



**NORWICH**  
City Council

## **Council**

**16 March 2021**

### **Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees**

#### **Question 1**

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

“We have had many discussions recently about the importance of access to outdoor facilities, which now is more important than ever. Residents of Ely Street and the surrounding streets have asked for years now what is happening with the play park the council has closed off. This is an area with limited access to green spaces and outdoor facilities and it is a real shame that the only place where children and adults could exercise has been closed off for years. The community has made a number of suggestions about how this space could be used, including as a play area or a community garden. I requested an answer regarding what the council's plans were for this area in 2019, several times in 2020 and again at the beginning of this year. Could you please, after two years, give me an answer to my question?”

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

“The decision to close the Ely Street basketball play area, was made some time ago due to the dilapidation of the surface and concern for safety.

We are committed to bringing this area back into full sustainable use by local residents. Ely Street has been included within our estate programme. We have been seeking suggestions from the surrounding community with regard to how this space could be used and we will now seek to pursue these with the support of our community enabling colleagues.”

## Question 2

### **Councillor Schmierer to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“I was surprised when watching a recent interview with the Labour leader Keir Starmer. When asked about the current approach to drug policies he answered that he thinks this is 'roughly right'. I find this very concerning because we can all see that current drug policies are discriminatory, do not prevent harm and deaths from drug abuse and do not support rehabilitation. In addition, current drug policies fuel violence related to the illegal drug market and drug gangs and mean that our communities suffer the consequences of related crime and anti-social behaviour. In this council we only recently passed a motion which acknowledged these problematic aspects of the current approach to drug policies and asked for a radical change in UK drug policies. Can the leader of the council reassure me that the Labour group remains committed to the resolutions of the drug reform motion passed by this council in January 2020 and that the current approach is anything but 'roughly right'?”

### **Councillor Waters, the leader's response:**

“Thank you for your question. There is a far-reaching debate within the Labour Party regarding our future policy on drug sentencing reform, in the context of the devastating impact of addiction, organised crime; in particular, ‘County Lines’ and abuse. It is a complex landscape. At present our position remains that which was pledged in the 2019 general election manifesto which argued for “establish a royal commission to develop a public health approach to substance misuse, focusing on harm reduction rather than criminalisation”. A position consistent with the motion unanimously passed by the council at the beginning of last year”

### Question 3

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

“In September 2020, this council resolved to ask cabinet to take a number of actions to discourage fly-tipping. These included:

- investigating the cost, environmental impact and logistics of both introducing “community skips” in key locations across the city or regular fly-tipping “amnesties” as well as kerbside collections and call on government to provide effective local government funding to reduce the cost of waste disposal and subsequent cost of responding to fly-tipping.
- evaluating the current kerbside collection system, especially whether the costs and the service are suitable to the needs of residents, taking into account the impact of the planned creation of a new recycling centre in the north of Norwich to replace the existing one at the Mile Cross depot
- investigating working with partners and other councils to ensure greater enforcement action is taken against those who fly-tip in Norwich and call on Norfolk County Council to remove charges for the disposal of DIY waste at recycling centres.
- working with the Norwich Car Club to ensure that larger vehicles are available to residents who need to take bulky items to a recycling centre.

Can the cabinet member provide an update on these resolutions, in particular considering that bringing waste collection services back in house from 1 April provides an opportunity to fulfil many of the actions listed?”

#### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“Thank you for your question. Responding to each part of the motion mentioned above:

- Community skips generate substantial quantities of waste and therefore they encourage an irresponsible attitude to the consequences of disposal. These community skips therefore become cost prohibitive as the sorting of waste placed into each skip is expensive and instead the waste would be sent to landfill. Instead our priority is reducing the amount of waste produced per household per year. The majority of our residents manage their waste responsibly and do not fly-tip.
- The current kerbside service in Norwich is the most comprehensive in the county and includes a wide variety of things that are collected and facilities available to residents to properly dispose of their waste. We are still waiting on the outcome of the Environment Bill and subsequent developed legislation. We will provide a comprehensive appraisal on how this new legislation will affect the provision of services to

residents. It is, therefore, neither practical nor prudent to carry-out any review of the kerbside services at this time.

- We are continuously working with our partners through the Norfolk Waste Partnership. The SCRAP fly-tipping campaign helps to highlight how to prevent the crime and reporting it. The best way of stopping fly-tipping is preventing it and therefore the joint focus is on providing information to residents on where and how they can legally dispose their waste. We continue to work to reduce this by:
  - Providing information about the safe and responsible disposal of waste
  - Encouraging residents to report fly-tipping and provide as much evidence as possible
  - Quick and effective clearances of waste accumulations so as not to encourage further deposits - the online reporting service links directly to the removal crews and results in numerous compliments to the council from those who report fly-tipping on-line and are pleased to see it removed within 24 hours, often on the same day as it's reported.

We encourage residents to dispose of large items properly. We encourage them to consider re-use opportunities like donating to charity shops or using on-line services such as Freecycle. Alternatively, if the re-use is not an option then they can use the bulky item collection service. The car club already has large cars and vans available to hire by the hour.”

#### Question 4

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

“In May 2020 First Bus agreed to invest £15.8 million in 55 Euro VI diesel buses alongside the £32 million of Transforming Cities grant secured by the county and district councils. Whilst Euro VI diesel buses would benefit air quality, they would not deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. I wrote to the new managing director, Janette Bell at First Bus Head Office to enquire whether the company would consider switching the £15.8m to zero emission buses and refuelling facilities and would join any local working party on zero emission buses. Ms Bell replied positively to say that First Bus was open to the possibility of switching the planned investment to zero emissions, although clearly there were a lot of obstacles to overcome. She also replied that First is willing to participate in a local working party. I contacted Norfolk County Council transport team who have agreed to discuss with colleagues the idea of forming a local working party to develop a road map for rolling out zero emission buses in Norwich. Will the portfolio holder contact the county council and add his voice to the need for a working party and plan to set the Norwich bus fleet on the path to zero emissions??”

**Councillor Stonard, the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth’s response:**

“The agreement by First to upgrade its bus fleet as part of the Transforming Cities Fund programme is a result of the excellent work that we did with the county and First to shape the programme and secure government funding. It will help to clean the air and contribute to meeting our legal obligation to reduce NOx and particulates. Electric buses are best from an air quality and climate point of view, especially if the electricity is obtained from renewable sources. However, they cost much more than upgrading to the cleanest diesel engines so spending the funds on electric buses would leave dirty Euro 3 and 4 in service for longer which could undermine our air quality outcomes.

We will continue to work with the county to see how further improvements to the bus fleet can be made, including through a new working group. The county council has ongoing conversations with the Department for Transport and bus operators on the opportunities to provide a zero emission bus fleet in Norwich and applied to the All-Electric Bus Town Fund for £42m to convert 180 buses. Unfortunately, Norwich was unsuccessful along with 17 of the 19 applications but it showed the aspiration.

While exploring the scope for electrification of buses is important I welcome other moves to electrify transport through the work we are planning with UK Power Networks and the county council to facilitate on-street Electric Vehicle charging for residents’ cars and the electric mobility provided by the Beryl bike share schemes and e-scooter trial.”

## Question 5

### **Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“Residents of Beatrice Road have put up with flooding in their street, and occasionally their homes, for some years, due to a build up of leaves in gutters each autumn. A Green amendment to the council's budget asked for more regular sweeping of the street to prevent this build up of leaves and the flooding it potentially causes, but the administration rejected that proposal. Residents have cleared up the leaves themselves from time to time but need support from the council to dispose of the leaves, which they are now getting. This is an example of environmental services being delivered in the city in an inefficient way which could be improved if the council carefully considered the knowledge and suggestions of ward councillors and residents. In the light of this, would the cabinet member and the director of Norwich City Services Ltd agree to meet with me and councillors from other wards in early June, approximately two months after services are first provided by the council's wholly-owned company, to make use of local councillors' specific knowledge of inefficiencies in current service provision in their wards?”

### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable environment's response:**

“I am aware that additional cleaning has been carried-out in this locality previously and has not yet resolved this issue. A more structured approach, potentially involving the county council (for gulley cleaning) and other parties, may be required. We also need to be mindful that by attempting to resolve one problem we don't create another, or move this particular problem to another area.

I accept the concerns of residents and am supportive of a joint approach to examining this issue and designing a solution. To this end I can confirm that the Operations director for NCSL will be happy to meet on site to discuss this and that June would likely be a reasonable time for this to happen. The environmental services manager will ensure that the meeting takes place.”

## Question 6

### **Councillor Neale to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“I was pleased to hear, recently, that the Norfolk Pensions Fund Pensions Committee is taking steps to measure the carbon cost of its investments. As we are in the middle of a climate emergency, I hope the leader of this council will agree that complete fossil fuel divestment and investment in climate solutions is urgently needed if our world and culture is to remain recognisable long enough for these pensions to be claimed. Therefore, will the cabinet agree to apply similar policies to its own Treasury Management Strategy and measure the carbon cost of council investments as a first step to fossil fuel divestment and investment in climate solutions?”

### **Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:**

“The approved Treasury Management Investment sets out that the council will not knowingly invest directly in businesses whose activities and practices pose a risk of serious harm to individuals or groups, or whose activities are inconsistent with the council’s mission and values.

Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) driven investment strategies are a growing area with new options and products emerging in the market, as well as approaches to measuring ESG credentials. In addition, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) are currently consulting on proposed changes to the Treasury Management Code of Practice. These proposed revisions include consideration around ESG risk management. The council will review and build on the emerging guidance in this area of treasury management and continue to seek advice from its Treasury Management advisors.

Security, liquidity and yield remain the cornerstones of the Treasury Management Strategy, and it is vital that all investments continue to ensure the security of council funds as a priority and remain compatible with the risk appetite of the council and its cash flow requirements.

It is also important to remember that the cash balances held for investments are effectively already allocated to policy initiatives through the budget and MTFS and is simply cash awaiting spend, and so cannot be directly used for a separate policy initiative (such as green initiatives), or put at risk, which would impact the General Fund balance. As this cash is effectively council taxpayers cash, the Security, then Liquidity, before Yield requirements are paramount. As this cash is essentially held short term, and as cash deposits, an ESG agenda for the council is likely to be much more limited than would be available for a pension fund.”

## Question 7

### **Councillor Oliver to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“Continued delivery on the practical green agenda to reduce our carbon emissions has been a consistent feature of this Labour led administration. Since our last council meeting I was pleased to learn that we have successfully been awarded over £1.5m to enhance our work to become net zero. Will the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment comment on the difference this will make to our city?”

### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“Thank you very for this timely question. You are correct that Norwich has made excellent progress towards reducing carbon emissions both on our own estate and across the wider city. In 2019 we declared a climate emergency, and have set an ambition target to become operationally carbon neutral by 2030, with plans for the city to follow suit by 2050 or sooner.

In terms of our success, the data speaks for itself.

Per capita emissions for the city of Norwich have decreased from 6.8 tonnes per capita in 2005, to 3.5 tonnes per capita in 2018. Per capita emissions include data related to: Transport, Domestic dwellings and Industrial and Commercial settings, and are provided annually by the Department of Business, Energy and Environmental Strategy.

And we continue to work on reducing carbon emissions in the city. We do this through a number of different pathways - Cosy City, our scheme helping private sector residents access funding to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, continued retrofitting in our own stock to support our citizens, and are working with partners on the matter through the City Vision Partnership.

We were delighted to have been successful recently in a number of different bids aimed at reducing carbon emissions in the city by focusing on the built environment.

This includes £715,700 from the Green Homes Grant which will improve 80 homes in the city with improved insulation on private sector homes and installation of solar technology on our own estate. Not only will these improvements reduce fuel bills for some of our more vulnerable citizens, and reduce the risk of fuel poverty, we also estimate this will reduce carbon emissions in the city by a further 30,000 tonnes.



In terms of our own estate, officers continue to work tirelessly, in partnership with our asset-management team, to drive down carbon emissions from council operations. To date, we have made a huge reduction of 62.1% against our 2007 baseline. This has been achieved by continually seeking new and innovative ways to reduce the council's carbon footprint.

Recently, we have also been awarded £740,000 through the government decarbonisation funding scheme, which will be used to deliver renewable heating at City Hall, three major LED lighting retrofitting programmes, and a large solar system at the council's new environmental services depot at Hurricane Way. The work on City Hall is especially challenging, given the technical issues presented by the building's grade 2\* listed status.

The council has also allocated £88,000 to LED lighting retrofitting for St Giles car park and Blackfriars Hall, as well as over £36,000 on more energy efficient servers. A number of further projects will be developed and delivered in the next financial year, all funded through eco-financier Salix.

This, combined with our long term programmes, will enable the council to continue to deliver carbon reduction both within our estate and throughout the wider city, as we continue to work towards achieving our net zero ambition. Whatever our own aspiration, however, we will need government support to deliver. Instead of having to bid to secure different funding for particular programmes as each arrives (and to do so within an often very tight deadline), we would be able to achieve so much more if government were to provide the confidence of stable funding sources which would support delivery over multi-year programmes. That would greatly help us to deliver even more in this area."

## Question 8

### **Councillor Stutely to ask the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods the following question:**

“Like many councillors who represent wards with a large number of private renters I was deeply angered by the government’s decision to end the eviction ban. This will act as a driver for homelessness in our city and bring untold worry to hundreds of people in Norwich struggling due to the economic impacts of Covid-19. Given this position, can the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods comment on the important work our private sector housing team will undertake to continue to support both tenants and work with landlords to prevent evictions in our city?”

### **Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods’ response:**

“We remain acutely aware of the difficulties both private sector landlords and their tenants are facing as a result of Coronavirus. The latest research estimates that over 800,000 people across the nation are in rent arrears with 445,000 private renters being served some type of notice.

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

Our tenancy relations adviser and colleagues in the housing advice team are wholly committed to supporting landlords and their tenants to maintain tenancies wherever possible. Experience has shown us that early intervention is key and we are able to 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 the further extension of the eviction ban to May 31st. This is a personalised, bespoke service with the focus on working closely with clients to maintain their tenancy by whatever means possible.

In line with best practice, we have a range of options available should a tenant be experiencing difficulties in meeting the rent. 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. Where a tenancy proves unsustainable, we are able to assist clients to source alternative, affordable accommodation. A standard budget form has been developed in line with new case-law and all of our advisers have received training in carrying out budget and affordability assessments. Where appropriate we will assist with rent deposits and up-front payments.

We appreciate everything that 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 advise 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 commitment to protect private sector tenants and deal with the challenges that the sector faces.”

## Question 9

### **Councillor Mike Sands to ask the leader of the council the following question:**

“In place of the failed and grotesquely costly private sector track and trace programme, I was pleased to see this city council roll out its own ambitious Covid tracing programme in late January. Working with public health can the Leader update council on the difference this has made locally to tackle this virus in the city?”

### **Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:**

“Norfolk has been supported some elements of devolved contact tracing since late 2020, with colleagues at Norfolk County Council undertaking positive contact tracing where the central service was unable to make contact with residents. Our council supported that with additional data checks to identify other ways to get in touch with those people and undertook doorstop checks to encourage residents to engage with the contact tracing team where contact could not be made by phone and this was very successful, leading to Public Health to make the case to further devolve the engagement needed with the close contacts of these positive cases. After recruitment of our initial team, this Enhanced Contact Tracing service went live in Norwich on 1st February 2021 with a team of two seconded supervising officers and five call handlers which is rising to 8 this week to cover the 7-day working rota we operate.

The role of this team is to reach out to those contacts, ensure they are aware of the need to self-isolate and are doing so, and understand any additional support they need to isolate safely and not need to leave their homes, increasing the risk of spreading the virus should they become positive or be asymptomatic. The calls to residents have been well received and since the start of the service 1,078 residents have been successfully contacted which is a 96% success rate compared with the data given. Where there have been unsuccessful contacts, these are usually due to a lack of information provided and we encourage anyone engaging with any test and trace service to give as many details as possible as it allows us to offer support when they need it. There have been very rare cases where people have indicated a refusal to self-isolate and compliance is 99% from those contacted Norfolk wide and under 0.3% non-compliance for Norwich. They have also supported door stop checks for 27 covid-positive residents who have not been contactable by Norfolk County Council and made follow up welfare calls to 84 residents who have indicated additional support needs when applying for Self-Isolation Payments through our Revenues and Benefits team.

In terms of being able to meet the needs of those who needed additional support to isolate or who are experiencing hardship as a result of the pandemic, the team have directly delivered food parcels to 209 households since the beginning of February, have referred 160 people to medicine collections from Voluntary Norfolk which is instrumental in coordinating local volunteers and over 200 people have been supported to apply to the Norfolk Assistance Scheme’s Winter Hardship Fund. This is on top of signposting

people via LUMi to the wonderful work done by local communities to meet their neighbours' needs and other VCSE partners for specific advice such as debt management advice and legal concerns.

By being able to ensure people have what they need to support themselves and their families, we have been able to minimise residents' reasons to leave the house and thereby contain any potential further spread of the virus to protect Norwich communities.”

## Question 10

### **Councillor Button to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“As a strong supporter of directly controlled public services under democratic accountability at a local level, I fully support the work to bring in house currently the joint ventures. I am excited by the prospect of our environmental services returning in April with over 250 staff. With regards to the new depot which is under construction can the cabinet member comment on the environmental and biodiversity improvements which shall be made?”

### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“Thank you for the question. Like you I am keen to see Norwich City Services Ltd up and running from 01 April, so we can work closely with the company to deliver against our objectives including improving the environmental performance in terms of land management and service delivery.

With regard to the new depot which we are providing for the company on Hurricane Way, your question is particularly timely as this is due to be handed over by the contractor to the company tomorrow. I would like to express my thanks to the contractor, Council staff and current and future company employees who have all worked to get us to this point. Delivering such a project during the pandemic has taken a considerable team effort and am hugely grateful to all involved.

As you are aware we have been able to incorporate many environmental features within the design of the new depot to improve the environment locally and so it can contribute to our target in the Environmental Strategy for the council to become carbon neutral by 2030. Moreover, it is worth noting that the project itself is inherently sustainable as it is reusing a former wine warehouse building that has been vacant for some time.

Last month it was announced that the council had been awarded just over £100,511 through the government decarbonisation funding scheme to deliver energy efficient LED lighting within the depot and a solar PV system on its roof with associated battery storage measures. The LED lighting has been installed for depot opening, both within the main depot and the office accommodation, the solar PV scheme will follow in the summer.

These measures sit alongside the other measures that were built into the scheme to promote cycling to work, to future proof it by providing ducting to ease the process of adapting to using electric vehicles in future, and external lighting schemes that are specially designed to minimise disturbance to bats.

Furthermore, we are particularly proud of the on-site features designed to support biodiversity in the area. These include multiple bat and bird boxes, new pond and various measures to encourage reptiles and amphibians on the site.

A carefully designed landscape scheme, including 84 native trees, 88m of hedging and 71 climbing plants, has been developed in close consultation between Council officer's and landscape and ecological consultants. This provides new and varied habitat opportunities across the site. Significant tree and hedge planting has taken place in accordance with the agreed landscaping plan which, in time, will more than compensate for biomass lost as part of the development.

A combination of trees, hedging and climbers has been used. The climbers are designed and located to attract invertebrates which will in turn benefit the local bat populations. Native trees and woody shrubs have been planted, many as standard trees. The native hedgerow species have been chosen to increase diversity and promote good management for the benefit of wildlife in accordance with specialist ecological advice.

An area of fruit trees has been planted in the south of the site. The fruit trees have been selected to provide additional food sources. As they will not grow to be tall trees, this leaves an area of open grassland near to the proposed wildlife pond which should create considerable habitat opportunities for reptiles and amphibians."

## Question 11

### **Councillor McCartney-Gray to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“As a keen follower and supporter of the climate change charity ‘Carbon Copy’, I was pleased to read of their praise for Norwich City Council being a top mover in the race to reach net zero in carbon emissions 20 years ahead of schedule. Can the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment comment on the significance of this?”

### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“Thank you for this timely question, and for highlighting the work of Carbon Copy. If anyone is not aware, Carbon Copy are a UK charity who celebrate local low-carbon success stories, raising the profile of best practice projects and encouraging communities, councils and companies to make a difference. In addition to recognising us as a top mover, we have also been pleased to see Carbon Copy have promoted best practice case studies about Norwich Car Free Day and the Passivhaus development on Goldsmith Street.

I think it is very important to recognise the successes we are having in our approach to responding to the climate emergency alongside appreciating the scale of challenge that remains. Such recognition builds confidence in the team delivering this change and is helpful in ensuring political support. The recognition from Carbon Copy is indeed welcome in this regard. This follows on from other recognition including:

In October 2019, a wide-ranging survey undertaken by Friends of the Earth, found that Norwich city council was ranked joint-15th nationally (out of 350 local authorities surveyed) and first in Norfolk, with a performance score of 80 per cent.

In addition to this Norwich city council has won a wide range of accolades for our environmental work, the most recent of these being; a RIBA Stirling Award for the Goldsmith Street Passivhaus Development and the EDIE Carbon Reduction Award in 2019, as well as a Global Good Award in 2020.

We are proud the fact that in past years we have also received recognition from the Carbon Trust for our work in carbon management, as well as being awarded a coveted Green Apple award for our efforts to repurpose council computer equipment.

We are by no means complacent about the amount of work that still needs to be undertaken to achieve our targets, both on our own estate and in the wider city. But, thanks to our vision and ambition, and the excellent work of the dedicated officers who deliver the initiatives, we remain optimistic that we will achieve our targets. It is an optimism that is based both on our own carbon emissions data, and supported by recognition from other organisations



looking to Norwich city council as a best practice case study in carbon emissions reduction.”

## **Question 12**

**Councillor Erin Fulton-McAlister to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:**

“Protecting all of our community against Covid-19, particularly the most vulnerable, is something which I know this council is fully committed to. There are few groups more vulnerable than homeless people in our city and I know there has been significant interest in how best health providers will provide and deliver the vaccination programme for them. Can the cabinet member for social housing comment on the work our officers are achieving, in partnership, to help deliver this important goal?”

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

“Our officers have been working closely with our partners in the NHS to identify people in Norwich who are still rough sleeping (despite our continued efforts to offer accommodation), those living in temporary accommodation, and supported housing projects. I can confirm that the first vaccinations took place on Thursday 11 March and this will continue to be rolled out across the city in the coming days and weeks.”

### Question 13

#### **Councillor Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:**

“Brazengate Bus Gate operates 365 days a year Monday to Friday 7.30am to 9.30am.

It was implemented to make sure that priority was given to buses and so that there were no private motor cars using the road at these times.

However when a resident of Eaton was caught on camera and fined for using the bus gate on Christmas Day it made Eaton Councillors think that it was unnecessary

for the Traffic Regulation Order to include this one day of the year, a Bank Holiday on which no buses were running.

Does the cabinet member not agree that this is a rather opportunistic way of making money when common sense would say that there is no need to have the bus gate operating when buses are not running?”

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

“Thank you for your question. It is correct that the bus gate was introduced by the city council when it had the agency agreement. Sadly, and in my view through an act of folly, this was then terminated by the county council. It is clear from advice from officers that responsibility now sits fully with Norfolk County Council and therefore the question should really be aimed at them as they are now responsible whether to have it and its hours of operation. To clarify once again for the avoidance of doubt, the city council simply undertake the camera enforcement on behalf of county.”

## Question 14

### **Councillor Wright to ask the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment the following question:**

“A number of local residents have got in touch to express concerns about missed food waste collections, despite leaving the caddies out for collection in the usual way.

Having followed this up with the council, they were told it was accepted that the contractor should have collected but that no return visit would be made.

Is Councillor Maguire, as cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment, satisfied that the contractor is fulfilling their obligations to both the council and to residents?”

### **Councillor Maguire, the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment’s response:**

“The food waste collection service continues to be a successful part of this council’s doorstep recycling service – which is the most extensive such service in Norfolk. Norwich residents are regularly diverting over 3,300 tonnes of putrescible waste into food waste recycling each year. The service is both popular and well used

It is recognised that food waste collections are more challenging than normal waste and recycling collections –

- The participation rate is lower than for waste or blue bin recycling and participation is not constant or consistent – not everyone who participates sets their food bin out for every collection
- The containers are much smaller, which makes them easier to miss if obscured by vehicles, bins or other pavement obstructions
- The containers are easy to handle – so they do occasionally get moved away from their collection position, usually accidentally

Despite these challenges the food waste collection service is very efficient. The number of missed collections has reduced consistently over the last two years and with thousands of collections each week a missed collection rate of just 30 per month is very low – as evidenced in the latest performance data below. We estimate that the service is 99.9% effective.

Officers have checked the notes from customer contacts regarding the small number of missed food waste collections and there is no mention of residents being told that Biffa will not return. Customer contact officers are trained to use the same wording as is presented on the council’s website. This asks if the residents bin is half-full and, if so, residents can help reduce the council’s

carbon foot print by waiting a week until their next scheduled collection. About 60/70% of residents request Biffa to return, which they will.

The only time the resident would be informed that Biffa will not return is if the report is outside of the stated 48hr period for reporting a missed collection.

Given all of the available evidence, I am very satisfied that the contractor is fulfilling their obligations to both the council and to residents.

Missed Collections-Food Waste Apr 2019 – Jan 2021 



This trend line is very encouraging and reflects the focus and stability of the food crews during this year.



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## Question 15

### **Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:**

“In Eaton there is a detached house which for the last 10 years has been covered with ivy and other vegetation to the point that is inhabitable. The garden is overgrown and covers part of the footpath.

Needless to say this house has not had an occupant for that period but despite this the council tax is paid each year.

It is a target for anti-social behaviour and for vermin. The neighbours are fed up with the situation and continually ask what can be done.

Despite many emails to the council I have had no success whatsoever in ridding the neighbourhood of such an eyesore.

Can the cabinet member give me some hope that despite no action being taken in the past, that a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) could be used in the near future to bring the house back into use as a home?”

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

“I recognise that the problems created by empty and unkempt homes can create problems for neighbourhoods across the city. Thankfully we don't have large numbers of such properties in Norwich but they can certainly act as a magnet for anti-social behaviour and cause distress to neighbours.

The council is well aware of the property you are concerned about and it does blight the neighbourhood. We have taken action to address its condition previously through serving a community protection warning which did result in improvements being made to its appearance. It is unfortunately to see that over time it has deteriorated once again.

The council has a number of powers that it can use to address issues such as this. These generally result in temporary improvements to appearance and not the root cause of why the property is standing empty. Whilst it may be possible to use these powers again I tend to agree with you that the only way a more permanent solution is likely to be found would be for the council to compulsorily purchase the property in order that it could then be either sold on the open market or taken into the HRA. Either way would not only relieve the blight on the community but also result in a much needed home being provided.

We have some experience of using CPO successfully to ensure that empty homes are repaired and reused. Some years ago we had an officer based at City Hall who was responsible for taking such action across a number of areas. Unfortunately government withdrew the funding for this activity a number of years ago since when we have not been funded to carry it out.

As you will also be aware we have recently taken a more active approach to CPO. We compulsorily purchased the site of the former Kings Arms in Mile Cross last year where we will commence construction of 5 much needed new council houses over the summer. We have commenced the same process on another site and are working up a business case to establish a revolving fund to address derelict sites as part of the towns deal funding we were awarded last year.

Much of this funding is directed at wider regeneration and officers will need to investigate whether any of it may be able to be used to tackle issues of single homes that are left empty as in the case that you refer to. I'm afraid I cannot offer any instant solution to the problem you have identified. The threshold for CPO action against individual homeowners remains high and there are considerable costs and risks for the council in pursuing the matter.

However, I will ask officers to look into the matter further and explore whether there are options for a more permanent solution that we can identify in this and other similar cases."

**Please note that the following questions are second questions from members and will only be taken if the time taken by questions has not exceeded thirty minutes. This is in line with paragraph 39 of appendix 1 of the council's constitution.**

**Question 16**

**Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:**

“The council's Corporate Asset Management Strategy 2011-16 states it 'is essential to develop an investment programme that aligns to the asset review process and is consistent with the aim of the council to maintain a high income from assets'. In the light of this, it is surprising that a budget report in February 2021 said the “existing maintenance backlog on the council's existing general fund assets is estimated to be in excess of £21m” and that the council's focus “has been largely on using the council's limited capital resources on reactive rather than planned improvements”. The build-up of such a massive backlog means the council is likely to end up spending more than if it had proactively planned repairs so that last-minute reactive repairs are not needed - not to mention the fact that delayed maintenance has negatively impacted people living in and using the affected buildings. Why has the council not paid any attention to its Asset Management Strategy in the last ten years, leaving such an expensive backlog which will end up costing the council more than planned maintenance would have done?”

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:**

“The objective to increase income from assets in the 2011 Corporate Asset Management Strategy related specifically to the investment portfolio. Income from the investment portfolio stood at £3.4m in 2011 and over the last ten years we have significantly increased income from such assets to £7.5m pre-covid.

The maintenance backlog to which you refer relates solely to general fund properties, it does not therefore affect our tenants and indeed our housing stock is subject to a rolling program of condition survey and maintenance to ensure all stock meets the high bar of the Norwich Standard.

The council also owns a significant number of non-residential properties which serve a variety of purposes to meet our corporate objectives. Many of these are reaching the end of their life or are heritage properties with high repair and maintenance costs. The sustained period of austerity over the past ten years has put significant pressure on the general fund including funds available for capital investment in existing properties.



However, as you will see from paragraph 5.12 of the medium-term financial strategy to which you refer, the council is committed to reviewing and updating the asset management strategy. Work is well underway in progressing this project which will align with and inform the insourcing of our asset management function as of April 2022. The new strategy aligned with the insourcing of asset management functions will give the council greater control over the management of property and ensure that our assets are fit for the future”