

Council

21 July 2015

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Carlo to ask the portfolio holder for resources and income generation:

"Towards the end last year, Norwich City Council approved capital spending of £210,000 on Waterloo Park pavilion for bringing it back into operation. I enquired why a large amount of money had been earmarked for essential works to a building that had been substantially re-furbished about 12 years ago. The briefing note provided in response contains the statement:

"The Heritage Lottery Fund invested a considerable amount of money in Waterloo Park including renovation of the pavilion. The fact that the pavilion is not open and in use as required by the HLF agreement means there is a risk of HLF reclaiming capital provided. The building is also starting to fall into disrepair through lack of use".

I emailed the city council in March and again in early May to find out why the essential work was not carried at the time of the original refurbishment, especially as it was a condition of the HLF grant. Over ten years have been lost when the pavilion could have been let out for public use and an income generated. The city council promised to investigate and get back but never did.

Please could the cabinet member answer my question?"

Councillor Stonard, portfolio holder for resources and income generation's response:

"Officers have had difficulty tracking down the history to this, as the HLF works at the pavilion were completed over 12 years ago. I am sorry that officers have not kept you informed of their investigations which have taken longer than anticipated due to abortive enquires.

The HLF works involved a number of repairs to the pavilion and improvements to the park more generally. As part of this the roof was inspected in consultation with Ayton Asphalt. In light of this was decided that the asphalt only needed some minor repairs to keep it watertight. Some slabs were added on top of the asphalt

Unfortunately the repair only lasted a short period before water ingress began to reappear, however. It is understood that the source of this ingress was very difficult to identify at the time. This may have contributed to the short lived nature of the repair.

Since the water ingress reappeared further repair work was attempted in 2005-06. In 2012 the waterproof roof membrane was replaced and whilst of good quality it also failed to stop water ingress. More recently a proposal for major capital repairs has therefore been put forward for inclusion in the council's general fund capital programme and which are hoped to remedy the problem for 10 years (as unfortunately flat roofs do not have the same lifespan as pitched tiled roofs).

As originally envisaged, the capital repairs proposal also included ancillary works including provision of car parking. However there is some doubt that the latter would be compatible with the HLF conditions. The project was therefore scaled back but is now being funded from the 2015-16 capital programme for implementation this financial year."

Question 2

Councillor Boswell to ask the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development:

"At last year's public examination on the northern distributor road (NDR), evidence was presented that that Norfolk's annual transport carbon emissions will increase by 6.17% if the NDR is built (year 2032 compared to base year 2012), and 4.7% even if the NDR is not built. This is based on county council data presented to the examination, and the figures are not challenged by the county council, and accepted by the examining authority in their report, and the Secretary of State in his decision letter of 2 June.

These figures also reflect the whole *Norwich area transportation strategy* (NATS) and therefore already include any benefits of programmed bus, walking and cycling measures under NATS. Given that the recent NDR decision effectively sets these emission increases for the future in the transport sector under NATS/NDR, please can the cabinet member advise what actions he considers should now be taken to make steeper reductions in emissions in other sectors (such as energy and housing) to meet the city's *Corporate plan* and *Environmental strategy* objectives and targets of Norwich being a low carbon city?"

Councillor Bremner, portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development's response:

"In answering Cllr Boswell's question some context needs to be provided. The figures he quotes from the public examination do not purport to represent changes in Norfolk's annual transport carbon emissions. The county council modelled a sub-set of all relevant transport and it is misleading to suggest it

represents the whole transport sector in all of Norfolk which would include much more detail outside of Norwich and would also consider rail etc.

Furthermore the modelling and calculations carried out were not undertaken for the purpose of informing the carbon management strategy for the area. Specific carbon modelling would need to be undertaken in order to do that.

Since 2005 overall carbon emissions in Norfolk have been falling. Back in 2005 it was 8.7 tonnes per person. In 2013 – the latest data from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) – it was 7.5 tonnes per person, i.e. a 14% reduction.

In the same reporting period Norwich's emissions have fallen even more impressively from 7 tonnes per person to 5.2 tonnes, i.e. a 26% reduction.

Considering the NATS objectives and policies delivery of the strategy including the building of the NDR has only a modest impact on road transport emissions within the city. This is because NATS is intended to manage transport demand to the city so that as much growth as possible is taken up by non-car modes such as cycling and public transport. Data shows that measures such as park and ride and other elements of NATS to-date have been successful in achieving this already. Looking ahead the modelled data presented at the examination predicted a 1.5% increase in motor transport carbon emissions for Norwich and its immediate surrounds by 2032 compared to 2012.

As regards what actions in sectors should be taken to mitigate a potential rise in emissions from transport it would be prudent to continue to monitor actual emission data first and then act on this rather than undertaking actions based on any forecast models.

Presently the council is already embarked on an ambitious environmental work programme through its latest Environmental Strategy. This strategy covers all emission types including industry, transport and domestic. I would refer Councillor Boswell to the action plan contained within it to see what is planned."

Question 3

Councillor Price to ask the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development:

"Would the cabinet member commit to developing a list of priorities relating to the government's proposed annual 1% cuts in council house rents, if it is introduced, which protects carbon reducing home improvements and the highest build standards that we have committed to with any new housing?"

Councillor Bremner, portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development's response:

“The council remains committed to the corporate priorities of decent homes for all; including reducing carbon impact and tackling fuel poverty.

Whilst further work needs to be carried out to understand the impact of the recent budget announcements on the 30 year housing revenue account business plan and the council’s aspirations for new build; the council is committed to maintain quality, good standards and value for money.

The council’s environmental strategy commits council to code 4 or Passivhaus; and the council is supporting fabric first design solutions for new homes to reduce to need to use energy in the first instance and maximise the efficient use of any energy required through renewal and sustainable resources.

In addition, the cost of renewable and sustainable solutions are reducing, which will help us to continue to meet these goals.”

Question 4

Councillor Woollard to ask the portfolio holder for fairness and equality:

“Can the cabinet member for fairness and equality give his comments on the results of the recent *Solar Together Norfolk initiative*?”

Councillor Thomas, portfolio holder for fairness and equality’s response:

“Thousands of people across Norfolk are set to benefit from the recent success of the UK’s first ever council-run solar panel scheme. The 3,379 households and businesses across the county which registered for Solar Together Norfolk are set to be offered average savings of 16 per cent on solar panels for their homes and offices.

After a one-day auction process, the savings offered to participants were between 11 per cent and 19 per cent below the current market price for solar panels. The average saving works out at 16 per cent.

For example, a household which requires 16 solar panels would normally expect to pay around £5,740 in the current market. But with Solar Together Norfolk the cost would be £4,630, a saving of £1,100.

The winning contractor for the work is Job Worth Doing Ltd, which is one of the leading UK installers of energy efficiency products. It is accredited by the Renewable Energy Association and has ISO9001 accreditation for high quality standards. All work will be done by Norfolk installers, which are part of the organisation’s existing network.

The aim of Solar Together Norfolk is to offer quality competitively-priced solar panels with a guarantee, installed by a reputable installer for sustainable,

clean and environmentally-friendly energy. It also means participants can save on energy bills and earn from the power they generate.

The scheme, which achieves the best deal for the best solar product by using the power of collective bargaining, has been open to all householders and businesses throughout Norfolk no matter which council district they are located in.

To accommodate householders who have missed the opportunity to register, new subscribers are being accepted until 14 September. This will be on a first come first served basis until the number of registrants reaches a limit of 4,000. These individuals will be able to register online and then immediately see their personal offer.

Householders and businesses have until Monday 14 September to decide whether to take up the offer. There are no costs or obligations up until this point.

A huge amount of detail is available about Solar Together Norfolk. Please do visit solartogether.co.uk to access this."

Question 5

Councillor Ryan to ask the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development:

"Can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give his views on the proposals for the council to run an accreditation scheme for all privately rented properties in the city and the subsequent enforcement actions that may be taken against landlords who do not comply with the rules of the scheme, if it is approved?"

Councillor Bremner, portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development's response:

"Recent research carried out by the Building Research Establishment for Norwich City Council has shown that as many as 20% of privately rented homes in Norwich and 25% of houses in multiple occupation contain hazards that seriously affect the health and safety of the occupants. This is something that the council is required by law to tackle.

There are a wide range of enforcement powers available to the council to bring about improvements in privately rented homes. Many of these are already used to great effect by the private sector housing team. However, the council's resources are not sufficient to fully address a problem of this size using its existing powers.

The council recognises that the lettings industry is becoming more professional and is taking significant steps towards self-regulation, for example through the national private rented sector code of practice which has

been agreed by all the main landlord and managing agent organisations. In carrying out its duties, therefore, the council will seek to minimise the impact on landlords who already comply with the law.

We are therefore proposing a two-tier approach to regulating the private rented sector in Norwich with the accreditation scheme representing the first step.

Landlords who join the scheme will be required to notify the council of their properties and these will be made public via the council's website. They will also agree to manage them in accordance with the national code of practice and with a small number of local conditions. Where a tenant or member of the public believes that the agreement is not being honoured, it may be removed from the scheme. In this way, it is believed that tenants or other people affected by the management of privately rented homes will be able to deal with any problems directly with the landlord, but with the knowledge the council will be able to back them up if necessary.

Properties that are not listed in the scheme will be targeted for formal enforcement action. The council will be taking a no-nonsense approach meaning that any landlord who chooses not to join the scheme and lets sub-standard accommodation will be charged for the full cost of any enforcement work, including the cost of the council doing the works itself, and will be liable to prosecution.

Following an evaluation of the effectiveness of the scheme, a future consultation will be carried out to determine whether the council's existing enforcement tools should be enhanced with the introduction of some form of licensing of privately rented homes.

In summary, the proposed scheme seeks to improve conditions for those living in private rented accommodation and to provide prospective tenants with the information to make informed choices about where they choose to live. It will also minimise the impact on landlords who currently offer good accommodation and enable the council to concentrate its resources on those who are prepared to let unsafe homes."

Question 6

Councillor Maxwell to ask the portfolio holder for leader of the council:

"Is the leader able to give his comments on the successes achieved so far by the *Norwich and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Strategic Partnership* since 2009 and the benefits that have been secured for the city by this partnership?"

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"The Norwich and HCA Strategic Partnership was the first partnership of its kind in the country between HCA and a local authority. The partnership secured £8M investment from HCA in the City. Since 2009 the following benefits have been delivered:

- i) Restoration of the Memorial gardens. The remaining funding from the Memorial gardens project has been allocated to kick-start a fund raising effort to secure the restoration and relocation of the Lutyens Roll of Honour;
- ii) 108 new affordable homes on small sites owned by the council;
- iii) The 'eco-retrofit' of over 800 council homes;
- iv) New skate park at Eaton Park;
- v) Contributions to the completion of the Open 24/7 youth venue and the Narthex projects;
- vi) Establishment of the 'Building Futures in Norwich' project to help ensure that local people can take up job and training opportunities created through construction projects;
- vii) Completion of a *Vision and investment plan* for the South City Centre.
- viii) Ground investigation work on Mountergate West to enable this site to be brought forward as a mixed development involving housing, offices and car parking

The partnership's business plan for 2015-6 commits £1,433,391 partnership funding to pay for the road/ infrastructure at Threescore which unlocks the delivery of 1000 homes, plus the 172 unit housing with care/ dementia care scheme (which forms phase 1 of the development). Partnership funding has also been used to secure a commitment from UK Power Networks to underground the high voltage cables that cross the Threescore site.

The housing with care/ dementia care scheme will be completed by March 2016. The road infrastructure is currently under construction and is due to be completed in the autumn 2015. This infrastructure will allow the start of construction of phase 2 early in 2016 by the housing development company to be set up by the council. This phase will deliver 172 dwellings of which 33% will be affordable and 112 are planned to be built to passivhaus standards."

Question 7

Councillor Button to ask the portfolio holder for, portfolio holder for fairness and equality response:

"Can the cabinet member for fairness and equality give his opinions on the likely impact upon the most vulnerable in Norwich caused by the recent

emergency budget and the ongoing work, through the council's financial inclusion strategy being taken towards mitigating this?"

Councillor Thomas, portfolio holder for fairness and equality's response:

"Since the emergency budget on 9 July, there has been increasing commentary on the overall impacts of the proposed changes to the welfare system.

The changes are many and varied and will impact on some of the poorest people in the country. The following is a summary of some of the main changes where residents will have money withdrawn that is currently paid to them. However, there are many others that will have an impact over time where for example new claimants will see a reduction in benefits or tax credits.

There will be a freeze on most working-age benefits, including tax credits and the Local Housing Allowance for 4 years from 2016-17.

From April 2016, the level of earnings at which a household's tax credits and Universal Credit award starts to be withdrawn will be reduced from £6,420 to £3,850.

Support provided to families through tax credits will be limited to 2 children - any children born after April 2017 will not be eligible for further support

From April 2017, automatic entitlement to housing support for new claims in Universal Credit from 18-21 year olds who are out of work will be removed (exemptions will include vulnerable young people, those who may not be able to return home to live with their parents, and those who have been in work for 6 months prior to making a claim).

The cap on the total amount of benefits an out of work family can receive will be lowered from £26,000 to £20,000 outside of London.

Social housing tenants with household incomes of £30,000 and above outside of London will be required to "Pay to Stay", by paying a market or near market rent for their accommodation.

A new National Living Wage (NLW) will be introduced for workers aged 25 and above, by introducing a new premium on top of the national minimum wage

From April 2016, the new NLW will be set at £7.20 (a rise of 70p relative to the current NMW rate), and 50p above the NMW increase coming into effect in October 2015.

Impacts of the changes

The council's financial inclusion strategy had some simple objectives:

- Free debt and money advice
- Maximising income –
- Reducing fuel poverty
- Promoting a living wage

The overarching aim can be best described as *getting more money into people's pockets*.

In this context the impacts of the emergency budget are therefore best understood from how much money is being taken from some of the poorest people's pockets in Norwich.

Whilst the main headline was the announcement of a "national living wage" more accurately an increase in the national minimum wage, this is by far offset from the significant changes to tax credits.

The changes will vary from household to household and at this stage it is not clear what the full impacts will be. The complexity comes for those households whose income comes from a mixture of earnings and tax credits.

However, the following is some examples of families who will lose money from the changes:

Numbers affected

- **11,000 families** were claiming tax credits in 2013-14 in Norwich, of which **7,400 were in work**.
- Approximately the third lowest-paid part-time resident workers (estimated to be 6,000 people) and lowest paid 10-20% of full time workers (estimated to be 3,500-7000 people) in Norwich earn less than £7.20/hour. It is not possible to say how many of those are over 25 and therefore will benefit from increase in National Minimum Wage (NMW).
- Approximately 100 households who are affected by the current benefit cap may be further affected by the new cap. An additional 500-700 households will come into scope for the new benefit cap, depending on their exact circumstances
- Freezing of working-age benefits will affect all working age benefit claimants, which stood at **10,000 in May 2015**, as well as approximately **15,000 families claiming Child Benefit** (some of whom will be amongst the 10,000 working-age benefit claimants)
- The freeze of applicable amounts for HB and LHA for 4 years will impact on some of the around 18,000 claimants of those benefits in Norwich. Exact numbers are difficult to model. The estimated 2,700 tenants in private rented accommodation are more likely to be affected

- The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimate that working-age benefits freeze means an average loss for families who are affected of £260 per year (or £280 per year for those in work)
- Those who are working and claiming tax credits will lose an average of just over £1,000 per year due to changes to work allowances (which equates to £7.4m in Norwich)
- Increase in national minimum wage will not compensate for tax credit changes (for example someone over 25 on current minimum wage could be a partner of someone earning a large salary and still benefit from increase in NMW)
- Anyone already affected by the benefit cap will potentially lose a further £6,000 per year (at least up to the level of their HB), and those newly affected will lose varying amounts

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has indicated in its annual report published on 16 July 2015, that nearly two-thirds of British children in poverty live in working families, which challenges the view that work is an automatic route out of poverty.

The IFS also indicates that:

- child poverty and inequality are set to rise as a consequence of the planned tax and benefit cuts
- recent declines in income inequality will be reversed,
- current static child poverty rates will begin to increase

The IFS research also states that:

- the planned rise in the minimum wage will be counter-balanced by cuts to benefits and tax credits, pushing up absolute poverty figures
- the top 1% of earners increased their share of household income from 5.7% in 1990 to 8.4% in 2007-08 and 8.3% in 2013-14
- Disabled people, lone parents and social housing renters all appeared to be hit by rising material deprivation, meaning that they were more likely than others to struggle with the cost of basic goods and services.

In summary, the increasing levels of employment have masked increasing problems of in-work poverty something that has been a recurring issue in Norwich. Whilst the planned increase in the minimum wage will help, many low-income working families will still find themselves worse off due to tax-credit changes.

The role of the council and partners

The ability for the council to mitigate these considerable impacts is limited, given the scale of change and the reducing finances available to the council.

The principles of the financial inclusion strategy, now incorporated into a broader approach to reducing inequality are still sound and more relevant since the emergency budget.

Collaborating with partners has always been a fundamental principle within the financial inclusion work and this will continue with the broader reducing inequalities activity.

The report to Cabinet in March 2015 identified seven broad areas of investigation and action where the council may have a realistic chance of making a difference to reducing inequality including the changes in the emergency budget. These are:

- a) **Regeneration and development** – consider the implications and opportunities to further advance equality (and avoid increasing inequality) via e.g. City Deal, Local Enterprise Partnership, new housing development and economic development.
- b) **Develop living wage and social value** into broader policies across a number of key themes over the three years, including:
 - i) Contracts e.g. procurement and award
 - ii) Grants and commissioned services – moving a range of sectors toward living wage
 - iii) Other partnerships and funding streams and an explicit expectation to directly impact inequality (health, culture, active travel)
 - iv) Civic leadership – how best to further advocate for reducing inequality and supporting living wage e.g incentives to become living wage employers
- c) **Open spaces / physical activity / food** – look at the linkages between open spaces and sports strategy plans, opportunities for Community Led Local Development (or its successor), links between allotments, food, low income etc. Review Go4Less and how that may enable targeted activity or support.
- d) **Digital inclusion** – based upon the three year service transformation challenge award action planning. This has at its heart work with digitally excluded communities and opportunities inclusion may afford in terms of jobs, income, reducing costs etc.
- e) **Housing**– assessing the opportunities within the council’s approach to housing including the impacts of rent levels and high quality capital improvements, use of housing resources to support community wide activity and provision which reduces inequality (welfare reform, advice, engagement, facilities etc.)
- f) **Transformation and budget challenges** – continued and robust examination of transformation and budget changes through the prism of financial and other inequality matters. Additional work on developing and utilising the socio economic considerations within the equality impact assessment tool for this as well as other policy and change activity to reduce unintended consequences. Existing work to support debt and money advice, income maximisation and expenditure minimisation

- g) **Affordable warmth** – recognising the links between housing and health as well as income and life opportunities. Continue to build and source additional opportunities to address the poorest quality housing in Norwich (e.g. within the private rented or owner occupied sector)”

Question 8

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the leader of the council:

“It was announced that the Norwich Aviation Academy is moving a step closer following Norfolk County Council approving a £6m loan. Working together with partners, can the leader give his opinion on the likely potential advantages to Norwich from this joint venture?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council’s response:

“KLM UK Engineering already provides a highly valued programme of quality training and apprenticeships at Norwich Airport; locally at apprentice and nationally at graduate level. However, research by the International Civil Aviation Organisation shows that the aviation industry is facing a substantial local and global need and demand to increase the recruitment of trained personnel; this is due both to expansion of the sector globally and also the ageing demographic profile of its current workforce. The proposed Norwich Aviation Academy facility provides a unique opportunity to bring together KLM with the Airport, City College, University of East Anglia and Aviation Skills Partnership with the local authorities to provide a centre of training excellence to help meet these needs.

It is vital to build on what we have in Norwich, the Norwich Aviation Academy will create one of the UK’s foremost aviation training facilities. Failure to seize the current opportunity so to do will risk investment moving elsewhere as other regional airports become alert to the opportunity.

Initially focussing on aviation engineering, the facility will gradually extend its remit into ground crew operations, air traffic Control, cabin/crew training, operations, planning, and pilot training.

Courses will be offered at a variety of levels ranging from apprenticeship to graduate. Both KLM and the Aviation Skills Partnership have a good reputation in providing high quality apprenticeship training to meet local need and the Partnership also has an excellent track record of working with disengaged young people, and using the aviation sector as a source of inspiration.

The Academy will be a significant enhancement to local skills provision helping local people enter into high value employment. In turn it will both help secure and enable the growth of aviation engineering at the Airport providing further high value jobs and helping support other employment. Finally it will also attract students from further afield whose expenditure will also add to the

prosperity of the local economy. These latter points include through supply chain activity and the likelihood that a high profile facility of this type is likely to attract other aviation and engineering employers into the local area.”

Question 9

Councillor Herries to ask the portfolio holder for resources and income generation:

“The *River Wensum Strategy Partnership* is running a consultation until Friday 24 July on how to protect and promote this treasured resource for our city. Can the cabinet member for resources and income generation give any early indications on the feedback and views provided since the launch of consultation on 24 June and how best members of the public can continue to take part?”

Councillor Stonard, portfolio holder for resources and income generation’s response:

“The consultation exercise has been hugely successful with around 140 responses received to date. Since the consultation is not yet complete it is too early to draw any particular conclusions from the responses but analysis of the comments received so far suggest that issues relating to the availability of boating facilities (in particular canoe access points) and joining up stretches of the riverside walk have drawn most comment. These issues will be explored as the strategy is developed.

Respondents to this consultation have had the opportunity to submit their contact details and to be kept informed about further developments or consultations. Future consultations will also be communicated to stakeholders and through our website, the press and social media.”

Question 10

Councillor Peek to ask the leader of the council:

“What is the opinion of the leader of the council regarding the role of Norwich and greater Norwich as part of any future devolution settlement?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council’s response:

“Councillor Peek, thank you for your timely question. In any devolution settlement, given the emphasis on ‘rebalancing’ the British economy it is vital that stand-alone cities like Norwich are not lost in a big combined authority. If that were to happen it would dilute the role Norwich and Greater Norwich has in driving economic growth and this would be not only to the detriment of Greater Norwich but also to the region.

Key data makes this explicit:

- 53% of all jobs in the Norfolk area are in Greater Norwich (28% of the LEP area)
- 54% of the GVA in the Norfolk area is in Greater Norwich (26% of the LEP area)
- 57% of the actual jobs growth in Norfolk in the last 15 years has been in Greater Norwich.
- 50% of all planned housing growth in Norfolk is in Greater Norwich
- 52% of the planned jobs growth in Norfolk is in Greater Norwich.

Norwich is working closely with the Key Cities Group and its partners on the Greater Norwich Growth Board to make a strongly evidenced case to the Secretary of State that Greater Norwich should have a central role in any devolution settlement for the East of England.”