



Council

19:30 to 22:45

30 January 2024

Present: Councillors Wright (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Calvert, Carrington, Catt, Champion, Davis, Driver, Everett, Fox, Francis, Fulton-McAlister, Galvin, Giles, Hampton, Hoechner, Huntley, Jones, Kendrick, Kidman, Lubbock, Maguire, Oliver, Osborn, Packer, Padda, Peek, Price, Prinsley, Sands (M), Sands (S), Schmierer, Stonard, Stutely, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi), Worley, Young

Apologies: Councillor Haynes

1. Lord Mayor's Announcements

The Lord Mayor announced that he had attended several carol services and events around Christmas, Hannukah and other religious festivals. The Lord Mayor, Lady Mayoress, Sheriff, Sheriff's Consort and Deputy Lord Mayor, had all attended Open Christmas on Christmas Day to thank the volunteers and people attending the Christmas lunch. He had also attended the Holocaust Memorial event. This was an important annual event to ensure that the Holocaust and subsequent genocides could never happen again.

2. Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Public questions/petitions

The Lord Mayor announced that five public questions had been received within the provisions of Part 3 of the council's constitution.

Question 1 – Twinning with a Palestinian City

Ms Safiya Waley, asked the leader of the council the following question:

“Will Norwich City Council twin Norwich with a Palestinian city?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader of the council, gave the following response:

“This is absolutely not the time to rush into such an arrangement. Current events in Israel and Gaza are tragic and many Norwich residents are very

concerned about the ongoing situation while everyone wants to see an end to violence. Our key priority remains to ensure that the city is welcoming and that all residents feel safe. We support calls for a political and peaceful settlement to the conflict and I'm sure we can all agree that the death of innocent civilians must stop, and international law must be upheld. A route to a lasting peace must ensure the safety and security of Palestinians and Israelis.

When we twin with cities, it usually stems from an existing and ongoing relationship between the two cities and with clear links within the city. Twinning should not be a priority for us at this time. We should ensure our primary responsibility is to promote community cohesion and to foster good relations between all faiths and communities, ensuring we remain an inclusive, respectful, tolerant, and accepting place for everyone."

In reply to Ms Waley's supplementary question, Councillor Stonard said that he rejected the implication that the council had shown tacit support for either of the parties engaged in this conflict. The responsibility of the council was to promote community cohesion in our city.

Question 2 – Eaton Park car parking charges

Mr James Hawketts asked the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

"Several months ago, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion said that, in response to a question from Councillor Lubbock, a review of overflow and nuisance parking from the Eaton Park charge was due to be completed shortly but that preliminary findings showed that no major incidents had been reported to the council. Assuming this review has now been completed, what were its findings; was this the case?"

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social gave the following response:

"Thank you for the question. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about the work taking place at Eaton Park. Contrary to suggestions made that the introduction of car park charging at Eaton Park, would deter usage, income received at end of Q3 of £93,550 has already exceeded the £85,000 annual income target.

Car park income set at an affordable rate is enabling Eaton Park to continue to thrive in partnership with the Friends Group. Tennis courts have been re-surfaced with painting to take place in the spring. In response to strong interest from the Friends group we will be installing the Thomas Browne memorial sculptures previously located on Hay Hill to the grass area south of the play area. A public consultation on an upgraded play area design to destination standard will soon be commencing.

Building on the deep aeration of the football pitches last year, we have just successfully bid for £333K of Greater Norwich Growth Board funding to upgrade all six of the changing rooms in the rotunda so they remain FA-

compliant. The scheme will see solar panels and a heat pump installed to the rotunda. Ten new bicycle racks and new signage will also be installed. The city council is match funding £80K in capital funding, and I would like to thank Friends of Eaton Park and Eaton Park Community Centre Association for their £500 contributions. The scheme in the Football Foundation's Norwich Football Facilities Plan, and £187K of Football Foundation match funding is subject to successful planning permission.

I would like to congratulate Friends of Eaton Park on Eaton Park not only retaining its Green Flag last summer, but also being awarded Green Flag Heritage status for the first time. This was followed up in the autumn with a Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence.

With regard to the impact of the car parking charges on displacement, a high level review of displaced parking around Eaton Park was carried out after the introduction of parking charges at the park. The only complaint we have received since then relates to parking on the verge of South Park Avenue at Custance Court Sheltered Housing. Unfortunately, there is no enforcement action that we can take as there are no parking restrictions at this location (enforcement of parking restrictions on the highway are also enforceable on the pavement / verge. There is currently no legislation that covers parking on pavements where no parking orders are in place). During this review, the county council were consulted, along with our own parking team. We also completed a project closure report and lessons learned exercise as part of the project governance, and displaced parking was not identified as an issue.

Norwich City Council can only continue to invest in high quality facilities in Eaton Park through generating income. I would encourage people to work constructively with the Friends of Eaton Park. Eaton Park is a much-loved open space and volunteers and residents don't want to see the park being talked down. The investment I have set out illustrates this administration's on-going commitment to high quality and high value parks and open spaces in Norwich."

Mr Hawketts, by way of a supplementary question, asked where the call for evidence from the public had been made for the parking review. Councillor Giles confirmed that only one complaint had been received following the review of displaced parking. The council could not take action in that location.

Question 3 – Norwich International Airport investment and support

Mr Mark Walker asked the leader of the council the following question:

"The UK aerospace industry is one of the jewels in the crown of the UK economy. Support by this city council, through investment in the aviation academy, has enhanced the capacity of the airport and provided local students the opportunity to secure well paid, unionised, and skilled work within this developing city industry.

The positive and important work of UNITE the Union in organising amongst workers in the local aviation economy within the city and their members report, 'Going for Growth - Beyond 2022' which sets out the steps the government must take to deliver a greener, sustainable, and more self-reliant

future for UK workers and the economy, helps further underline the significance of this industry.

Given this, will the Leader commit to write to government and reiterate the need to support the local aviation industry and the positive impact that the Aviation Academy has made to Norwich since opening?"

Councillor Stonard, leader of the council, gave the following response:

"Thank you for your question, Mr. Walker. I am very pleased to endorse the importance of the local aviation industry and the positive impact that the Aviation Academy has made to Norwich.

Norwich Airport acts as a catalyst for the local and regional economy, not only by providing good airline connections across the UK, Europe and to an international hub, but also as a major employment centre in its own right.

It is estimated that the Airport and the Academy support 1,240 jobs in the local economy and contribute approximately £70 million to the regional economy. By 2045 it is estimated that the Airport will contribute £160 million to regional GVA through direct, indirect and induced employment.

This is incredibly significant for the local and regional economy and the local jobs market.

The Aviation Academy has proved vital in providing local students the opportunity to secure well paid, unionised and skilled work, good jobs which are really important to the City's future and the future of our young people.

This administration's support for the airport is distinct from that of the Green Party opposite who are no friends of the aviation industry and the airport.

This is despite the recent news that the world's first pleasure flight in a fully electric aircraft took off from Norwich Airport last year, with Saxon Air offering the public the chance to fly in a battery-operated plane. This comes with much needed advancements in the aviation industry and emerging new technologies such as hydrogen and electrification. The crucial importance of the aircraft industry moving away, as part of a just, sustainable and worker friendly transition, from carbon-based propulsion to renewable energy so that the industry plays its vital role in tackling the Climate Emergency.

We need to protect and ensure the future sustainability of the airport and local aviation industry and I endorse the report "Going for Growth", written and produced by UNITE members working in the industry which sets out the steps the government must take to deliver a greener, sustainable, and more self-reliant future for UK workers and the need to ensure the aviation industry is a full part of this.

So, in direct answer to your question, I would be very pleased to write to the government to stress the vital importance of the industry and the positive impact of the Aviation Academy has made to the city since opening."

Mr Walker confirmed that he did not have a supplementary question.

Question 4 – Street light repairs

Ms Sally Reynolds asked the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Residents in Norwich are facing long delays in arranging repairs to social housing and communal areas in the city. Fixing streetlights has been a particular issue in Mancroft, where the lack of lighting has made certain parts of the ward unsafe, which has also brought anti-social behaviour issues. How long should residents expect to wait for repairs to be completed?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion gave the following response:

“In order to improve street lighting, the council is in the process of investing £0.5m into the district lighting network to upgrade 1,600 lights to LED fittings. Installation will take place over the next 18 months. Once installed this will reduce electricity costs and consumption-based carbon emissions by more than 50% and also significantly reduce repairs and maintenance, leading to a more reliable and effective street lighting network.

The responsibility for public lighting in the city is shared between the city council and the county council. Street lighting (and the associated repairs) is generally owned and maintained by the county, with lighting on public buildings, in green spaces and on council housing land, maintained by the city council. There are a small number of outstanding repairs in Mancroft Ward that were reported in December, and these are currently being assessed to prioritise replacement of the existing equipment. We have not received any reports that these have led to an increase in antisocial behaviour.

Lighting upgrades will also include replacement of some columns and the renewal of some power supply equipment which has previously delayed repairs.

The council is also working to streamline the reporting process to make it easier for residents to identify lighting that is managed by the city council and to enable faults to be reported online and for them to be sent directly to its maintenance contractor.”

In reply to Ms Reynolds’ supplementary question regarding how long residents should expect to wait for repairs, Councillor Giles said that he would make enquiries about service standards for the street lighting that the council owned and get back to her through Democratic Services.

Question 5 – Engagement on Norwich North Levelling Up fund bid

Ms Lucy Allen, on behalf of the Mile Cross Exchange Projects and Events Group, asked the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“What steps did Norwich City Council take to consult the Mile Cross Community in relation to the original bid and how can the community be reassured that their views will be taken into account moving forward?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion gave the following response:

“The original Norwich North Levelling Up Fund bid, submitted in summer 2022, was informed by our longstanding programme of engagement with residents, community groups, business and local anchor institutions. It promotes good community relations principally by enhancing amenities and opportunity in the Mile Cross ward; our focus on improved facilities will draw in groups from all across the community to contribute to and benefit from the investment of just under £10m, giving many local clubs and community groups a real sense of ownership of these improved community assets. In addition, the collaborative manner in which this bid has been developed, drawing on engagement from across our communities, has promoted positive community relations and drawn key partners together in pursuit of improved outcomes for Norwich and Mile Cross.

This area will particularly benefit from improved access to sports, safer open spaces, volunteering opportunities and leisure facilities to promote improved health and wellbeing, as well improved access to active travel routes into the city centre and its range of learning and employment opportunities. Our bid strengthens integration and widens participation across the local community by bringing many local clubs and community groups together to share much improved public space that will be a source of great local pride.

In terms with consultation with communities, Norwich City Council used community conversation data collected by the Neighbourhoods and Community Enabling team to give a broad range of local residents’ views to help develop the application.

Officers have also consulted with the following stakeholders: Norwich Flyers; Park Run; Norfolk Wildlife Trust; Norfolk Football Association; Football Foundation; and British Cycling. The Towns Deal Board was also involved.

At the time of the original bid there was no Friends of Sloughbottom Park group, so we were not able to consult with them. However, now that the group has been established, the council will consult and engage with the new Friends group, the local community, and the groups listed above to help strengthen our project proposals during the final design and implementation phase as the project progresses.”

Ms Allen’s supplementary question was would the council allow the community to engage in the coproduction approach, through the Mile Cross Exchange Projects

and Events Groups, on the final design and implementation stage and change the plans if the community considered that the 3G football pitch was unacceptable in an environmentally sensitive area and part of the green corridor. Councillor Giles agreed that in terms of coproduction of the final design and implementation stage the community could be involved. He referred to the terms of the original bid and explained that the 3G football pitch was integral to the funding. The provision of this 3G football pitch, was part of a strategy that would significantly improve the capacity of football pitches across the city. There was an environmental impact assessment which could be shared via Democratic Services with the questioner.

The Lord Mayor confirmed that no petitions had been received for this meeting.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 28 November 2023 and 10 January 2024.

5. Questions to Cabinet Members

The Lord Mayor announced that 29 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members, for which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of Part 3 of the council's constitution.

The questions are summarised as follows:

- Question 1 Councillor Driver to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Homelessness Policy.
- Question 2 Councillor Sands (S) to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on housing in Bowthorpe.
- Question 3 Councillor Sands (M) to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on tackling poverty.
- Question 4 Councillor Carrington to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on Right to Buy.
- Question 5 Councillor Vaughan Thomas to the cabinet member for resources on the local government settlement.
- Question 6 Councillor Peek to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on accommodation to tackle homelessness.
- Question 7 Councillor Vivien Thomas to the cabinet member for climate change on the Solar Together and Switch and Save auctions.
- Question 8 Councillor Huntley to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on energy efficiencies in council homes.
- Question 9 Councillor Padda to the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture on improvements to The Halls.

- Question 10 Councillor Maguire to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on trees in Norwich.
- Question 11 Councillor Prinsley to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on changes to housing benefit.
- Question 12 Councillor Catt to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the repairs booking system.
- Question 13 Councillor Galvin to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on an update on the pre-payment meters.
- Question 14 Councillor Young to the cabinet member for resources on the City Hall project.
- Question 15 Councillor Hoechner to the cabinet member for regulatory services on digital billboards.
- Question 16 Councillor Champion to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on guidance on the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol.
- Question 17 Councillor Haynes to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on fire doors.
- Question 18 Councillor Davis to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on incomplete repairs.
- Question 19 Councillor Oliver to the cabinet member for climate change on the closure of the Reuse Centre at Swanton Road
- Question 20 Councillor Stutely to the cabinet member for regulatory services on taxi and private hire vehicle enforcement.
- Question 21 Councillor Everett to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on statistics on non-qualification to the housing register.
- Question 22 Councillor Worley to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on rechargeable rates.
- Question 23 Councillor Schmierer to the cabinet member for climate change on collection of communal bins.
- Question 24 Councillor Price to the cabinet member for climate change on cleaning of communal bins.
- Question 25 Councillor Calvert to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on overdue repairs.
- Question 26 Councillor Fox to the leader of the council on follow up meetings with cabinet members.

Question 27 Councillor Osborn to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on delays to repairs.

Question 28 Councillor Francis to the cabinet member for climate change on renewable energy for community centres.

(A second question had been received from Councillor Schmierer but as more than 30 minutes had elapsed since the start of the item, the question was not taken.)

(Full details of the questions and responses were available on the council's website prior to the meeting. A revised version is attached to these minutes at Appendix A and includes a minute of any supplementary questions and responses.)

6. Appointment of senior officers

(This item was contained within the supplementary agenda)

(Leah Mickleborough, head of legal and procurement and monitoring officer, and Sameera Khan, interim democratic and elections manager left the room for the debate and vote on this item).

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Maguire seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously to:

- (1) Note the information on the recruitment processes for the executive director of resources and executive director of communities and housing.
- (2) Approve the appointment of the post and salary packages for the roles, which are above £100,000 per annum.
- (3) Delegate to the head of HR and organisational development, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to finalise all other matters relating to the appointment.
- (4) Appoint Sameera Khan to act as the Council's monitoring officer on an interim basis with effect from 1 February 2024.

(Leah Mickleborough and Sameera Khan were readmitted to the council chamber.)

7. Appointment of the chair of the licensing and regulatory committees

The Lord Mayor announced that he had received two nominations for the chair of licensing and regulatory committee. Councillor Huntley had been nominated by the Labour Group and Councillor Stutely had been nominated by the Independent Group.

Councillor Fulton-McAlister moved and Councillor Carrington seconded the report.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, on the chairs casting vote, to appoint Councillor Stutely as chair of the licensing and regulatory committee for the remainder of the 2023-24 civic year.

8. Review of polling places and districts

Councillor Giles moved and Councillor Kendrick seconded the recommendations as set out at appendix A to the report.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the recommendations as set out at appendix A to the report.

9. Members allowances 2023-24 – Independent Remuneration Panel recommendations

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Fulton-McAlister seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously, to adopt the proposal of the Independent Remuneration Panel to increase all members allowances by 5.17% for 2023/24, to be backdated to 1 April 2023.

10. Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy change 2023-24

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Vaughan Thomas seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED with a majority voting in favour to:

- (1) adopt the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy change 2023/2024; and
- (2) agree the policy statement set out in Appendix A to the report.

11. Treasury Management mid-year review report 2023-24

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Kidman seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate, with a majority voting in favour, it was:

RESOLVED to approve the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review Report 2023/24, covering the first six months of the financial year to 30 September 2023.

12. Motions

Motion 12(a) – Contacting the council and preventing maladministration.

Councillor Catt moved and Councillor Young seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Councillor Packer moved and Councillor Hampton seconded a motion without notice to refer the item directly to cabinet, which following debate, it was:

RESOLVED with a majority voting in favour to refer the following motion on contacting the council and preventing maladministration to cabinet, as follows:

“Contact with the council through consultations and everyday communication is vital for the citizens it serves. Councillors have been made aware of many instances where this has been difficult or unsatisfactory, and has led to further issues for residents, especially those seeking urgent housing repairs.

This motion asks for a review and actions to make sure that all citizens are served and inequalities issues are addressed. Both the council and its citizens benefit from efficient, fair, and trusted two-way communication, and it is especially important that no one is left out of this process and that issues are dealt with quickly when problems arise.

In October 2023, the Housing Ombudsman published its Annual Complaints Review for 2022/2023, writing to all landlords who have a maladministration rate of over 50% to bring urgent attention to the figures. In this period, Norwich City Council was given a 100% maladministration rate, the joint highest of any landlord in the country.

In December 2023, the Housing Ombudsman, in a ruling against the council, found that Norwich City Council had failed to investigate complaints, had inadequate record keeping process and procedures, and in this case lacked empathy and was at times dismissive.

Council **RESOLVES** to ask cabinet:

- (1) To improve the mechanism and accessibility of consultations by:
 - a) Removing the requirement for residents to create an account or log-in when completing a consultation (ensuring that key demographic questions required for the consultation are collected in the body of the survey).
 - b) Providing a clear statement of intent with each consultation which explains how the results of the consultation and the data collected will be used (e.g. how will a majority of consultees objecting to the consultation change the plans).

- c) Replying to each consultee with the results of the consultation after it has concluded and outline changes that have been made as a result of consultation returns.
- d) Avoiding the use of leading questions when putting together consultation surveys.

(2) To improve engagement by:

- a) Having a plan showing how engagement data (such as the Community Connectors' data) is used before it is collected. This should include worked up logic mapping of how the engagement exercise will translate into tangible and measurable outcomes.
- b) Planning a clear impact evaluation of big engagement pieces before the engagement happens to enable objective evaluation of the impact achieved. Where possible, a progress evaluation should be included throughout the engagement.

(3) To improve customer contact as part of the new customer and digital strategy by:

- a) Reviewing the provision of face-to-face appointments and the ease of requesting and being granted these appointments.
- b) Exploring the use of video appointments to enable the sharing of documents and a better assessment of the overall situation.
- c) Reviewing and monitoring the equalities impact of the customer contact and advice service.
- d) Ensuring that a clear warning is provided before a form times out, if the timing-out of websites cannot be removed as a feature
- e) Assessing the customer journey for a range of customer engagements, and conducting regular spot checks and mystery shopper exercises.
- f) Allowing for residents to book face-to-face appointments and report issues to the council by visiting City Hall, and aspiring to re-open the Customer Contact Centre.
- g) Introducing picture-proof confirmation of the completion of all requests through the street issue form
- h) Introducing a minimum timeframe in which tenants in the private rented sector can expect to receive a response following a Healthy Homes referral.

(4) To improve communications with council housing tenants by:

- a) Reinstating regular Estate Audits and sharing the dates of these audits in advance with residents, councillors and other key stakeholders, and communicating action points from each audit to those stakeholders with clear timescales.
- b) Reviewing the tenant involvement panel to ensure it is representative of different kinds of tenancies and diversity of council tenants.
- c) Reviewing its repairs record keeping process and procedures for housing repairs.
- d) Update the tenancy agreement used by the council (as part of the next scheduled review), the 'Your New Home' booklet and council website with information about what might be considered an emergency or routine repair, timeframes for its response to any of these, expanding on information provided to give an equal focus on both resident and landlord responsibilities.
- e) Publishing the council's repairs policy on the Norwich City Council website.
- f) Committing to introducing a housing repair reporting system which allows tenants to schedule their own appointments.
- g) Ensuring that tenants are given adequate notice of where a repair case has been closed or a work order marked as completed with sufficient time given to challenge this if work has not been completed, or a tenant is not happy with the quality of work delivered.
- h) Ensuring tenants are contacted immediately upon the changing of an appointment.

(5) To improve responses to complaints by:

- a) Achieving the set targets for responding to complaints in time within the next three months.
- b) Exploring automated progress updates to residents' enquiries and complaints.
- c) Exploring ways for residents to escalate reports and complaints that have had no or inadequate responses with the council.
- d) Committing to a review of complaint handling across the council, following a recent Ombudsman report which ruled that the council had failed to demonstrate it had investigated a residents complaint despite sending both stage 1 and stage 2 responses in a case of severe maladministration, and the Annual Complaints Review 2022/23 from the Housing Ombudsman which gave Norwich City Council a 100% maladministration rate.

(6) To improve communication via letters by:

- a) Including a name, job title and telephone number of the person sending the letter.
- b) Adhering to readability best practice guidelines, or where that is not possible, including an easy read sheet.

(7) To improve contact with contractors by:

- a) Ensuring that the council keeps an overview of work passed on to contractors and trials a system of being able to mark contractor work as completed and follow-up work that is not being marked as completed in a set time target.
- b) Ensuring that contractors are part of the 'no wrong door' policy
- c) Introducing picture-proof delivery of missed appointment cards being put through doors by NCSL operatives or contractors, to avoid disputes over whether properties have been 'carded' or not.

(As two hours had passed since the beginning of the meeting, the Lord Mayor asked if the remaining business could be taken as unopposed. Members indicated that they wished to oppose items 12(b) – Norwich City Council's wholly owned companies and 12(d) – Scrap CIL ECR for private developers, so these would be debated.)

Motion 12(b) – Norwich's wholly owned companies

Councillor Osborn moved and Councillor Catt seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Councillor Stonard moved, and Councillor Hampton seconded a motion without notice to refer the item directly to cabinet.

Debate ensued.

Councillor Davis requested that a recorded vote be taken on the motion to refer the item directly to cabinet. As per the council's constitution, she received the support of at least five members of the council, and on being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED, with 22 members voting in favour (Councillors Ackroyd, Carrington, Driver, Fulton-McAlister, Giles, Hampton, Huntley, Jones, Kendrick, Kidman, Lubbock, Maguire, Packer, Padda, Peek, Prinsley, Sands (M), Sands (S), Stonard, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi) and Wright) and 16 voting against (Councillors Calvert, Catt, Champion, Davis, Everett, Fox, Francis, Galvin, Hoechner, Oliver, Osborn, Price, Schmierer, Stutely, Worley and Young) to refer the following motion to cabinet:

"The council's wholly owned company NCSL delivers two sets of services for the council: maintenance and repairs services for council owned properties such as council housing and environmental services, including street cleaning and maintaining council owned land (e.g. communal land on council estates).

The council contracts NCSL as a private company to carry out these maintenance and repairs works, meaning that the staff who do the work are not council employees but are employees of the private company, which has its own management and directors. Because the services are delivered by the company, any changes to the service are not directly within the council's control but instead must involve changes to the contracts and negotiation with the company.

Recent papers presented to council committees including Cabinet and Audit have shown that there has been a persistent problem with the wholly owned company NCSL not carrying out work to the standards expected by the council and residents. For example, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and HRA Budget 2024/25 presented to Cabinet on 13 December 2023 states: "Following the Repairs and Maintenance Services transfer from Norwich Norse Building Ltd to Norwich City Services Ltd (NCSL) in April 2022, there have been a number of operational challenges impacting on the delivery of the service. ... In relation to repairs and maintenance at the end of quarter 2 customer satisfaction has slipped from 69% [...] to 67.5%".

Minutes from the cabinet meeting on the 15th of November 2023 summarising parts of the discussion of the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 2, 2023/24 state: 'Councillor Galvin referred to KPI 26, noting that the number of complaints responded to within 10 days dropped by 10 per cent this quarter, whilst the total volume of complaints had increased by 5 per cent, and asked which services were unable to achieve their targets. The Interim Head of Housing and Community Safety said that the two principal drivers for complaints were in Property Services relating to the wider issues of contract delivery by Norwich City Services Ltd and Environmental Services.' These indicators reflect residents' and tenants' dissatisfaction with the services delivered by NCSL. The city council's Annual Governance Statement 2022-23, considered at the Audit Committee in July and November 2023, notes that "Over the past year, as has been reflected in performance reports, NCS[L] have experienced challenges in delivering service improvement" and acknowledged that there have been "significant governance issues" (including the resignation of all previous board members) relating to the wholly-owned company NCSL. Overall these statements indicate that the arrangements to manage these essential services via NCSL as a wholly-owned company and contractor have thus far failed to deliver the service improvements that are required.

Among other councils and public services, there is growing recognition that bringing services fully back in house is an effective way to improve terms and conditions for workers as well as directly improving service delivery for residents and tenants. The Association for Public Service Excellence's report "Insourcing: A guide to bringing local authority services back in house" states that "research shows insourcing is happening for practical reasons as opposed to any ideological stance" and that "councils are finding insourcing a realistic service delivery option that can: ensure service continuity, address issues of poor performance; build flexibility and integration into the service delivery chain; and provide more accountable local services." UNISON's "Bringing Services Home" campaign sets out the benefits of insourcing including: better terms & conditions, better public services, better

accountability, better investment, better equality at work, and better union recognition.

Council notes that:

- 1) There is a growing movement amongst councils to bring services back in house, with many councils having reaped benefits - for example: Southwark Borough Council, Islington Borough Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Exeter City Council, and others.
- 2) Evidence from The Association for Public Service Excellence suggests that insourcing environmental and property services, if well-managed, could deliver improvements in performance, accountability, and resident satisfaction.
- 3) The current Teckal rules that apply to NCSL restrict the profit that the company can make by selling services to clients other than the council to 20% of total profit, but fully in-house services would not be subject to the same restriction and so could in theory deliver higher levels of income for the council.
- 4) Insourcing NCSL would result in an immediate requirement for all workers to be put onto a local government pension scheme (LGPS), which could result in cost increases for the council. However, insourcing will also result in significant cost savings. These cost savings could be achieved through reducing the need for senior management positions in the company when this management could be provided by existing council management, as well as removing the need to pay board members who have been brought in on temporary contracts to manage the private company. In addition, allowing the company direct access to support services such as HR and IT (rather than requiring a service-level agreement) may also result in further significant savings, as will a reduction in staff time required to oversee coordination between the council and the wholly owned company (including contract management, oversight management and the shareholder panel).
- 5) Bringing all NCSL workers inhouse and placing them on the LGPS would mean there is no longer a two-tier workforce in relation to pensions and therefore improve the terms and conditions for some of the lowest-paid workers who do the work that residents rely on Norwich City Council to carry out.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- (1) Recognise and express thanks for the hard work of NCSL employees, committed to deliver essential front line services for the council.
- (2) Recognise the expertise and express thanks for the hard work of current NCSL board members, committed to supporting the council in finding ways to improve service delivery.

- (3) Ask Cabinet to prepare an options appraisal for the future of NCSL, which should include a business case for bringing services currently delivered by NCSL back in house so that the council can deliver its own environmental and building maintenance services. The business plan should build on the options appraisals presented to cabinet in ahead of the creation of NCSL and include all relevant evidence emerging from delivering services under the current business model (e.g. financial implications, performance, risks and opportunities, lessons learnt). The business case should further include a clear outline of anticipated costs and savings, outline benefits to the workforce and draw on recent publications to highlight how a direct service delivery may improve service quality.
- (4) Ask Cabinet to discuss the business case for bringing services delivered by NCSL back in house as part of an options appraisal for the future of NCSL at the next available opportunity.
- (5) Ask Cabinet to immediately establish regular meetings with Unite, Unison and any other relevant unions to discuss the potential for bringing services delivered by NCSL back in house as well as other options considered in the options appraisal.
- (6) Ask Cabinet to consider producing a business case for an insourcing by default policy, which could also cover the council's other wholly-owned companies, where this represents best value, and to consult on such a policy.

(As three hours had passed since the beginning of the meeting, a vote was taken on whether to continue with the remaining business. With a majority voting against continuing the meeting, the remaining business – item 12(d) motion – Scrap CIL ECR for private developers, would be taken to the next ordinary meeting of council.)

Motion 12(c) – It costs more to be poor: tacking the poverty premium in Norwich

(This item was taken as unopposed business)

(Motion moved by Councillor Galvin, seconded by Councillor Champion)

An amendment had been received from Councillor Giles which was accepted by the proposer:

“Inserting the words “presented through future Equality Information Reports” after the words “in Norwich” in resolution 7)

Inserting the following resolution before resolution c) so that it becomes resolution c):

“c) Take reasonable endeavours to bring forward a Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy feasibility study, as part of the planned EDI Action Plan workstream, on the below to June Cabinet:

- (i) Presenting the evidence as collected based on Resolution 8A above

- (ii) Identifying the relevant partnership prospects, including through the Norwich 2040 City Vision Partnership, highlighting challenges and opportunities
- (iii) Scoping a top-level proposition in relation to the feasibility of a Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy
- (iv) Identifying the resources that would be needed to deliver a potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy
- (v) Setting out a practically viable timescale for commencing work on a potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy in alignment with the EDI Action Plan”

Inserting the following after the new resolution c), to become resolution d): “d) A potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy produced on a practically viable timescale may include:”

Replacing resolutions c), d), e), f), g) and 9) with the following:

“(i) A Project Mandate for investment in local credit unions, possibly including its ‘in house’ Wherry Dragon credit union. This could possibly be via subordinated debt or deferred shares, and would necessarily involve identification of how affordable finance products could be best used to support cost-effective council service delivery, by engaging with local providers to discuss potential product development opportunities. For example, this may include developing a business case in partnership with credit unions and Norwich 2040 City Vision partners to provide financial support through investment to develop targeted products in line with the council’s corporate plan objectives and the objectives of the Norwich 2040 City Vision (examples may include extending managed credit to those struggling via tailored, manageable loans, or targeted loans at reduced interest rates for home improvements that increase energy efficiency

(ii) Aligned with a plan of engagement with, and support of, affordable lenders, a plan to encourage and facilitate their adoption of the Affordable Credit Code of Practice as necessary.

(iii) Examination of using the criteria highlighted within the Affordable Credit Code of Practice to inform future commissioning/ contracting processes for affordable finance provision, to ensure the quality and effectiveness of local services.

(iv) Consideration of how access to affordable finance provision, including the council’s insurance offer to tenants, is robustly integrated with wider support services, including those of the council and local voluntary and community sector partners. This may include the development of an effective outreach campaign to support access to and uptake of affordable finance provision, drawing on behavioural insights to increase the effectiveness of the campaign. This could e.g. include embedding reference to local affordable finance provision and the ‘stop the loan sharks’ team within relevant council tax communication processes;

(v) Development of, together with partners, a robust evaluation framework with clear metrics and success criteria to regularly assess the impact of this strategic work on access to affordable finance.

(vi) Consideration of how the aims of the Strategy align with the treasury management strategy, balanced with consideration of security, liquidity and yield.

Removing resolution 10)”

Therefore the motion as amended was:

RESOLVED:

“The cost-of-living crisis and 15 years of stagnant incomes mean that many Norwich residents are going into 2024 worse off. The benefits of decreasing inflation and tax cuts will not be felt by the 20-30 percent of people with the lowest incomes who will see their incomes fall rather than rise, and special payments by the government will end in April.

The impact of the crisis on Norwich residents is well documented. Around 55,500 people in Norwich live in areas that are among the 20% most deprived in England.

High unemployment and poverty have been part of life in some wards in our city for generations but the cost-of-living crisis has sharpened the effects. Children’s health is compromised. Recently we have seen evidence of children in Norwich suffering from rickets, and evidence from a head teacher of having to carry malnourished children to the doctor, two year olds trying to eat sand because they are hungry, and increasing absence due to ill health from poverty.

Norfolk is one of the worst-affected areas for malnutrition, with the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) recording a malnutrition rate of 6.7%, the highest of any ICB in the country, according to a report from Future Health research centre.

The ‘poverty premium’ - the name for the syndrome where people living in poverty end up paying more for goods and services - worsens with increasing poverty. It harms the physical and psychological health, welfare and quality of life of residents. This penalty for living in poverty exacerbates the difficulties of managing a low income. The premium exists in many dimensions, but areas where its impact is worst include: not paying by the cheapest billing method; geographical premiums for e.g. car insurance; paying to access money; and having to use higher-cost credit.

All these elements add to keeping people in poverty, both in and out of work, and are impacting increasingly. Figures from the anti-poverty campaign Fair by Design show that in Norwich south a third of households have experienced one or more poverty premiums and the average cost of these premiums to households in poverty is £466. In Norwich north 26% of households were paying a premium of some kind, the total cost of the poverty premium is

£4,681,591 and average cost to households in poverty is £ 454. This is money that could be in people's pockets, and in the local economy.

Debt is a particularly bad problem and increasing at an alarming rate. Figures from the latest Norfolk Community Law Service Impact Report (2022/23) show clients with £3 million of debt, up from £1.9 million in 2021/22, with a 52% increase in the value of debt written off/renegotiated from 2021/22, and average debt of clients up 113% from previous year. Increase in average debt for clients went from £4,429 in 2019-20 to £15,550 in 2022-23.

Council notes:

- 1) In 2018 the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty described in detail the gross misery that the UK's Conservative government has inflicted on the population through the "punitive, mean spirited, and often callous" policies of austerity. Today this situation is worse, and a second UN rapporteur recently described the government's approach as a human rights law violation.
- 2) Today in the UK an inexcusable one million children live in destitution, four million children face food insecurity, and 4.2 million children live in poverty, and this council states, and deplores the fact that it is this Conservative government's cuts in public services, wages, and benefits that have put them there.
- 3) Local councils like Norwich can support tackling the poverty premium within service functions relating to housing, economic development, community and wider support functions. Norwich city council continues to work to improve sustainable warmth for its citizens and on ongoing financial inclusion initiatives.
- 4) Given its leadership role within local communities, Norwich city council is well placed to ensure that the right partnerships are in place to facilitate a coordinated approach.
- 5) Norwich city council has an insurance provider available for tenants (11) and a long history of establishing and working with credit unions and advice organisations to support its communities' access to credit and advice. Currently under 9 percent of tenants use the scheme for insurance and the trend has been downwards for the past five years. The credit unions are also seeing a fall in users. An increase in the use of both of these services will assist in protecting residents from paying the poverty premium.
- 6) Given the financial pressure on councils, investing in credit union capital can allow credit unions to expand their operations while retaining the investment as an asset on the council's budget sheet, which may present a more attractive funding proposition than a grant.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) Ask cabinet to make an immediate written commitment to monitor and address poverty premium impacts and levels in Norwich, presented through future Equality Information Reports, similar to the council's Fuel Poverty Commitment
- 2) Take action on this commitment, by asking cabinet to consider developing and working within a strategic framework to:
 - a) inform improving access to affordable financial services. This will require building a holistic local evidence base that includes estimations of the scale and cost of the issue. Effective ways of improving access to affordable financial services should further be informed by considering the success of national and international projects to address the issue (e.g. the No Interest Loan Scheme Pilot).
 - b) Draw on people's lived experiences to inform strategies to reduce the poverty premium in Norwich.
 - c) Take reasonable endeavours to bring forward a Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy feasibility study, as part of the planned EDI Action Plan workstream, on the below to June Cabinet:
 - (i) Presenting the evidence as collected based on Resolution 8a) above
 - (ii) Identifying the relevant partnership prospects, including through the Norwich 2040 City Vision Partnership, highlighting challenges and opportunities
 - (iii) Scoping a top-level proposition in relation to the feasibility of a Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy
 - (iv) Identifying the resources that would be needed to deliver a potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy
 - (v) Setting out a practically viable timescale for commencing work on a potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services strategy in alignment with the EDI Action Plan
 - d) A potential Norwich Affordable Financial Services Strategy produced on a practically viable timescale may include:
 - (i) A Project Mandate for investment in local credit unions, possibly including its 'in house' Wherry Dragon credit union. This could possibly be via subordinated debt or deferred shares, and would necessarily involve identification of how affordable finance products could be best used to support cost-effective council service delivery, by engaging with local providers to discuss potential product development opportunities. For example, this may include developing a business case in partnership with credit unions and Norwich

2040 City Vision partners to provide financial support through investment to develop targeted products in line with the council's corporate plan objectives and the objectives of the Norwich 2040 City Vision (examples may include extending managed credit to those struggling via tailored, manageable loans, or targeted loans at reduced interest rates for home improvements that increase energy efficiency).

- (ii) Aligned with a plan of engagement with, and support of, affordable lenders, a plan to encourage and facilitate their adoption of the Affordable Credit Code of Practice as necessary.
- (iii) Examination of using the criteria highlighted within the Affordable Credit Code of Practice to inform future commissioning/ contracting processes for affordable finance provision, to ensure the quality and effectiveness of local services
- (iv) Consideration of how access to affordable finance provision, including the council's insurance offer to tenants, is robustly integrated with wider support services, including those of the council and local voluntary and community sector partners. This (REMOVE should) may include the development of an effective outreach campaign to support access to and uptake of affordable finance provision, drawing on behavioural insights to increase the effectiveness of the campaign. This could e.g. include embedding reference to local affordable finance provision and the 'stop the loan sharks' team within relevant council tax communication processes.
- (v) Development of, together with partners, a robust evaluation framework with clear metrics and success criteria to regularly assess the impact of this strategic work on access to affordable finance.
- (vi) Consideration how the aims of the Strategy align with the treasury management strategy, balanced with consideration of security, liquidity, and yield.

Motion 12(e) – Giving Norwich's children the best start in life

(This item was taken as unopposed business)

(Motion moved by Councillor Lubbock, seconded by Councillor Ackroyd.)

RESOLVED that:

"The two-child benefit cap, which prevents parents from claiming child tax credit or universal credit for more than two children, was introduced by the Conservative Government in 2017.

Analysis by the Child Poverty Action Group shows that 900,000 children living in poverty in England do not currently qualify for free school meals because the Conservative Government introduced an arbitrary £7,400 household income threshold in 2018.

The Norfolk and Waveney Area in which Norwich lies for the provision of health services, has the highest rate of malnutrition in the entire country according to a Future Health report entitled 'In Plain Sight'. The report found that the region has a malnourishment rate of 6.7% compared with a national average for England of 5%. The report analysed the growing problem of malnourishment and its impact on the health system, putting Norfolk and Waveney near the top of a separate chart for hospital admissions for malnutrition.

A recent report from a headteacher in West Earlham revealed the impact of primary children arriving at school hungry and under nourished and suffering vitamin deficiencies.

A new report by the Commons Education Select Committee warns mental health problems and cost-of-living pressures on families are among the complex reasons for increased absenteeism.

Scrapping the two-child limit is the most cost-effective way to reduce child poverty. It would lift 250,000 out of poverty and mean 850,000 children are in less deep poverty.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- (1) call on the UK Government to scrap the two-child benefit cap;
- (2) ask the Council Leader to write to Members of Parliament, Chloe Smith and Clive Lewis representing Norwich, expressing the Council's support for the scrapping of the two-child benefit cap.

Motion 12(f) – Cost of living crisis

(This item was taken as unopposed business).

(Motion moved by Councillor Giles and seconded by Councillor Carrington.)

RESOLVED this Council notes:

“News before Christmas that children in Norwich have “bowed legs: hunger worse than ever” rightly shocked any decent resident and highlights the continuing growing extreme poverty within our city. The UK has a failing economy and a failing Government in which real household disposable incomes in the UK were 1.2 percent lower in the second quarter of 2023 than at the end of 2019, with a long-term crisis in the real value of wages and household income. The Office for Budget Responsibility now says real wages will not return to 2008 levels until 2028. The current pay squeeze will have lasted 20 years, a generation, with the consequent combined impact in driving poverty within Norwich.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- (1) note that austerity economics has patently failed in delivering growth or reducing debt. It has eviscerated public services, harming millions who did not get the support they needed, and life expectancy has fallen. It pushed millions towards and into poverty.
- (2) continue to prioritise and build on the social inclusion agenda within the City Council as previously agreed in prior motions on this subject. Examples of actions taken can be found in the Annual Equality Information Report.
- (3) call on the Government to declare a Cost-of-Living Emergency and provide Covid-level support to residents, businesses, and local government to tackle this issue urgently.
- (4) thank our third sector advice agency partners in the Financial Inclusion Consortium for all their hard work supporting residents.
- (5) continue grant funding the Financial Inclusion Consortium.
- (6) thank our Community Partnerships Team for their hard work distributing Household Support Fund grants to those in need of support with utility bills, food, and other essential items.
- (7) call on the Government to extend the Household Support Fund beyond its current end date of March 2024.
- (8) thank our Benefits team for their hard work administering Housing Benefit, our 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and Discretionary Housing Payments.
- (9) call on the Government to provide an adequate level of Discretionary Housing Payments funding to enable local authorities across the entire financial year to support all Housing Benefit and Universal Credit recipients struggling to pay their rent.
- (10) call on the Government to introduce permanent provision of free school meals for children in school holidays.
- (11) continuing progress working with partners implementing the actions as set out in the Norwich Real Living Wage Place Action Plan; and
- (12) call on the Government to increase the National Minimum Wage to match the Real Living Wage.

(The Lord Mayor closed the meeting.)

LORD MAYOR

Appendix A

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Driver to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Homelessness has sharply risen across Britain since 2010 and I am aware that this council has taken significant steps to tackle it. I was therefore surprised to see the City Council being accused of having an “inhumane” policy with regards to this. Does the cabinet member for social housing agree with this accusation?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Our approach to dealing with rough sleeping in Norwich is person focused, compassionate and successful. Our services work with the client to understand their needs and wishes, ensuring that we have the right provision and support in place to help them off the streets.

The council has a specialist team dedicated to assist rough sleepers, supporting Pathways Norwich, the outreach service, working with church partners to deliver a winter shelter for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough from November to March. We are the only local authority in the area to provide a winter shelter for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough. This is in addition to the 500+ beds available through the city’s hostel system.

Many of those sleeping on the streets have complex needs and may be entrenched. Accessing the winter shelter is often the first step toward building relationships with the help and resources we have available. Our approach is successful. The annual DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) verified rough sleeping count shows an 80 percent decrease in rough sleeping numbers in Norwich since 2016, opposed to national and regional patterns. The latest figures, due for release in February, will show a further reduction.

We will continue our efforts to develop our services for those in the greatest need. I have confidence that this will ensure we and our valued partners are able to provide the best support for people sleeping rough in Norwich.”

(Councillor Driver asked as a supplementary question for further details on the council’s approach to address the complex needs of this client group.

Councillor Jones said that the council’s approach through partnership working addressed rough sleeping which was the best way to address complex needs. She highlighted St Martin’s Housing Trust, Safe to Stay Hub in Recorder Road and new facilities at Webster Court that provided support to prevent rough sleeping. The Pathways Norwich was a multi-agency approach that provided new ways to provide

services to this complex client group. The council was always looking at new ways that it can provide help and support for these vulnerable people with complex needs.)

Question 2

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“As a strong supporter of social housing, I was pleased to read that just before Christmas the council took ownership of 22 new eco-friendly homes in Bowthorpe, with some tenants moving in before Christmas Day itself. This must have been a huge boost for those new tenants. Can the cabinet member comment on progress to develop the rest of the site so that further tenants should be able to begin their tenancies?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Indeed, it is very pleasing that our commitment to building new homes continues. The build programme at Threescore continues to move forward positively and the council will be in a position to advertise and let new homes on a monthly basis from February through to July of this year. I am pleased that we then will have 76 high quality and much needed new homes occupied on this phase of the Threescore site. I am greatly looking forward to further council housing being brought forward on further sites in due course, especially at the former Mile Cross depot where planning proposals should be submitted shortly.”

(Councillor Sands (S) asked as a supplementary question for further details of the innovative design of these new eco-friendly homes. Councillor Jones said that steps were being taken to address fuel poverty by ensuring that the houses had triple glazing which made an impact on energy consumption and make positive improvements to the environment and improve biodiversity, and looking at different ways that it could be enhanced, including promoting the access for hedgehogs across the site.)

Question 3

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Shortly before Christmas I read in the Guardian newspaper a shocking headline which said, “children have bowed legs: hunger worse than ever, says Norwich school”. The headteacher of West Earlham infant and nursery school gave a graphic and profound account of the searing poverty and the impact that this was having upon children in this area of our city. In the face of this ever increasing and desperate poverty, can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on what actions this council can take to tackle poverty in the city?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“Like every city across the country, we are confronted with the challenges posed by the existing poverty within our society. This inequality is the driving force for much of what we do as leaders and champions of the city; we remain wholly committed to the reduction of inequality in all its forms. We maintain strong working relationships with local service delivery partners, both statutory and in the voluntary sector, and continue to work towards our 2040 City Vision, as we promote Norwich’s growth towards a truly creative, liveable, fair, connected, and dynamic city.

We are working closely with health colleagues and partners in relation to the report in West Earlham, taking preventative support services direct to their door through the Wellness on Wheels bus.

Our Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership is soon to mobilise its strategic action plan to reduce health inequalities; it has a dedicated workstream focused on addressing food poverty. We have also provided some funding for the recently opened Earlham based social supermarket, bringing the total number of social supermarkets across the city to six.

Our neighbourhood and community enabling team has been working with people to ensure they are able to access help and support through the Household Support Fund, issuing almost £230,000 to over 1,200 households this financial year. This is in addition to the planned work and support identified through our Sustainable Warmth Strategy, and the commissioned social welfare advice and support provided by our Financial Inclusion Consortium.

Our Living Wage City campaign continues to raise awareness of the blight of insecure, low paid employment and will encourage employers to become accredited, ensuring employees in Norwich are paid a fair wage. Living Wage Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of this, and the Action Group’s communications team ensure that we get our message heard by as many people as possible through radio interviews and media articles. We are also supporting the formation of a Women’s Advisory Board, who will be specifically focused on the economic needs of women. We continue to target our work into those areas that need it most, in our Reducing Inequality Targets Areas, and partners are joining us in this focus, as we do all we can to make Norwich a fairer city. This will be a key theme in our new Corporate Plan for 2024-2029.”

(Councillor Giles replied to Councillor Sands (M)’s supplementary question and reiterated the actions that the council had undertaken following the report on the state of children at the West Earlham school. A meeting had been held across all council departments to consider how the council could help families across the city. Councillor Jones, chair of the Norwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership, had overseen the actions agreed to address food poverty and working with health professionals, housing officers and partners, arranging the Wellness on Wheels bus to attend. This co-ordinated response was working well and could be applied to other schools requiring a similar intervention.)

Question 4

Councillor Carrington to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“As a councillor for Catton Grove, I am regularly contacted by fellow constituents desperate to attain council housing in the city and I am aware that there are over 4,500 people currently on register. At the same time, the council is losing around 140 homes per year through the enhanced Right to Buy, with a consequent loss of £19m per year in rent. It is evident to me that this policy and the difficulty building new council housing at pace has produced a housing crisis both locally and nationally. Can the cabinet member comment on the loss of homes since 2010 with the associated income deprived due to this?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“With 146 homes sold in 2022/23 and 52 so far in 2023/24 through right to buy policy, alongside, 4,500 on our waiting list, we face a challenging housing landscape. The capital receipts from these sales are being reinvested into both constructing new council homes and upgrading the council’s existing homes. This dual approach is crucial in both expanding our housing capacity and ensuring that our current homes meet the required standards. By investing in these upgrades, we not only enhance the quality of life for our residents but also extend the lifespan of these homes, making them viable housing options fit for the future.”

(In reply to Councillor Carrington’s supplementary question relating to the use of capital receipts to benefit residents, Councillor Jones agreed that it was disappointing that council houses were lost through right to buy and that to address this, the council, through its partnership with Orwell Housing Association and other social housing landlords, sought to free up sites, made sure that as many new council houses were built as possible and ensure that it was not in the position of handing back the receipts from RTB to the government, which should be invested in the city.)

Question 5

Councillor Vaughan Thomas to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“In recent weeks the focus on the number of local authorities declaring themselves as effectively bankrupt has skyrocketed and caused understandable concern and fear amongst citizens who receive vital public services. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on the local government settlement, announced just before Christmas, with its impact on this council in relation to whether we face a similar threat?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“The local government finance settlement is still provisional, and members will be aware of the announcement of additional funding being added to the final settlement. These additional funds are welcome as is any recognition of the financial pressures that local government faces both now and in the future. Norwich City Council is not immune from these pressures but, in recognition of the historical good financial management of the authority’s resources, the council has been able to steer well clear of the problems encountered by those local authorities that have needed to declare a S114 notice to date. The future funding of local government is still uncertain, which increases the difficulties in planning in the medium term and consequently also increases the risks that have to be managed. Norwich City Council is fortunate to be able to build upon solid financial foundations, but will need to continue to be prudent in its outlook and vigilant in exercising financial control.

Details of the financial settlement and the implications for the council are set out in the reports progressing through the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and onto Full Council during February, which I am pleased to say reflect a balanced budget for 2024/25 without the need to draw upon reserves.”

(Councillor Thomas (Va) confirmed that he did not have a supplementary question.)

Question 6

Councillor Peek to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Given the importance of building accommodation to tackle homelessness, and particularly rough sleeping, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on the record of the administration and whether she feels this goes far enough?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The council is steadfast in its commitment to addressing homelessness and rough sleeping through new initiatives and effective collaborations. I’m pleased to report that we have successfully secured Rough Sleeper Accommodation funding in the majority of government funding rounds, taking a proactive approach to securing resources for critical projects.

Collaborations with housing association partners have yielded tangible results for vulnerable clients, including six new flats at Webster Court, seven homes at Ketts Hill, specialist Housing First accommodation for young people, and plans to deliver 12 homes at Netherwood Green. Additionally, the council maintains a commitment to Housing First principles, providing 16 dedicated properties for clients transitioning directly from the streets.

The allocation of revenue funding, alongside the capital funding required to build the new homes has meant that individuals at risk of rough sleeping have benefited from a wide range of support. This helps to break the cycle of entrenched rough sleeping and gives people the best chance of a better life.

By seeking out and applying for relevant funding streams, the council is continually responding to the evolving needs of the community. Furthermore, the focus on general needs through our partnerships including the Norwich Orwell Partnership, Lion Homes, and engaging with private developers underlines the council's commitment to those in housing need."

(Councillor Peek as a supplementary question asked whether there were any further steps being taken to address homelessness. Councillor Jones referred to her previous replies on this issue and said that it was crucial that the council assisted asylum seekers needing accommodation to ensure that they did not become rough sleepers. The council worked with St Martin's Housing Trust and other partners to reduce rough sleeping. A specific support worker for asylum seekers had been appointed to oversee this.)

Question 7

Councillor Vivien Thomas to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

"I am proud to be a Labour councillor and have always believed in the difference that co-operative ways of working, through collective power and purchasing, can make for public services. The advent of Big Switch and Save, pioneered by this council nearly a decade ago is a good example of this and how it has been expanded across Norfolk, including providing solar panels. Can the cabinet member for climate change comment on progress with the latest sign ups for both the Solar Together and Switch and Save auctions which completed late last year?"

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

"As Councillor Thomas has noted, Norwich City Council was one of the first local authorities in the country to run collective auctions for energy bill switching and solar panels, pioneering an approach that is now utilised across the country. Both the Solar Together scheme and the Big Community Switch energy scheme continue to be key planks of our work to enable residents to save money and reduce their emissions, supporting the city's transition to net-zero and our response to cost of living concerns.

The most recent Big Community Switch auction has only just finished, and as such the final figures are still unknown. However, the June 2023 auction, which is the latest that we have figures for, proved exceptionally successful with 237 Norwich residents switching as a result. Because of the Big Community Switch, these residents were able to fix their energy bills at a below market rate, providing bill savings, certainty, and access to a 100% renewable tariff.

The 2023 Solar Together auction has been equally as successful, with 114 Norwich residents accepting offers for discounted solar panel installations. This has beaten our own 2022 numbers, and is nearly double the amount of signups that other Norfolk local authorities received in 2023.

The Council remains committed to both schemes and will continue to run these auctions to ensure that residents have the opportunity to save money and reduce their emissions. The success of these also highlights the importance of collaboration and collective action, and as such the council continues to be open to exploring equally innovative schemes to support Norwich in reaching net-zero by 2045.”

(In reply to Councillor Thomas (Vi)'s supplementary question, Councillor Hampton referred her to the written response which set out the council's innovative approach to arrange collective auctions for energy billing and solar panels, and said that this should answer her question, but if she needed further details to contact her.)

Question 8

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Investing in council housing is a top priority for this Labour council and I was therefore pleased that just before Christmas the cabinet voted to support an important update to the Housing Revenue Account business plan which will help deliver new kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors, roofs, insulation, but also £66m to improve energy efficiency and carbon reduction measures including installing cavity, loft and wall insulation, draught proofing, and improvements to heating systems. Solar PV systems will also be installed where most effective. Can the cabinet member elaborate further on the very real physical differences this will make?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“As identified the physical improvements will be delivered as part of the “whole house approach” to the planned delivery. The physical differences will be in-line with the findings of the stock conditions surveys and will indeed fall into the categories that you have identified. The aim is to tie in number of improvement measures that will deliver a holistic approach rather than a series of separate measures that only deliver partial benefits.

This significant programme of investment will transform both the condition our housing and the lives of tenants, whilst at the same time reducing the impact our stock has on the climate. We're taking a 'whole house approach' to investment, which means efficiently packaging works so that all necessary improvements are carried out at the same time. This minimises disruption to tenants and improves cost efficiency, so we maximise outcomes for every pound spent. The programme not only modernises homes but will make them future proof as well. Living spaces will benefit from new kitchens, bathrooms and improved ventilation, the envelope of dwellings will better retain heat which reduces the cost of energy and renewable energy systems will be installed to greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

(Councillor Huntley's supplementary question was to ask for information on the features of the new housing at the Mile Cross Depot site. Councillor Jones replied that this scheme was design orientated to maximise solar energy gain, and included air source heating and triple glazing, and a surface drainage system. There were social benefits for the wider community that included the local schools and sustainability.)

Question 9

Councillor Padda to ask the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:

“Norwich people are rightly proud of their history and heritage and that includes city icons such as the Halls. Investment in our historic built-up environment and the opportunity to enhance our cultural agenda within the city remain important to this Labour led council, so I warmly welcomed the success of securing £3.6m worth of grant funding to transform this unique heritage asset. Now that the Halls have finally closed and re-development will begin, can the cabinet member discuss her views on how this investment will interlink to a much wider enhancement of the cultural provision in the city?”

Councillor Kidman, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture's response:

“The redevelopment of The Halls is a really significant and exciting opportunity for Norwich and will enable this important and historic venue to fully contribute to the cultural ecosystem of the city.

The investment will vastly improve the experience for visitors, performers and staff alike and will include a major upgrade to the sound and lighting system, make the venue more accessible and welcoming to all, and improve bar and café facilities. As a mid-size venue, The Halls plays an important role in the variety of venues across the city, allowing a wide range of performers and creatives to showcase their talents.

The project has support from our cultural partners and the Creative City Compact, and we are working closely with them to ensure the redevelopment can maximise benefits for the wider creative sector.

Our Action Plan for Culture, published last year, sets out our commitment to a number of areas of work to help maintain and expand the City's cultural offer, including the Halls redevelopment, the continued provision of free events, the use of our assets to support our cultural sector and many other activities. The Plan is a stepping stone to a full Culture Strategy which will be complete in Summer 2025.

The importance of our cultural offer to the vibrancy of Norwich, and the opportunity it provides to create a sense of community and aspiration amongst our most disadvantaged communities, are key focus areas in our upcoming corporate plan, demonstrating how serious we are about this important work.”

(In reply to Councillor Padda's supplementary question on how the survey would identify gaps in cultural provision and be available for everyone. Councillor Kidman said that she was passionate about participation for all residents in the cultural activities, and this was the purpose of the survey. The Norwich Creative Compact survey was online, and reminded anyone wishing to be included in the consultation that the deadline for comments was 31 January 2024. She referred to the 5-year Norwich Castle Royal Palace Reborn project was nearing completion and would be the British Museum's first medieval gallery outside London, and press reports that Norwich was one of the most exciting places to be. The council would continue to build on this platform, to protect and expand the city's cultural offer to benefit all residents.)

Question 10

Councillor Maguire to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

"When I first came to Norwich over 50 years ago, I was in awe of the Tree population along the roads and streets of our city making it so green and pleasant. Until recently, our city maintained those trees and was engaged in regular replacement and renewal using this as an opportunity to bring in more native species that supported pollinating insects. Ever since the loss of the Norwich Joint Highways Agreement, however, I regularly receive comments and concerns from residents who witness street trees on highway land no longer replaced and the general erosion of the city's once proud coverage. On land which is still responsibility of this council, can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on recent bids to secure more trees within the city."

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

"Norwich City Council maintains 38,092 individual trees located in parks, open spaces, housing areas, car parks, cemeteries, and churchyards around the city.

There are also an estimated 300,000 trees within woodland groups that are not individually recorded.

Norwich has many treelined roads and leafy parks, the tree canopy cover in Norwich is estimated to be 18.6%

Urban trees are valued greatly by local communities, providing a broad range of benefits to people and the wider environment:

- Filter airborne dust and pollution.
- Improve local air quality.
- Sequestration of carbon
- Reduce temperature extremes.
- Reduce storm water runoff and the possibility of flooding.
- Increase biodiversity.

Using the Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees methodology (CAVAT), the economic, social, and environmental benefits that the councils' trees provide have been valued at just over three hundred million pounds. With regards to recent bids to secure more trees in the city, we have been successful in securing £235,000 funding for new tree planting through the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF) and the Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) for the 4 years from 2023 – 2027. We have already planted 332 trees this year through these schemes, and plans are being developed for the next 3 years.”

(Councillor Maguire confirmed that he did not have a supplementary question.)

Question 11

Councillor Prinsley to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“The maintenance of our Council Tax Reduction Scheme as a clear mechanism from which we can better protect some of the most financially vulnerable constituents in Norwich is something all members of the council can be proud of. I was therefore concerned to read that the government intends in the 2024/25 financial to migrate all housing benefit claimants of working age, including mixed age couples, except those in temporary and exempt accommodation, to Universal Credit administered by the DWP. Given the importance of this policy, and the discretion allowed through it by elected councillors, can the cabinet member comment on his views as to whether he welcomes this change?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“This Labour-led city council is rightly proud to continue to support our residents by retaining a 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). It is disappointing that the migration of all the remaining legacy Housing Benefit claimants of working age, including mixed age couples, to Universal Credit in the 2024/25 financial year will reduce the level of discretion we have to support these claimants through our CTRS Scheme from 2025/26 onwards. The Applicable Amount for CTRS claimants in receipt of Universal Credit is the UC Maximum Award, rather than the level of Applicable Amount set by the City Council. Upon migration we lose the discretion in relation to these claimants to, for the purpose of calculating income, fully disregard housing costs and ignore the two-child benefits cap as we currently do with legacy HB claimants applying for CTRS.

The Government intends to keep pensioners, with the exception of mixed-age couples, and those in temporary/exempt accommodation on Housing Benefit which we will continue to administer.

We are politically committed to retaining our 100% CTRS scheme for all claimants, and migration of legacy HB claimants to UC will not remove this

ability. We are legally obliged to provide a 100% CTRS scheme for pensioners.”

(Councillor Prinsley’s supplementary question asked what the government should do to eliminate the need for this discretionary benefit. Councillor Giles said that the root causes of poverty were complicated and numerous and pointed out that there was a motion later on the agenda seeking to address it. One solution that government should consider was the introduction of legislation to ensure that people had a real living wage and had sufficient income to cover their basic needs.)

Question 12

Councillor Catt to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“In a gutter repair case reported back in November 2022, the council have failed to deliver the repair with about four separate work orders being raised, appointments missed left right and centre by NCSL or contractors and target dates for completion pushed further and further back while lots of money has been spent on inefficient communication back and forth, officer time wasted and the resident still left angry and disappointed. It is clear we need a housing repair reporting system where tenants can book in their own repair appointments to give residents certainty, to actually deliver their repair while saving the council time and money cutting out endless inefficient communication internally. I have been told we already have the capability but have chosen not to switch this on. Is this because the council does not believe NCSL is fit to handle the demand of a customer-led repairs reporting system?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“I believe previously that you queried this and received a response from the executive director of housing and community safety. We've undertaken a thorough review, dedicating the past six months to developing an improvement plan for NCSL's service delivery. While the NEC system has appointment functionality, it's currently basic initial focus has been on refining core scheduling activities. This will overlay the NEC system, offering dynamic scheduling solutions, transparency, and customer choice. The rationale for not turning the functionality on is not related to NCSL being unable to handle demand it is related to a prioritised approach to improving the whole scheduling and customer experience.”

(Councillor Catt confirmed that he was specifically told by the executive director of housing and community services that NCSL, as an organisation, had had a difficult 18 months and was not structured in such a way to be able cope with a resident demand led repairs service, which contradicted with the cabinet member’s response, and asked if the council was considering specific reporting software or other tools to implement this. Councillor Jones said that she shared Councillor Catt’s ambitions and that the three-year improvement plan, with work going on behind the scenes to explore every opportunity available, was a journey to ensure that NCSL provided the best service for our residents.)

Question 13

Councillor Galvin to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Following our decision as a council to take action against pre-payment meters last January, please update me on the actions we have taken to use all communications methods at our disposal (website, letter, tenancy agreement, tenant involvement panel, social media, Citizen magazine, local press, etc) to explain, inform and continue to underline to residents that they do not have to accept a prepayment meter; and offer assistance to those who wish to move to other forms of payment if appropriate; provide discretionary help to residents with pre-payment meters and what extra attempts we have made to ascertain which city council tenants have prepayment meters, especially those who might be at extra risk of being cut off, and monitor them to offer assistance, for example through housing officer and other support.”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Norwich City Council remains committed to supporting residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis and experiencing fuel poverty.

A core part of this is supporting residents at risk of being moved to prepayment meters by their supplier. To help residents understand their rights, the council has shared advice on social media and on our website's cost of living page, providing guidance to residents and highlighting the rules energy suppliers must follow. The link to these cost-of-living pages, which also detail other support that residents might be eligible for, has been signposted extensively in housing letters, Council Tax letters, Citizen magazine, and on social media.

Because tenants are able to change utility supplier and associated metering as they wish, we don't have data on who has a pre-payment meter. However, the council continues to offer extensive support to residents experiencing financial difficulties, so tenants who do come to us experiencing issues with energy bills can get help.

The Household Support Fund has enabled us to offer additional discretionary support this year, and alongside this we have been educating recipients about the standing charges they face.

Specifically, if high utility bills are a reason for money issues, the council's Income Officers will have discussions with residents about pre-payment meters, but the nature of conversation and the desire to empower individuals means that residents won't be probed about whether or not they have a pre-payment meter. If further guidance is required, residents will be referred to the Budgeting Advice and Money Advice team who are able to provide more detailed support and guidance.

It's also important to note that improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock is crucial to alleviating fuel poverty. The council has delivered energy

efficiency improvements to over 2000 properties in the past 5 years, most notably installing external wall insulation on 41 of our least efficient homes. We have ambitious plans for the future, and are currently developing a bid for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2.2 to allow us to continue this important work.”

(Councillor Galvin asked by way of a supplementary question what would be in place to replace the Housing Support Grant. Councillor Jones said that was not sure and about the current government’s intentions and undertook to contact Councillor Galvin to discuss this further.)

Question 14

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

“In September 2023, I asked a question about the role of residents and councillors in the future of City Hall. I was told that “at the heart of that plan will be stakeholder and resident engagement at an early stage to inform next steps.” Could I have an update on how this stakeholder and resident engagement is progressing”?

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“Thank you for your question about this Councillor Young.

We are working with Inner Circle Consulting to take forward this project and establish a strategic brief for future development of City Hall. The aim is to have the strategic brief for City Hall produced by summer 2024, a focussed engagement plan will sit alongside this and will ensure resident and stakeholder input to support the delivery of the project is achieved.

As Inner Circle have also been working on our new corporate plan, they are well placed to ensure that the extensive stakeholder and resident engagement received via workshops, panel discussions, focus groups, street outreach and online surveys undertaken on the corporate plan informs our exciting work on the future of City Hall.”

(In reply to Councillor Young’s supplementary question, Councillor Kendrick referred to his written response about improving City Hall to let it out. Some constructive suggestions had been received and an external consultant had been engaged.)

Question 15

Councillor Hoechner to ask the cabinet member for regulatory services the following question:

“Digital billboards consume a huge amount of energy, leading to more carbon emissions; they increase light pollution, adversely affecting both wildlife and people’s health; they clutter our city visually and they can distract drivers, making our streets less safe. Bristol City Council recently adopted a new local

plan that expands upon national regulations by setting out criteria against which an advertisement's response to "amenity" and "public safety", the two only considerations local planning authorities can take into account when assessing planning applications for new digital billboards, will need to be assessed. Campaigners are confident that the new criteria will make it harder for advertisers to build large, new, intrusive screens in Bristol. Will the Cabinet member commit to exploring opportunities for Norwich City Council to adopt similar criteria as part of the council's Development Management Policies or planned Design Code at the earliest opportunity?"

Councillor Fulton-McAlister, the cabinet member for regulatory services' response:

"The policy that Bristol City Council have recently published for consultation as part of their Local Plan Review does indeed provide some helpful clarity but does not fundamentally alter the matters that a council can consider when determining advertisement applications, for example it does not make reference to the impact of illuminated adverts upon wildlife. Subject to the publication shortly of the expected national development management policies, the development management policies for Norwich will be reviewed and we will consider at this stage whether it would be legally possible to include a local policy on advertisements, and the extent of any such policies including whether environmental considerations can be included. Any changes to the Development Management policies will be required to undergo consultation as part of a Local Plan Review process."

(In reply to Councillor Hoechner's supplementary question relating to timescales, Councillor Fulton-McAlister referred to his written response and said that this was dependent on the publication of the government guidelines so that consultation the council's development management policies could be held in tandem.)

Question 16

Councillor Champion to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

"In October 2023, Homeless Link released guidance for local authorities to ensure that rough sleeps are given shelter under a Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) before temperatures dip below freezing, using the 'feels-like' temperature rather than actual temperature and taking into account rain, snow, wind chill, gales and weather warnings to ensure we can best prevent serious medical implications or death on our streets. It also says that shelter should be offered in occasions of extreme hot weather. Currently our SWEP says that shelter will only be provided when three days of freezing temperatures are predicted, and does not include shelter during extreme heat. I was told this policy has recently been reviewed, but there is no mention of this on the updated SWEP section of the council website. Why did this review not take into account of new guidance to save lives of rough sleepers on our streets?"

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“The council’s website is clear that we follow the government guidance on supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather as updated in September 2023.

The council, in collaboration with Pathways Norwich, homelessness services and our partners, actively engages in efforts to prevent and address rough sleeping, particularly during extreme weather conditions.

As per guidance, the decision-making process for SWEP activations takes into account factors other than temperature alone, as set out in the daily Weather Health Alerts provided by the Met Office.

During the last 3 years Norwich has been in a fortunate position to have use of the winter night shelter available to anyone rough sleeping throughout the winter months in addition to any SWEP activations.

In the event of a regional weather warning for severe heat, we have established a robust plan during hot weather, with additional support provided to vulnerable individuals. This includes the distribution of packs containing essential items and targeted outreach efforts by our rough sleeper teams and partners. Throughout the year, beds are available to people who have been sleeping rough on the street through the ‘somewhere safe to stay’ hub and the supported accommodation system.

As a council we remain committed to preventing harm and fatalities on the streets, and we continuously strive to develop and improve our services.”

(In reply to Councillor Champion’s supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that it was important that there was longer term provision and not beds just for one night. This was the reason that the council was investing in its partners in the Safe Place to Stay Hub and Webster Court, to provide a wraparound service to support homeless people. Further support would be provided at Webster Court. The council and its partners took a housing first approach to explore every opportunity to prevent rough sleeping.)

Question 17

Councillor Haynes to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“In answer to a question at September 2023 full council, we were told that orders for fire doors had been raised and that doors would start to be installed in October. We were then told the programme was on hold. Then we were told that details of programme were being put together in early October and would be shared when the programme commences. This did not happen. We asked about this a second time at full council in November 2023, being told works would commence in February. Residents have been waiting up to five years for doors which meet fire safety regulations, and this is unacceptable - people should feel safe in their homes. It is time for some honesty. Does the

cabinet member have confidence that NCSL can reliably deliver this programme from February?"

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

"We have appointed a contractor from a specialist framework provider to undertake the installation works at Winchester and Normandie towers. Within these blocks we have undertaken various works to mitigate the risk, such as installing secondary fire alarms within dwellings, fire-stopping works in communal areas and repairs to doors where required. These works have to be undertaken by accredited companies and their installation tradespeople. We are undertaking pilot works in Winchester Tower in February to finalise the precise installation process and will then commence the programme of installations from March 2024. We will concurrently tender for the remaining programmed works with the intention of appointing a further 3-4 specialist contractors to accelerate the programme and complete the remaining replacements in the shortest possible timeframe."

(There was no supplementary question from Councillor Haynes who was absent from the meeting.)

Question 18

Councillor Davis to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

"Councillors are often told damp and repair works have been completed and removed from the tracker, only to discover when checking with the tenant, that work has been partially completed, or in some cases not started. What evidence of completion is provided to assure councillors and residents that contractors are not being paid for work which has not been completed?"

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

"When works are completed by the contractor this is recorded on the council repairs system to confirm completion of the works. This includes the nature of the work carried out and when it was completed. Historically, follow up surveys were undertaken with a selection of customers to receive feedback. As part of the recently completed property services restructure, we have introduced the role of "clerk of works" to strengthen our validation process. This role will carry out physical inspections of completed repairs on a sample basis. The sample will be dictated by the type of works and any identified trends."

(In reply to Councillor Davis's supplementary question asking that members were given contact details for the clerk of works so that they could send photographic evidence of works that were listed as repaired that were clearly not. Councillor Jones said that this would normally be recorded on Civica and could be marked for the

attention of the clerk of works. However, she would liaise with housing officers on the best way of doing this and provide a response to Councillor Davis in due course.)

Question 19

Councillor Oliver to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“I was surprised to read on social media that the Reuse Centre at Swanton Road has recently closed due to unforeseen circumstances. The depot provided an accessible and convenient drop off point for items for reuse, diverting them from landfill and recycling. Since the recycling centre was closed and there was no longer a facility within city council boundaries, this provided an alternative. It provided training opportunities, supported community groups such as Mile X, and hosted pop up sales. It won an industry award and was unique in many aspects. On site visits, Councillor Stutely and I were impressed by the vision and creativity of the Benjamin Foundation staff and could see how their work would meet many of the council’s objectives (environmental, community cohesion). As the owner of the building what steps did the council take to ensure the survival of this important service?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The Benjamin Foundation have been providing an excellent facility at Swanton Road and it is unfortunate that it has closed. The premises was let to the Benjamin Foundation by a previous tenant whose lease ended in January. The council had been in discussions with the Benjamin Foundation about continuing the facility and had offered a new lease at a peppercorn rent whilst the future of the property was considered further. Unfortunately, despite this offer, the Benjamin Foundation wrote to us in December advising that they would not be able to continue to run the facility and that sadly they had made the decision to close the premises. I understand that the Benjamin Foundation have looked at alternative ways of running their furniture refurbishment operations to enable them to continue their good work.”

(In reply to Councillor Oliver’s supplementary question which suggested that the offer of a peppercorn rent had been for a temporary period. Councillor Hampton replied that she and Councillor Kendrick had visited the Benjamin Foundation and learnt more about its services and educational opportunities and were aware that the organisation would continue to offer its services from other locations. The Foundation had sublet the premises from a former tenant and the council had not been party to this arrangement. The council recognised the social value of the Foundation’s use of the facility and was willing to support the organisation, but this needed to be proportionate and the gap between the market rent and the social value and offer that the organisation offered, taking into account other organisations and services in the area, was not proportionate to offer a peppercorn rent in the long term. Councillor Oliver was aware of ways that organisation could be supported to continue its work, Councillor Hampton said that she would be pleased to hear of it.)

Question 20

Councillor Stutely to ask the cabinet member for regulatory services the following question:

“In 2019 I identified that taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) enforcement was inadequate and repeatedly asked officers and colleagues for additional resources, but adequate permanent funding has never materialised. I also asked for parking enforcement to keep taxi ranks clear but that isn’t happening either. Of particular concern is the ongoing failure to control late night PHVs and Hackneys in Prince of Wales Road. There are reports of PHV abuses, while the taxi rank is frequently unusable due to other vehicles (including PHVs) illegally parking. The result is chaotic with frustrated visitors remaining the area for much longer than necessary. There is potential for disorder, but also vulnerable young people are unable to get home safely. Could the cabinet member comment on whether he believes that sufficient levels of enforcement action have taken place, especially in the month of December, including confirmation of permanently funded officers to help address issues?”

Councillor Fulton-McAlister, the cabinet member for regulatory services' response:

“With regards to parking enforcement, we have increased enforcement activity in the Prince of Wales Road area over the last 6 months. For example, 37 hours of late-night patrols were carried out at weekends in December aimed at improving traffic flow, addressing unsafe parking, and providing reassurance for visitors and residents in the area. This included taxi rank enforcement, where the presence of Civil Enforcement Officers acted as a deterrent against unauthorised use.

In addition, following receipt of complaints, we are investigating licensed vehicles and checking operator records to establish whether they were pre-booked. This includes sharing information with neighbouring licensing authorities on their licensed vehicles. Private hire vehicles are permitted to wait for their pre-booked journeys in a location where they are lawfully entitled to wait or park. Any licensing contraventions are reported to home licensing authorities as appropriate, and we have frequent contact with our licensing counterparts at Broadland and South Norfolk particularly.

I will work with officers to drive efficiencies in the service and look at strategies to build capacity in order to increase effective enforcement activities.”

(Councillor Stutely by way of a supplementary question asked Councillor Fulton-McAlister whether this situation demonstrated that the licensing team was over stretched. Councillor Fulton-McAlister referred to his written response and questioned whether in four years as chair of Licensing Committee, Councillor Stutely had not sought to resolve this situation.)

(Councillor Fulton-Alister later apologised to Councillor Stutely for personal comments made in his response.)

Question 21

Councillor Everett to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“The housing department does not record data for non-qualification to the housing register. What is the reason for data not being collected, anonymised and used to inform the financial inclusion consortium of the reasons residents may be seeking support, so they can plan accordingly?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“GDPR guidance states that organisations must not keep personal data for longer than it is needed. Once a determination is made our need for the information ends.

This question suggests that qualification for the Home Options scheme is affected by affordability or finance, which is not the case. Affordability for example is not an issue that would affect the allocation of council housing, although we acknowledge that some housing associations undertake affordability checks prior to allocation. We are happy to work with the housing financial inclusion consortium if they require any information regarding the operation of the housing register.”

(In reply to Councillor Everett’s supplementary question, Councillor Jones referred to the written response and confirmed that affordability was not an issue that affects the allocation of council housing. The rules were applied to ensure that all housing allocations were made fairly.)

Question 22

Councillor Worley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“Rechargeable fees are when tenants pay the council back for work it has done. Please could you outline what the levels of rechargeable fees recovered have been over past five years as a percentage of the total, year by year?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Over the past four years a total of £576,103 has been recharged in fees to former and current tenants for work that has been carried out by the council’s contractors. To date we have recovered approximately 28% of these costs. As part of the Council’s debt recovery strategy, workstreams and guidance are being prepared to significantly improve the rate of income recovery.”

(Councillor Worley pointed out that around £400k of debt should be reinvested in improving housing and services for residents, and asked whether the cabinet member met with him to discuss the plans that the council had to increase the 28% that had been recovered. Councillor Jones said that there was a work around which she would be happy to discuss with Councillor Worley. The council always looked at ways to maximise collection, but it was a difficult time financially for lots of people.)

Question 23

Councillor Schmierer to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“Residents are regularly reporting that communal bins are not being collected on time even when residents report the issue to the council. Rubbish accumulates making the area look unsightly and can attract vermin. Sadly, this seems to be a growing problem in recent months with missed collections being reported in the Oak Street area, Rouen Road area and Duke Street. Can the cabinet member reassure residents by telling me what actions are being taken to stop the problem getting worse?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“The collection issues at the locations identified by Councillor Schmierer were caused by changes to access arrangements introduced by the property managers, particularly changes to locks and electronic key fobs. In these cases, we are reliant on the property managers advising the council promptly of any changes that are made, and providing us with new keys and fobs to allow us to access the bin storage areas.

Where we are made aware that collections are missed, either via Biffa, residents or elected members, we liaise with property managers and Biffa, our collection contractor, to ensure that we can gain access as quickly as possible to empty the communal bins and remove any excess waste that has accumulated.”

(Councillor Schmierer, by way of a supplementary question, said that it was not a case of new keys or fobs, but simply that collections were missed, the information had been provided and asked the cabinet member what was being done to address this and asked what was being planned to do to address this. Councillor Hampton said that the written response referred to the issue which was the cause of the problem. If this was not the case, then she could go back and have a look at the situation.)

Question 24

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“Many communal bin areas are eventually cleared of fly tipping if a request is put in, but the area is left filthy with detritus all over the ground. Is the cabinet member satisfied with the service we are providing?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“Unfortunately, fly tipping is an issue across the city and affects different categories of locations, including communal bin areas. In the calendar year 2023, over 80% of incidents were cleared with 24 hours of reporting.

Responsibility for clearing fly tipping is dependent on site ownership. On land owned by the council, NCSL is responsible for clearing fly tipping. They offer a highly responsive service in difficult circumstances, and we are not aware of any concerns about the quality of service delivery

On sites that are owned either by registered social landlords or are privately owned, responsibility for clearing fly tipping lies with the owner. The council has no responsibility for this, but would provide advice where requested.”

(Councillor Price referred to the state of council owned shared bin areas and said that payments were being made for work that was not taking place, and asked the cabinet member to share with him the quality assurance and key performance indicators for this work. Councillor Hampton said that she did not have this information but would provide Councillor Price with a written response in due course.)

Question 25

Councillor Calvert to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“How many council properties are awaiting repairs that are currently overdue for completion by Norwich City Services Limited?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“Norwich City Services Limited (NCSL) have experienced an increase in reported and raised repairs, from a historic annual volume of circa 26,000 to an increased projected volume of circa 36,000. This is in line with the wider repairs industry as identified by Housemark. This increase in the volume of works has translated into an increase in works identified as being out of target, with other organisations experiencing the same challenges.

In July 2023 following the appointment of additional skills and expertise to the NCSL Board and management team, work commenced to improve repairs scheduling processes, repairs reporting methodology and productivity. As of 23 January, there are 3195 properties awaiting a repair, there are no emergencies identified in this figure and this ranges across all repairs categories.”

(Councillor Calvert’s supplementary question was that 1 in 4 council homes were waiting for a repair and asked how many of those were overdue. Councillor Jones said that she would provide a written response outside the meeting.)

Question 26

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

“On a number of occasions, colleagues and I have made verbal agreements with cabinet members to meet, to discuss the issues that arise in our wards, but have later found that the meetings don’t happen. Email responses can take a long time to get a response to, and while I can appreciate that cabinet members have busy schedules, sometimes emails appear to be overlooked entirely. Do cabinet members agree that when a course of action, such as meeting with a councillor, or emailing over some information, is verbally agreed in a public meeting, those actions should be carried out?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“As a general rule I would agree that meetings with cabinet members which are agreed should take place although, due to high workloads and competing priorities, expectations of timescales for holding such meetings might not always be possible to meet. There may also be occasions where a meeting with a cabinet member is requested but it is deemed more appropriate for the member to meet with an officer or to be sent written information, or both. If there are any specific examples of problems with meetings, I would be pleased to receive them and look into them.”

(Councillor Fox by way of a supplementary question, commented that as cabinet had increased to 8 members did it mean that cabinet members were able to commit to actions they had agreed in public meetings and send courtesy notes if they were unable to attend to an agreed course of action. Councillor Stonard replied that yes, he was sure they would.)

Question 27

Councillor Osborn to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:

“A resident on Bull Close reported a leaking roof on 6 February 2023. On 7 February she was told the roof was included in the re-roofing programme for 2022/23. In March 2023 a surveyor visited and confirmed there was a leak, and said he would report to the council. In May, having heard nothing, the resident contacted the council to ask what was happening and was told that the repair was now scheduled for 2023/24. In September, the resident contacted the council again, and two operatives visited the next day – but had been sent to the wrong flat. The resident was then told that the repair was scheduled for 2024/25. In October, scaffolding was put up and then removed again without repairing the leak. Can the cabinet member confirm what process is in place to ensure that repairs scheduled for 2022/23 do not get delayed by at least two years?”

Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:

“I am not sure how long you have been aware of this case, but you will appreciate that without a specific address I am unable to provide you with an answer this evening. If you provide me with the details outside the meeting, I will ensure you receive a full update from officers.

I believe that you may be referring to a planned programme of work rather than a responsive repair, but again that is not clear from your question. All planned programmes are based on component lifecycle. In this case - roofs. The year before a roof programme is due, inspections are carried out to evaluate condition. If the condition remains good the lifecycle may be extended. All planned programmes are subject to this approach.

You will be aware that we have commissioned a 100% stock conditions survey which is due for completion this year. This will provide property services teams with improved data when planning programmes of work.”

(Councillor Osborn said that a planned programme of works was within a set period and his supplementary question was how many repairs had been delayed. Councillor Jones said that whilst she had no information on this, there had been a lot of work around this, and it was work in progress. There had been a positive step forward, which all the council would agree, would provide the best for residents.)

Question 28

Councillor Francis to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:

“Residents are reporting wheelie bins being left out on the pavement and in public alleyways to the council on a regular basis, as it presents both health and access problems for them. An FOI request by a resident revealed that there had been no enforcement actions taken in the last year. I raised this issue with a question to full council in June of last year, when I was told that the council prefers to use a 'light touch'. Clearly the 'light touch' is not working, and residents are feeling frustrated and ignored by the council. Can the cabinet member comment on whether they have confidence in their 'light touch' approach to enforce the bylaw regarding wheelie bins, under section 46a of the Environmental Protection Act 1990?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:

“As Councillor Francis is aware, we investigate all reports of bins obstructing footways, and engage with residents to ensure that pavements are kept clear. Any action that is taken needs to be proportionate taking into account the seriousness of the incidents being reported, and the resources available to deal with them.

We have taken advice on the effectiveness of issuing notices under S46a of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and this this enforcement route is regarded as ineffective in addressing the problem on bins left out before and

after collection. We therefore believe that, in the circumstances, the informal approach we currently take is the most effective in dealing with this problem.”

(In reply to a supplementary question from Councillor Francis, Councillor Hampton said that she would visit Magdalen Street and discuss with officers the issue of bins obscuring the welcome mural to see what could be done. The council took action which was relatively informal but could consider taking enforcement action when necessary.)

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 53 of Part 3 of the council’s constitution.

(The following question was not taken because more than 30 minutes had passed.)

Question 29

Councillor Schmierer to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:

“Norwich has fifteen community centres owned by the city council and operated by organisations within their own right, only one of which has renewable energy. This saves significantly on its previously high energy bill as a result. The council does not hold information on the energy bills for these buildings which are paid by the communities they serve. To save centres money and help them provide services for their communities and to cut carbon, will the cabinet member commit to making sure these costs are collected and analysed?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:

“Renewable energy has positive environmental and financial impacts, and I am pleased to hear that the investment in solar panels made by Marlpit Community Centre is having such a significant impact on its energy bills. This in turn helps the charity keep their hire rates down, making the community centre more affordable for the residents it serves.

As you rightly say, each community centre is operated by an organisation in their own right, and we are very grateful for the huge numbers of residents who volunteer their time to run these buildings, delivering such a valuable service to the community.

As these are independent organisations, we cannot oblige community centres to provide these details and I am mindful about placing an additional burden on volunteers. However, as part of our ongoing support to community centres, I am happy to offer that if the community centres send us their energy costs, we would be able to look at these and share an analysis back with a view to identifying money and carbon saving opportunities.”