening of criteria of access to statutory services caused by legislative changes (Health and Social Care Act 2012) and funding cuts
- Insecure working patterns
- Cuts to preventative services (Supporting people funding)

This will increase further with supported housing budget cuts, continuing welfare reform and with the introduction of universal credit next year.

Funding to the families unit

The county council withdrew funding of £150,500 per year to the service at the end of March 2017 which has now closed. The service would work with other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide integrated support plans to families with children to achieve three main objectives, namely:

- To support and challenge families and children to enable them to maintain their tenancies and live within the limits of acceptable behaviour
- To reduce the breakdown of family relationships through improved parenting skills, money and household management
- To maximise children and young people’s opportunities to attend school through improved attendance

The city council now fully fund a specialist support team whose focus is to support the most complex individuals and families sustain their tenancies and work related to children in families specifically, which was funded by Norfolk County Council has stopped.

Norfolk County Council - Promoting Independence strategy (future approach for adults)

- Empower and enable people to live independently for as long as possible
- Care and support is focused on improving people’s overall life outcomes

- Formal long term services only as last resort
- Work with local communities / district councils / local partners
- Develop solutions / market in local communities where there are little choice

Advice and guidance budget cuts

The recommissioning of information advice and advocacy services and planned savings of £0.063m has been moved from 2017-18 to 2018-19. It is unclear what the impact of these cuts will be.

At Norwich City Council, we know that people require advice at different times in their life or changes to one's life or circumstances. These life changes can be traumatic and advice can help provide people with a direction. Where these life changes affect vulnerable people then advice plays an even greater role in protecting people from making unwise decisions.

Whilst in many cases people can make well informed decisions from families and friends who can help them in their choices, for many this is not an option and the availability of easy free at the point of access advice can make a big difference to those individuals at that time but also prevent the need for higher cost interventions at a later time.

The withdrawal of resources to the sector will not stop the need.

If the county council accept the importance of prevention and early help as a starting point, it is important that good quality advice that is free at the point of access is available as demand will not go away with the withdrawal of funding to commission services.

Norfolk County Council should also consider how the provision of Information Advice and Guidance, (IAG) feeds into the wider prevention agenda, especially in the context of the systemic risk presented by the proposed cuts to housing support. There is a risk that some of our most vulnerable residents will lose multiple possible sources of support at the same time."

Question 10

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

"I was pleased to see the launch of the Crowdfund Norwich platform which will support community groups, social enterprises and charities across the city. Can the cabinet member for safe, stronger neighbourhoods comment on the positive opportunities this fund will give?"

Councillor Herries, cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods' response:

"Crowdfunding has become an increasingly popular means of raising money in recent times, allowing people to turn their project ideas into reality by receiving pledges from individuals and local businesses. Successful independent projects such as the Feed crowdfunding

£21,000 for their new market stall, or Foodhub recently raising £3,100 has shown Norwich has an appetite for funding its own community projects plus a skilled and innovative voluntary, community and social enterprise, (VCSE) sector ready to use it.

The council's new Crowdfund Norwich page, which forms part of the **Get involved** programme of community enabling, will feature any local Crowdfunder projects – the site can be found at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/funds/crowdfund-norwich - so people looking to gain funding and support for a local project have a platform to attract funding and where those looking to give to a local project can find exciting projects and causes with ease.

The council has set aside an initial sum of £50,000 of funding for community projects on Crowdfund Norwich, money which comes from the council's neighbourhood element of the community infrastructure levy (CIL) – a fund of money generated by planning charges made to developers as a way to support the growth their developments will bring to an area. This will be for projects which support areas of growth in the city including projects in parks and open spaces, community buildings, resident training, and safety and accessibility projects.

There have already been multiple enquiries into the platform, an article in Citizen, and internal coaches are supporting groups to develop proposals and projects.

Where projects are found unsuitable for council funding, this has not put off project owners and the council's coaches are helping them to develop their projects for public funding as well as other sources of funding on the Crowdfunding site, such as those from the Arts Council or specific businesses where there is a link.

The main positive objectives the council have are:

- To give the local community more ownership of decisions made on how neighbourhood CIL money should be spent, ensuring our investment reflects local need
- To raise additional monies against our own investment – Crowdfunder as a model averages an additional £1.67 is raised against ever £1 of council investment from their other council projects
- To give additional visibility and reputational support to projects in the city
- Crowdfunder reports that a pledge of any cash amount from a council or large funding body to a project increases the average size of subsequent public pledges
- To use the Crowdfunding training as an opportunity to connect with and upskill new and existing VCSE groups and residents, helping them develop positive and safe projects. Once groups are trained and confident, they can use this method for other projects independently, giving them access to additional funding sources
- To target the council's support, allowing more capable groups to raise their own funds allowing council officers more time to spend with those less capable groups where they can support both on crowdfunder and other grant options where needed
- To engage residents in their local projects, not only as financial backers but also as volunteers and users of the finished project
- To identify larger projects as suggested by residents which may not suit crowdfunding but could be larger CIL investment projects in the longer term.”

Question 11

Councillor Woollard to ask the cabinet member for safe city environment the following question:

“Representing Mile Cross, which has suffered considerably in recent months with violent offences linked to illegal drugs activity in the county, I was very pleased to learn that more than 170 people have now been arrested under Operation Gravity. Breaking up organised crime is vital to ensuring peace of mind and security for my residents. Can the cabinet member for safe city environment comment on the ongoing partnership and work between this council and other agencies tasked to deliver community safety in our city?”

Councillor Maguire, cabinet member for safe city environment’s response:

“The complex problem of organised drug activity in the city has presented a considerable challenge for both the Norfolk Constabulary and police, not least because as well as the increased level of drugs, it is vulnerable residents who tend to be targeted for ‘cuckooing’ and exploitation by drug dealing groups.

Working with the police and other partners, the council’s ABATE team are approaching this issue on a case by case basis and are using a variety of tools and measures including the use of closure orders, where premises can be closed for 3 months, possession action using the mandatory ground (where a property can be re-possessed quickly for the most serious issues of anti-social behaviour and crime), managed moves where appropriate and liaison with other councils to assist those fleeing violence. In conjunction with this, victims are offered appropriate support from either the council’s specialist support team or from a partner support service, accessed via the Norwich early help hub.

Very recently, the council’s ABATE team manager attended a conference organised by the ‘Tackling Crime Unit’ at the Home Office, where a number of similarly affected councils, housing providers and the police met to share approaches around best practice to this national problem. The experience of other towns and cities is very similar to ours in Norwich. Officers are part of a new online forum for frontline practitioners across a range of sectors, which enables the council to share information and seek advice on all matters related to organised drug dealing known as ‘County Lines’.

The Home Office is currently in the process of finalising a guidance document for frontline officers on identifying and appropriately referring concerns about this drug related activity. All frontline council officers have had information on indicators of organised drug crime and where to report it, via the Operation Gravity information booklet, ‘10 things you need to know about Gravity’.

Officers in housing and area management officers, have all had information on what to look for and who is vulnerable and the ABATE team continue to work very closely with police partners to identify affected properties and take appropriate action to tackle this challenging problem.”

Question 12

Councillor Bremner to ask the cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“I was pleased to see the cabinet member for social housing attend the golden brick ceremony at the new Leander Court development off Bluebell Road. The ceremony related to the build of 20 affordable sheltered apartments, due for completion in spring 2018. Can the cabinet member comment on the partnership arrangement and funding which was facilitated by the city council and Norwich Housing Society to deliver this really important part of a much bigger commercial housing scheme?”

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“In 2012 the council entered into an agreement with the department for communities and local government to retain any receipts from right to buy, (RTB) for the provision of affordable housing in the city.

The government subsequently introduced the reduction in social rents by 1% per annum for four years from 2016/17 and proposed in the *Housing and planning act* to make local authorities dispose of high value void properties to fund RTB for providers. These legislative changes mean that the council has had to consider its future ambitions for additional new-build affordable housing and as such holds surplus RTB receipts under the one for one replacement programme that we will be unable to spend ourselves.

To ensure that this money was retained for investment within Norwich, and to mitigate against having to pay high interest charges back to central government, in October 2015 cabinet agreed that we will seek to:

- i) spend first on the council’s own housing capital programme; and
- ii) where we do not expect to be able to spend in full we will seek to pass the remainder to registered providers to develop social rented housing as a first priority and affordable rented housing where this is not possible.

Since agreeing this policy cabinet has approved a total of £8.8m in grant funding to registered providers for the delivery of 253 new affordable homes.

This has included the grant funding of £600,000 to Norwich Housing Society for the scheme at Leander Court.

This scheme is part of a wider development, by McCarthy and Stone, and is phase 1 of the Bartram Mowers site. This phase consists of 62 age restricted (over 55s) sheltered apartments and assisted living extra care accommodation with communal facilities. 20 of the 62 sheltered apartments are required to be affordable housing under the S106 agreement. Officers facilitated the introduction of Norwich Housing Society to McCarthy and Stone as they are a local registered provider who is a specialist in accommodation for older people.

The Society also previously owned 12 houses in the city which were let to general needs families. They decided to dispose of these properties as they wished to concentrate on accommodation for older people. The council held restrictive covenants over these properties which were agreed to be lifted providing the proceeds were used for additional affordable housing in Norwich. The proceeds have provided the additional funding needed for Leander Court. The former tenants were all found suitable alternative accommodation with assistance from the council's Home Options team.