



Council

26 January 2016

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

“Norwich city centre has a very bad problem with air pollution which adversely affects the elderly and young and those who have respiratory problems.

Although it cannot be seen, the pollution is worse than London and exceeds the national standard of 40 micrograms of nitrogen oxide per cubic metre of air. For parts of Norwich the reading was 64.

Although the city council has an air quality action, plan I am concerned that simple measures like informing those responsible - mainly bus drivers, taxi drivers and delivery vehicle drivers – and asking them to turn their engines off is not being done.

Can the portfolio holder explain what practical steps Norwich City Council is taking to stop taxis, bus drivers and motorists from keeping their engines running while stationary on the city centre streets of Norwich?”

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development’s response:

“I really welcome this question as it allows us all to dispel some myths and some frank un-truths. Firstly, Norwich City centre does NOT have “a very bad problem with air pollution”. Although the whole city centre has been declared an air quality management area, it is only at a number of relatively localised places in or adjacent to the city centre where EU limit values for nitrogen oxide have been exceeded. The highest levels recorded have been at Castle Meadow where not only the annual mean but also the one hour European Union (EU) limit values were exceeded in 2013.

I am pleased to say, however, that provisional data for 2015 shows that levels of nitrogen dioxide have been well within the one hour EU limit value. Also the annual mean level of nitrogen dioxide has reduced from 64 to 51 micrograms per cubic metre. This is a welcome improvement but is still above the annual mean EU limit value of 40 micrograms per cubic metre.

The next myth that needs to be dispelled is “the pollution is worse than London”. That is so wrong it’s silly. The situation is no way as severe as in London, contrary to what has been reported. Exceedances of the annual mean EU limit value are widespread in London and in the worst two locations

in 2013, for example, the levels of nitrogen dioxide were double that found in Castle Meadow.

That said, I totally agree that air quality is a serious health issue and one which both the city council and county council are committed to addressing. I am therefore very pleased that Norfolk County Council has been offered a £416,060 grant by the government under the Clean Bus Technology Fund towards cleaning up exhaust emissions. The money will be used to retro-fit 15 Euro III buses and 9 Euro IV buses which are regularly operated by local bus companies along the street. The anticipated improvement will be to Euro 5/6 standard.

Now here is an amazing 'myth' – which some would call a lie. In locally distributed leaflets, one political party claimed that they had won "Cleaner Buses for Norwich"! In the leaflet they go on to say that the bid followed a request by one of their councillors to the Norwich Highways Agency Committee (NHAC). They even went to say that they had "persuaded the city council to request additional resources from the government for healthy air quality and to work with local bus operators to meet stricter emission standards."

Work on the government bid was already in place and up and running by Norfolk County Council well before the NHAC meeting and they did not do anything in response to any Councillor contacts. In fact, a city council officer told the county council about the Clean Bus Technology Fund the moment that the government made it public and the county were already on the case. If you read the leaflet, you will see that it contains a fantasy about persuading the city council to do things about pollution and to work with bus companies - something which the city has been doing for years, constantly, because the officers know exactly what the Labour administration wants them to do!

So well done to the officers of the city and county councils for all their hard work in getting this funding to clean up the buses in the city - and shame on the political party that claimed that they did it when they had no part to play whatsoever.

But let's get to your question about engine switch off. The investment in clean up technology is one element of the overall air quality strategy for Norwich which was approved by cabinet in October. There are a number of strands to the strategy and included in the armoury is engine switch-off which has a potentially important role to play so I am really pleased that you raised that.

Previously the council has explored the use of a traffic regulation order to allow the enforcement of engine switch-off of all vehicles using the street. This would require special signage however which the Department for Transport are unprepared to authorise. They have advised the council of powers within the Environment Act 1995 which are currently being explored with a view to using the civil enforcement officers to implement if necessary.

In the meantime the county council are regularly in touch with all bus companies to remind them of the need to switch off engines when stationary

for any lengthy period. Bus companies acknowledge this is important as it also helps save fuel. Also council officers will be reminding hackney carriage licensees of the need to switch off their engine.

I also think it is time that the people should also remind bus drivers, taxi and hire car drivers, truck drivers and ordinary motorists to switch off the engine while stuck in a queue. Maybe we can get posters in shop windows (the Department for Transport can't affect them) saying something like "STOP THE STINK – Switch off your engine!"

Question 2

Councillor Herries to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

"Given the rapid change in weather since our last council meeting, can the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing give her comments and opinions on the proactive steps the city council, working with partners, is taking to provide support for rough sleepers in the city?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing's response:

"Severe weather and emergency provisions (SWEP) is the process which is put in place to ensure people sleeping rough in Norwich are not at risk of harm or death during periods of cold and severe weather.

The most recent episode of SWEP started on Thursday, 14 January and concluded on Thursday, 21 January.

SWEP is managed by the rough sleeper coordinator and the housing advice team at City Hall. Planning and preparations for SWEP started well in advance of the recent cold snap and have involved a number of partner organisations that work with the most vulnerable people in the city.

The number of SWEP spaces provided this year is 23 and can be age and gender specific and also includes accommodation where the providers welcome pets and dogs.

In anticipation of SWEP, the outreach team has been actively informing rough sleepers about the service by printing and giving out information leaflets. In addition, this information has been widely shared with agencies including, Salvation Army day centre, City Reach Health Service, Mancroft Advice Project, Red Cross, local police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs).

The accommodation is provided by the supported accommodation agencies in Norwich and South Norfolk who provide 24/7 waking cover during SWEP. In addition to the accommodation, individuals are offered help and assistance with various issues such as accessing welfare benefits, register with a GP or referral to supported accommodation.

In cases when a rough sleeper refuses to accept accommodation, the team has been working with health professionals to carry out mental capacity assessments.

This year the council also worked with the Norwich Foodbank who devised 'kettle boxes' which can be used by individuals accessing SWEP without access to cooking facilities."

Question 3

Councillor Ryan to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"I was pleased to read that the Norfolk Car Club, which was established in 2009 with just two cars, has continued to develop and grow in recent years.

Can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his opinions on the support and help this council has provided the car club in its development and progress?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"It is, of course, fantastic that the Car Club has proved to be such a success in Norwich and again this year it looks poised to significantly increase its membership and car availability, following last year's record increase. The Club now has over 600 members, with more than half of these joining in the past twelve months. Forty new members joined in the first ten days of this year, which is a record and clearly shows that the club is now a well-established part of city life.

Not only does the club provide cost effective use of a car for local residents and businesses, it reduces the pressure on limited parking. There would have been scores more cars attempting to park on narrow Norwich streets, were it not for the success of the club.

The council has been instrumental in the success of the car club - firstly by enabling its' establishment and in successive years facilitating its expansion. I am afraid that I am going to have to indulge in a little history lesson taking us back long before 2009.

At the turn of the millennium, a time when car clubs were in their infancy in the UK, the council consulted on policies to encourage Car Clubs in the city as part of the Local Plan process. This resulted in their adoption in the Local Plan back in 2004. This policy background was instrumental in achieving European funding through the CIVITAS programme in 2005 towards establishing a car club in Norwich.

The first Car Club cars arrived in the city during 2005 and long-standing members may recall that there was significant criticism of the concept and doubt that it would ever work here in Norwich. When the CIVITAS funding ended in 2009, this coincided with a restructuring of the then operator, City Car Club, who consolidated their operations elsewhere and left the city taking their six cars with them.

Unwilling to lose the momentum that was building behind the car club concept, the council took steps to secure a new provider. Norfolk Car Club won the tender and proceeded to replace the previous operator fleet. The rest is history and the car club now has 38 vehicles and expects to double in size again this year, with a target of 60 new vehicles in place for March 2017.

Without the support of the council it is unlikely that the car club would be the success it is today. Making use of S106 funding from developers we have implemented designated spaces on-street across the city and contributed to the purchase of new vehicles. This has not only helped the Car Club but has enabled efficient use of development sites within the city, enabling us to meet housing targets without needing excessive amounts of land for car parking.

The commitment of the Norwich Highways Agency Committee has demonstrated to various funding organisations just how serious we are about promoting and expanding the club for the benefit of residents and businesses. Only last week it agreed to advertise on street bays in over 100 locations across the city, enabling the car club to demonstrate to would be investors the city's strong commitment and support for the car club concept.

Finally we should not overlook our commitment to promoting the car club. There have been articles in Citizen magazine and there is a dedicated page on our website. Permit holders are offered free membership of the Car Club, and we remind them of this every time their permits come up for renewal. At last year's Norwich 'One Planet' festival we had the most registrations ever for the Club over a weekend"

Question 4

Councillor Button to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

"Work on a pioneering £19m 'care village' in Bowthorpe is on course to be completed ahead of schedule – with the first residents due to move into their new home in April.

Given the increase in demand for specialist dementia care across both Norwich and the county, will the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing give her opinion on the positive support and joint partnership working which this administration has undertaken to help deliver this project?"

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing's response:

"Councillor Button, thank you for your question in regard to the 'Care Village' at Bowthorpe.

Work is progressing very well with this project and officers from the city development and housing service teams have been involved in both the strategic and operational planning of this partnership project. The city council has gifted the land to Norse Care as the first phase of the development of the Three Score site in Bowthorpe. The council has also ensured that the new spine road providing access to the scheme has been constructed and is ready to be used in time for the opening of the scheme. The council is also providing a direct pedestrian and cycle access to the scheme ahead of development of phase 2 of the development so that residents, staff and visitors have a safe and direct access to and from the care home on foot and by bike. The council provided support to the bid to the Homes and Communities Agency, which was successful in securing £4.2M of funding towards the scheme.

Once completed, the scheme will comprise 92 'housing with care' flats and 80 self-contained units for older people living with dementia. Saffron Housing Trust will be the landlord for the housing with care, with Norse Care being the provider of care for both the housing with care and dementia care unit. Norse Care will also be the landlord for the dementia care unit.

Staff from the housing service have been actively involved in the operational planning of this scheme, through a partnership approach with Norse Care, Norfolk County Council, Norwich CCG and Saffron Housing Trust.

The waiting list for the housing with care scheme will be managed by the sheltered housing service, as with the existing housing with care schemes in the city, working in partnership with adult social services and Saffron Housing Trust.

The 'Care Village' wants to engage with the local community of Bowthorpe. Residents will have access to and be able to enjoy the communal facilities on offer at the housing with care scheme. This will be of particular benefit to our tenants living at our sheltered housing schemes; Bradecroft, Seabrook and Alnwick Court. Integration will also be encouraged through the use of the new area of open space which will serve both parts of the overall development."

Question 5

Councillor Woollard to ask the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing:

“The newly refurbished sheltered housing scheme, St James House, will be ready to welcome its first residents in spring. Significant investment and improvements have been made to the scheme which will benefit residents.

Can the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing give her opinion on the work achieved to re-develop the scheme and the importance of providing good quality sheltered housing for our city?”

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for housing and wellbeing’s response:

“Councillor Woollard, thank you for your question regarding the refurbishment of St James House.

I am pleased to say that the refurbishment is progressing well and is due for completion in April 2016. The scheme will be the council’s flagship sheltered housing scheme, being built to exemplar standards and offering two one-bedroomed semi-detached bungalows together with 32 one-bedroomed flats, varying in sizes and suitable for either single older people or couples. All flats have a fitted kitchen, are carpeted and have fully tiled wet rooms. The scheme will be connected through to Norwich Community Alarm Service by means of a warden call system.

The build project has been very successful due to the excellent partnership between the contractor Gills, sub-contractors, NPS Norwich and the city council, being project managed by NPS Norwich.

Significant investment and improvements have been made to these schemes, including the remodelling of the majority of flats to allow for better space standards, new roof, drainage system, power supply and photo-voltaic (PV) solar panels which help to offset set the cost of the district heating system for tenants. All first floor flats will have French doors opening on to a Juliette balcony. The ground floor flats will have French doors opening out on their own private patio areas.

The communal gardens have been landscaped to allow for level access and provide a safer environment for tenants. Communal areas will include a dining room, where activities and meals can be provided, which will be facilitated by the sheltered housing staff; a quiet lounge, together with a guest suite, mobility scooter store room and laundry facilities.

Throughout this project the council has engaged and consulted with tenants, but of those decanted, only two tenants have decided to return to their original homes. Both have chosen their kitchen, which includes units, flooring and tiles, and full support will be given to them to move back to their homes.

Tenants' representatives from the sheltered housing involvement panel have been consulted on the style and choice of all communal furniture and the landscape design. They have also been consulted on the warden call system and the evaluation of the tenders for the furniture provider.

Finally, the council is about to conclude a series of open days which have been offered to older people on the waiting list for sheltered housing. These have been organised by the sheltered housing staff and have been held over the last three Saturdays. Some 120 prospective applicants visited the two show flats with very positive feedback about the high quality of the flats and a number expressing an interest in moving. From the feedback received it is anticipated that there will be high demand for this scheme.

The high quality refurbishment of St James House, together with the work undertaken as part of our enhanced void offer, ensures that we continue to provide good quality sheltered housing for our city and somewhere older people will want to move to make it their home. This has the potential to free up much needed family housing, offers the opportunity to create 'aspirational' housing for older people and contributes to the drive from older people themselves - as well as from national policy - to remain living in the community."

Question 6

Councillor Manning to ask the cabinet member for fairness and equality:

"Norwich's Big Switch and Save is again open for registration, until Monday 1 February, giving residents a great chance of saving money on their energy bills.

Can the cabinet member for fairness and equality give his opinion on the previous successes achieved with Switch and Save and the steps taken to promote it more widely?"

Councillor Vaughn Thomas, cabinet member for fairness and equality's response:

"Thank you for your timely question. With the recent cold weather our citizens will be thinking about energy bills and considering their affordability. Thankfully we are helping our citizens reduce their fuel bills via the Big Switch and Save.

We are currently running the seventh round of our successful collective energy switching scheme. Through the power of collective purchasing, we work to secure the lowest energy prices for our registrants, therefore helping to reduce the cost of energy and offset rising energy prices. The previous round of Big Switch and Save has delivered average savings of £230 a year per household. This was a better saving than those available through online comparison websites.

In the last five tranches overall 13,240 people registered for the Switch and Save scheme. Norwich has repeatedly had the highest national conversion rates, with an overall figure of around 2000 switchers.

If all homes took up the offered savings, a total of at least £ £2.3 million would be saved on energy bills by Norwich residents.

For this tranche, Norwich City Council has engaged with fuel poor households in innovative ways, including the use of case studies where pensioners held up a card showing their real savings from previous Switch and Save rounds. This was published as an advertorial in the evening news. In addition to this, we have launched a refer-a-friend campaign. Along with attending community events, organising library advice drop-ins, supermarket and hospital roadshows, sending a mail-out to fuel poor households and leafleting in fuel poor areas.

Norwich City Council always endeavours to engage with fuel poor households to ensure that they are aware of the Switch and Save scheme. In tranche three we asked the residents questions to identify whether they belonged to an affordable warmth group. The results showed that around two thirds of registrants belonged to one of these groups.

In addition to this, the small fee we receive from the Switch and Save goes back into affordable warmth work. This has been invaluable for vulnerable residents, as it has provided urgent heating need for them in the winter."

Question 7

Councillor Maxwell to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"Schools, businesses, local food producers, community groups and homeowners are being urged to enter an even bigger Eco Awards this year, with the closing date being 12 February. The aim is to celebrate projects and schemes with a strong ecological or environmentally-friendly ethos or groups and organisations which can show they adopt a sound eco approach to all their business.

Can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his opinion on the increased benefits and opportunities of working with Norfolk County Council on this project?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"Thank you for your question. Norwich City Council has successfully run the Eco-Awards for the past 8 years. The aim of the awards has always been to celebrate the environmental excellence of eco-projects going on across our fine city. In previous years over 80 projects have received recognition for their excellent eco-work, ranging from eco-hairstylists to community gardens,

environmental school projects to energy reduction initiatives in local businesses. However, every year we have been consistently approached by entries outside of the Norwich City boundary, which we regrettably had to turn down.

Towards the end of last year we were approached by Norfolk County Council regarding working together to make the awards county-wide. This is why this year we're now welcoming entries from Norwich and across the whole county to apply for the Norwich and Norfolk Eco Awards. Two new categories of eco home and eco food producer have been added to the usual four of eco primary school, eco secondary school, eco small/medium business and eco community group.

The new and improved Eco Awards give us the opportunity to celebrate a wider range of eco-projects happening across Norfolk and to share good practice throughout the county. We are really pleased to have already seen an increase in variety and calibre of entries since the new awards were launched in December.

Another benefit of working with Norfolk County Council is the added promotion of Norwich City Council's sustainable living festival. The official eco awards ceremony will be held at The Forum on Saturday 12 March as part of the One Planet Norwich Festival. It was decided to bring to the two events together to have a weekend long celebration of environmental achievements, organisations and engaging eco activities in Norwich and Norfolk."

Question 8

Councillor Stonard to ask the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"Since our previous council meeting, Norwich City Council celebrated its role in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and the difference it has made to driving up hygiene standards in food outlets across the city.

Can the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety give his opinion on the successes achieved through the scheme and how other local authorities (325 out of 326) have copied it?"

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"Following the launch of the Norwich Safer Food Award in 2005 local authorities around the UK adopted, adapted and launched their own schemes based on the same principles. The scoring and styling of the awards varied to suit local circumstances, with one commercial organisation designing a 'Scores on The Doors' scheme that many authorities adopted.

The Food Standards Agency and local authorities were concerned at the inconsistencies in having so many different schemes across the country and

researched a scheme that would be suitable for national adoption. The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme was created and due to the close working relationship Norwich City Council Public Protection Team has with the Food Standards Agency, Norwich became the first local authority to launch the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Following our lead the scheme has been adopted by all but one local authority in England.

The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme has improved food hygiene nationally. In the first year of operation, broad compliance (equivalent to a FHRS rating of 3 or above) amongst food premises improved by 2.0 percent. In the first 2 years the number of 5 rated premises (fully compliant) increased by 3.3%. In January 2016, 93% (1225) of Norwich food businesses in the scheme (1318) are broadly compliant and almost 50% (652) have a 5 rating.

The display of the rating by businesses in England is currently voluntary unlike in Wales where display has been compulsory since November 2013. Welsh food hygiene standards have been shown to improve even more than in England since that time. With this evidence the Food Standards Agency is now lobbying the government for the compulsory display of food hygiene ratings in England."

Question 9

Councillor Sands (M) to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"On Tuesday 12 January, a Labour amendment to the government's housing and planning bill - designed to ensure that all rented accommodation was safe for people to live in - was defeated by 312 votes to 219, a majority of 93.

While the majority of landlords let property which is - and remains - in a decent standard and many landlords go out of their way to ensure that even the slightest safety hazard is sorted quickly and efficiently, it is even more distressing when I see cases of homes which are frankly unfit for human habitation being let, often at obscene prices.

Despite the refusal of the government to take national action, can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his opinion on the ongoing - and innovative - work this council is undertaking to tackle poor quality landlords in our city?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

"The council has a statutory duty to identify and take action to remedy unsafe living conditions in privately rented accommodation. This work is carried-out by our private sector housing team which, on average, deals with 400 complaints about living conditions every year. In addition, the team targets high risk premises such as staff accommodation above restaurants and houses of multiple occupation where the landlord or agent has a record of

poor management. It also implements the statutory licensing scheme for houses of multiple occupation.

The privately rented sector in Norwich now exceeds 20% of all housing (about 14,000 homes) and has doubled in size over the last ten years. Recent research carried out for the council by the Building Research Establishment indicates that 20% of this accommodation in Norwich (2,800 homes) contains a category 1 hazard. These are hazards that are likely to have a significant impact on the health of the occupants and homes where they exist can be thought of as being 'unfit for human habitation'. The current team is able to tackle about 100 hazardous properties a year through enforcement.

With this in mind, we have, for some years, successfully used a toolkit to help tenants take their own action where they have a complaint about their rented home. This includes standard letter templates and advice about their rights. We always follow these complaints up to ensure that the problem has been dealt with and will always visit if a landlord fails to respond or if the problem is one that needs immediate action by the team. Enforcement action includes the service of improvement notices, prohibition orders and - in a small number of cases - prosecution.

We also work closely with local landlords and managing agents to jointly bring about improvements in the sector. This work has led to a new scheme which it is hoped will launch very shortly. The Norwich Property Registration Scheme will ask landlords to agree to abide by the national code of practice for the privately rented sector and to register individual properties with the council. Those properties will be listed on the council's website so it will be possible for tenants and members of the public to challenge any that they believe do not comply with the standard. This will benefit good landlords who wish to distance themselves from poor practices within the sector and tenants who want to ensure that a home that they may be interested in renting is well managed by a good landlord. Landlords who don't comply with the terms of the scheme may be suspended and ultimately removed.

If the scheme is a success it will enable the council to adopt a 'light touch' when dealing with these properties, freeing up our limited resource to tackle criminal landlords.

The government is currently consulting about extending the scope of the statutory licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation to increase the number that will require a licence. In Norwich, the current scheme only applies to about 160 houses in multiple occupation out of a total of 3,000. Notwithstanding that possibility, we intend to carry out a consultation to consider whether we should introduce an additional licensing scheme so that more properties are regulated and whether or not there is a case for introducing selective licensing of all privately rented accommodation on an area basis. Any new licensing scheme would be closely linked to property registration, potentially exempting members of our new voluntary scheme from licensing. This would act as an encouragement for landlords to ensure that their properties comply with the law whilst reducing the council resource needed to enforce a licensing scheme.

In summary, the council makes good use of the limited resource that it has to tackle the significant problem of poor housing in Norwich's private rented sector. It is also introducing innovations to bring about improvements in the sector and to enable the worst properties to be effectively targeted for enforcement action."

Question 10

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development:

"Earlier this month, Nelson and Town Close ward councillors learnt that a multi-agency meeting had been held in 2013 concerning the low budget lodgings on Earlham Road and Unthank Road in 2013 about which we were never informed nor briefed. Neither did the city council at the time advise ward councillors about their health and safety investigations relating to the windows of these properties in 2012 –13. From August 2013, I raised the white film on the windows as impacting on public amenity on many occasions and was told that action could only be taken in respect of the listed buildings.

The city council's role in the windows only became apparent when the owner showed me - in May 2015 - a letter dated 9 August 2013 from Norwich City Council environmental health, approving the health and safety action taken over the windows. When I asked the city council for a copy of the letter, I was twice informed via the council's solicitors that the letter could not be released to me. Instead, I was offered a briefing in place of the papers, but as a ward councillor I was entitled to the information requested. When I submitted a freedom of information request for background papers on the windows, my request was ignored.

Having contacted the Information Commissioner who rang and wrote to the council requesting their release, the council then told me that they did not hold the letter. Thereafter, some but not all of the background papers concerning the windows were sent to me, with evident gaps in the run of correspondence including the letter of 9 August 2013.

Why did the city council not inform ward councillors about the multi-agency meeting and try to withhold information requested by a ward councillor about the white film on the windows?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for environment and sustainable development's response:

As councillor Carlo knows - I hope - this issue has been both complex and long-running. The council, although it has a part to play, is by no means the only agency involved.

Multi-agency meetings between council officers' and external agencies occur all the time, on a regular basis, in relation to a wide range of issues. It is not a

practical, necessary, or sometimes possible for legal reasons, to brief councillors following every such meeting.

If councillor Carlo needs further information on this matter, I suggest she takes up the offer of a full briefing with officers, which she has so far - though offered - not taken up.

Question 11

Councillor Haynes to ask the cabinet member for resources and income generation:

“Last February, the Green group put an amendment to the council's 2015-6 budget which was accepted. Could the cabinet member update us on progress towards implementing the three proposals in the amendment and give us his opinion on whether he feels the efforts have produced tangible changes in Norwich?”

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for resources and income generation's response:

As councillor Haynes will be aware, the council has recently been taking steps to establish a housing company to develop the second phase of development at Threescore and with a view to bringing forward other housing development as well. Cabinet agreed the 2015-16 business plan for the company at its January 2016 meeting. This follows on from previous cabinet discussion and consideration of the proposal to establish a housing company in July 2015 and scrutiny committee review of the proposals in advance of that cabinet meeting.

The new housing at Threescore helps meet both housing need in the form of social housing as well as demand in the form of houses for sale and for private rent. Of the 172 dwellings, 112 will be built to Passivhaus standards. As well as these benefits, however, the purpose of this investment is to provide income to the council. In the case of the housing company's business plan it is anticipated to provide a return of £200,000 to the council in 2016-17.

Development of the housing company – along with bringing forward schemes focussed on social housing at Goldsmith Street and Hansard Close – has been the focus of capital investment work over the last 18 months or more. With no change to this focus cabinet has not considered it necessary to set up the working party as requested.

With the council facing continued budget pressure, coupled to an ambition to support the city's growth, there is likely to be a need to go beyond consideration of housing development as an investment mechanism. Such potential investment will form part of the transformation mechanism for which a member working party already exists. Equally, the scrutiny committee has a continuing interest in income generation which investment of this nature would

help deliver. Given this, I am not convinced of the need for a further working party at the present time.

With reference to securing joint funding with Norfolk County Council and Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust for a mental health officer, work is in progress with these and other public and voluntary sector partners, to develop more integrated working in Norwich. The focus of this is through an early help/early intervention approach to ensure services are available to those in need as early as possible to prevent later, higher cost interventions.

Members will also be aware that the council's commissioning programme for social welfare advice that was awarded to a consortium of voluntary sector advice organisations, includes an area to maximise income for vulnerable individuals such as, amongst others people with mental health issues.

The current focus is therefore to make best use of the resources that all organisations have rather than consider growth at a time when the council's budgets are under such pressure.

With regard to the costs of funding the Greater Norwich Growth Board the New Anglia LEP have maintained their position of making no financial contribution to the core costs associated with the operation of the Growth Board. The city council contributes equally to these costs with South Norfolk and Broadland Councils, whilst the county council contributes to a greater extent. The roles, governance and funding for the Greater Norwich Growth Board is due for review shortly.

Question 12

Councillor Schmierer to ask the cabinet member for resources and income generation:

"What measures are being taken to vet the suppliers and subcontractors used by Norwich City Council in order to ensure that these companies have not committed tax avoidance, either in Britain or in other countries around the world?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for resources and income generation's response:

Tax **avoidance** is defined as:

"the arrangement of one's financial affairs to minimise tax liability **within the law**."

Tax **evasion** is defined as

"the **illegal non-payment** or underpayment of tax."

The council has no authority to vet suppliers for tax avoidance.

The council is governed by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and this determines the grounds on which a supplier can be excluded from taking part in a public procurement.

Where the supplier has been **convicted of certain offences** the council **MUST** exclude them from taking part. There are various offences listed that relate to tax **evasion**. There is of course no offence for **tax avoidance** as it is of course, by definition, legal.

Also, where the council is “aware that the economic operator is in breach of its obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions” **AND** “the breach has been **established by a judicial or administrative decision** having final and binding effect in accordance with the legal provisions of the country in which it is established or with those of any of the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom” then the council must exclude the supplier from taking part in the procurement.

The council can only exclude suppliers on the grounds listed in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Suppliers are asked to complete a business questionnaire and must state in this any offences they have been convicted of or any other obligations they have breached (such as payment of taxes). There is no requirement and no legal basis for the council to ask questions about tax avoidance.