



NORWICH
City Council

Council

25 January 2022

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

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

“News of the provisional local government finance settlement was revealed shortly before Christmas. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on what this means for our city council?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“With the Chancellor presenting a three-year Spending Review last October, it was hoped that councils would also receive multi-year funding information. However, for the third year in a row we received only a single year funding settlement, hampering our ability to undertake fully informed long-term financial planning.

There was some positive news on our 2022/23 grant allocations with previous grants being continued, as well as a new one-year Services Grant. Full details of how our funding supports the council’s finances is contained in the budget papers for the February cabinet however, it remains clear that tough budget decisions will continue to be needed.

The Secretary of State also committed to ensuring that councils’ funding is based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. It is expected that the Department will work with the sector and other stakeholders to update this data ahead of consulting on any potential changes.”

Question 2

Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“Representing a ward that contains significant poverty I know that the impact of a cost-of-living crisis through falling wages, rising prices, energy bills going through the roof, mortgage payments going up, and two tax hikes for national insurance and council tax will be felt very hard indeed. Fuel poverty is a particular concern, so I was particularly pleased to hear of the successful city council bid to receive £2.8m worth of new funding for retrofitting properties in the city to deliver greater energy efficiency. Can the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion comment on the difference this will make in the city?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:

“We are very pleased to have been awarded £2.8 million from central government to retrofit properties in the city. Securing this funding is part of our ambitious plans on climate change.

Around 230 private-sector homes will benefit from the work, which includes loft, external wall and underfloor insulation. Solar panels and heat pumps will also be installed at some properties. Work commences this Spring and will be completed by March 2023

The project focuses on homes in fuel poverty and the measures installed will improve the energy efficiency of properties, meaning households generate and retain heat better. We estimate that, as a result, households will save £250,000 on energy bills each year. We also expect the work to reduce carbon emissions by 200,000 kg of CO₂ per year.

This is an important part of our wider fuel poverty and affordable warmth work which includes providing energy advice and helping residents access energy grants and support for insulation measures.”

Question 3

Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social inclusion the following question:

“Could the cabinet member for social housing comment on the progress being made with building new homes for social rent on the former King’s Arms site?”

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

“I am delighted to see development progressing so well following our compulsory purchase of this site.

The site has been a blight on this area for many years. The previous landowner failed to bring forward development, despite securing planning permission and several attempts to work with him.

The council secured planning approval for five new family homes, (four four-bed houses and one two-bed bungalow), which will help meet the identified need in the city.

All the properties are being constructed to an enhanced fabric specification and are equipped with air source heat pumps, reducing fuel costs for residents.

Work commenced in August 2021 and is anticipated to complete in September of this year.

Not only will this development provide much needed, high quality social housing, the council will replicate the model of acquiring stalled sites to deliver housing and regeneration objectives through its new Towns Deal Revolving Fund.”

Question 4

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

“I have long felt that an alternative to foodbanks, which seem to have become the government’s preferred option for all matters involving poverty or lack of social security, need to be found. I was particularly pleased to read that thanks to the work of the City Council and the Feed, a new supermarket with a difference will be opening in March, in Lakenham Ward. The community hub, which will sell fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy, and pre-prepared food at affordable prices, will open in what used to be Pat's Cafe in Hall Road. Can the cabinet member for environmental services discuss the benefits this will offer and the hope that similar opportunities for community hubs can be established across the city as practical alternatives to foodbanks?”

Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services’ response:

“I am delighted that the Social Supermarket on Hall Road will soon be opening.

Led by the Feed, working with voluntary, community and social enterprises partners and local people, the supermarket will offer a choice of low-cost food to members, supporting their progression from food insecurity and possible crisis to the ability to budget for and plan meals. It will also use surplus food, reducing food waste. Volunteering and training opportunities and other support services will be available from the Café, alongside the opportunity to socialise in a welcoming and safe space. Cooking classes and recipes will equip people with the skills to create delicious, nutritious, low- cost meals.

This work is part of the Norwich Food Poverty Action Plan. Other Food Network members are working on developing their own social supermarkets, sharing experience and expertise to ensure the offer can reach as many residents as possible. I look forward to seeing their success.”

Question 5

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

“The decline of many green spaces due to cuts in services and resources over many years have been felt in all communities across the city. Thanks to the successful bid for £500,000 from the Community Renewal Fund a real opportunity to support projects in the city which advance biodiversity and wellbeing are now more possible. Can the leader comment on the difference this will make and how community groups can get involved?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“I am delighted the council has received this funding for our “100 Day Challenge” project, which creates 8 paid community connectors to engage with their communities to understand community need, whilst building experience, skills and confidence to support people into work and create a wider sense of community.

Improving local green spaces is a focus area. Courses will be offered that cover outdoor project skills such as increasing biodiversity, wildlife friendly food gardening and planting advice. Residents who are thinking about starting an outdoor project will be able to attend alongside those who are more experienced, for example from running community gardens or “friends of” woods and parks groups, to share skills and develop networks within their communities.

Any groups or members of the public who would like to be involved can contact officers at community@norwich.gov.uk or visit the Get Involved section of the council website.”

Question 6

Councillor Matthew Fulton-McAlister to ask the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth the following question:

“There has been significant interest in the position adopted by the city council with regards to the county council Transport for Norwich Strategy and the proposed Western Link. Can the cabinet comment on how the strategy lacks the ambition and policy necessary for this council to consider supporting?”

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

“The city council has long advocated ambitious, radical policies to help people move around the city in a genuinely sustainable way, vital considering the climate crisis. We have persuaded the county council to adopt some such policies in the Transport for Norwich Strategy, e.g., more 20 mph limits and more affordable transport for residents. However, we are disappointed that county did not accept the principle that the road network hierarchy should prioritise transport modes that use least energy, produce least pollution and are most efficient; did not recognise that building roads fuels traffic growth/car dependency; did not demonstrate how building roads frees up space in the city for buses/walking/cycling; and did not commit to an investment package sustainable transport modes exceeding the greater sums committed to road building. For these reasons and others, cabinet resolved not to currently support either the Transport Strategy or Norwich Western Link project contained within it.”

Question 7

Councillor Peek to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:

“As someone who has faced homelessness myself, I know the difference which effective accommodation can make to stopping this and remain proud to be a Norwich City Council tenant. I was particularly pleased that the planning committee approved a proposal to build seven one-bedroom houses on our Ketts Hill site to provide accommodation to rough sleepers adding further permanent accommodation for rough sleepers in the city. Can the cabinet member for environmental services comment on the application and the benefits it will provide for some of the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens in this city?”

Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:

“The council is determined to do everything we can to meet affordable housing need in the city and will consider all pieces of land in our ownership for their development potential. Our rough sleeping strategy 2017-22 identified the need for more housing- led projects and we are delivering this through several initiatives. An example of this is the 16 homes we delivered last year through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme for rough sleepers. Our philosophy is to provide a stable, independent home with personalised support to homeless people. We can’t do this work in isolation and is why we use a multi-agency approach to help solve homelessness.

The Ketts Hill site is unused council-owned land and was assessed by housing development officers as having potential for new dwellings. Working with Broadland housing association, we submitted a bid for funding to the govt’s Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme and were delighted to secure grant funding for seven new homes, with associated gardens and parking. Each of the seven one-bed houses in the terrace will enjoy its own private, front door access, with gardens to the front and rear. The majority of the mature, established trees around the perimeter of the site will remain, providing a pleasant outlook and connection to Mousehold Heath. Funding was also awarded to provide support to each of the residents, who will benefit from intensive support to ensure they can stay in their homes in the long term and access help and support in the community. We expect the homes to be ready to move into by the end of the year.”

Question 8

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

“The city council is intending to undertake a review of city centre car parking, the scope of which has yet to be decided. In defining the scope, will the council set objectives and seek outcomes which are compatible with reducing carbon emissions from transport, encouraging major modal shift from the private car to public transport and active travel, and reducing the council’s reliance on income from city centre car parking spaces in its ownership with a view to the council investigating alternative income sources?”

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

“The council’s financial plan forecasts that £10.56m of gross savings will need to be found over the four-year period from 2022/23. This quantum of savings represents around 18 per cent of the 2021/22 gross expenditure budget. The car parking service makes a considerable direct contribution to the current revenue budget and maintaining income to meet the significant financial challenges that the council faces is important.

Our car parks also significantly contribute to supporting the city’s economy by providing an accessible and affordable parking to support economic vitality, which is needed more than ever in the light of the pandemic.

Alongside this we do recognise the climate emergency and as our recent comments on the Norwich Transport Strategy made clear want to see genuinely ambitious steps taken towards modal shift and reducing the reliance on the private car.

All these policy objectives will also be taken into account in the review.”

Question 9

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

“Regarding affordable housing in new developments approved by the council’s planning committee, what percentage of developments have provided the full recommended amount of affordable homes on-site? Figures from the last year, last five years and last ten years would be helpful to show this, as well as figures showing the percentage of developments which have not provided the full recommended amount of affordable housing provision, whether on-site or via section 106 money.”

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

“In the financial year 2021/22 to date, three applications were approved by the planning applications committee that required affordable housing. All three applications were approved with a policy compliant level of affordable housing to be provided on site. We do not monitor levels of affordable housing specifically approved at planning committee, and we therefore do not have this information for the last five and 10 years.

However, we do regularly monitor the number of total and affordable dwellings delivered each financial year. In the last monitoring period (2020/21), 12% of housing delivered was affordable. By comparison, across the last five years (2016/17 to 2020/21) 19.4% of housing delivered was affordable, and across the last 10 years (2011/12 to 2015/16) 28.6% of housing delivered was affordable. Full information is published in our Annual Monitoring Report.”

Question 10

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

“As councillors, we often sit in planning and licensing meetings where members of the public hear that schemes are allowed with conditions. It is therefore vitally important that the council complies with its own conditions when set. I asked urgently, as work is underway, on 24 November and again on 15 December if the conditions regarding the Heigham Park tennis courts have been met and have not had a response. Can you let me know how work on the conditions is progressing and if it is complete?”

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

“I apologise for not responding to your previous questions but can confirm that nine conditions were attached to the grant of planning permission for the all-weather tennis courts. Of these, one was the standard time limit condition and three required compliances with information submitted with the application, i.e., no further information was required. The remaining five conditions cover travel plan information; heritage interpretation; arboricultural works; landscaping and site structures. All conditions have been discharged with the exception of heritage interpretation. An application to discharge this was made in December 2021 and is being considered by the Planning Service and is on track for determination before the courts open.”

Question 11

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

“There is routinely congestion outside schools in my ward at school pick-up and drop-off times. For example, outside Jane Austen College, illegal double or sometimes triple-parking causes severe congestion and, with cars idling, dangerous air pollution.

Having raised this matter with the council in early September, I was told that the city council will consult with the county council regarding solutions including mobile cameras that can be located for limited periods in the school area, or a camera car.

Please can I have an update regarding action the city council is taking to address this problem, and if the above solution is not being pursued, can you tell me what actions the council is pursuing?”

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

“Parking enforcement around schools is a nationwide issue and is under continuous review by both the city and county councils. Solutions such as camera enforcement have been proposed, but this is not currently permitted outside London. We are hopeful that this will be extended in the near future, and we will work with the county council to investigate its potential once the legislation changes.

In addition, the county council will continue to lobby central government, and organisations such as the British Parking Association and East Anglian Parking partnership for improved guidance and powers.

There is a programme of school parking enforcement, it can take a number of weeks to complete one cycle due to the number of schools (56) exceeding available officers. Problem locations are targeted with additional resources, although this approach only has a short term effect on driver’s behaviour.”

Question 12

Councillor Grahame to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“Given the well-publicised cost of living crisis affecting many residents in Norwich and across the UK, caused largely by rapidly rising inflation and soaring utility bills, will the cabinet member join me in calling for the government to provide every household with a £320 payment (funded by a one-off windfall land value tax) to cover spiralling energy bills?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:

“Thank you for this question. The council is aware of the rising utility bills throughout the city and provide a number of services for residents, including energy advice, support on applying to debt reduction funds, small scale insulation measures and helping residents access funding to insulate their homes. We will continue to offer these services and help residents access the appropriate support and advice to help with their fuel bills in light of recent energy price rises. I support the Labour Party’s proposals for a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas to stop energy bills rising over the next year – and to increase and expand the Warm Home’s Discount, targeting extra support to squeezed middle, pensioners and the lowest earners; this would save nearly 30,000 households across the Norwich South and North constituencies up to £600 off their bills.”

Question 13

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

“Over the last few months, several residents have complained that they have struggled to access their properties or use cycleways or the highway itself because of cars illicitly parking either in permit zones or on the carriageway. Places include the Pottergate, Westwick Street, Timberhill and the Ber Street areas. The lack of enforcement seems to have resulted in a parking/stopping “free for all” in these areas. There is clearly a shortage of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs), which has been confirmed by officers in the council’s parking team. This has been an ongoing issue for several months now so why has it taken so long to start recruiting more staff to deal with these problems, especially as it takes several months for them to receive the necessary training?”

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

“It is correct that for a while earlier in the pandemic there was a freeze on recruiting new civil enforcement officers when staff left; however, this was lifted in the summer. The first round of recruitment resulted in one appointment, and they started in October. Recruitment was repeated in September and from this the remaining two new CEOs were recruited. All three completed their training in early December and so we now have the same number of enforcement officers as we had pre-pandemic.”

Question 14

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

“The council is aware of the efforts of local residents to start a community garden on derelict land at 44-46 Morley Street. The efforts have ground to halt because the land, which is owned by the council, is contaminated. Residents would like to know how and why this land is contaminated and how much it would cost to make it safe to use as a community garden. Could the council provide this information to me and the residents?”

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

“The land at 44-46 Morley Street has been investigated and has not been designated as contaminated under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, the soil at the property does contain some substances commonly found in urban areas, that are above the levels considered appropriate for the proposed use. Recommendations have been received from a specialist geotechnical engineer detailing options for treating the land to make it suitable. There are no up-to-date accurate costs for remediation however the ground investigation report is available online as part of a planning consent granted in 2012 for demolition on the site.”

Question 15

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

“At budget council in Feb 2021, council agreed a budget that included a provision for income generation of £50,000 from a “new income stream generated by charging for parking in parks which currently provide free parking.”

Could the cabinet member please let me know how much income has been generated so far this financial year, and if it has not met the projected £50,000, how the shortfall has been met?”

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

“Due to capacity issues within the parks and open spaces team, the implementation of this saving has been delayed. These have now been addressed, and the proposal will be implemented in the coming weeks.

As a result, no income has yet been generated by this proposal. The shortfall has been met by underspends and higher than anticipated income in other parts of the service.”

Question 16

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

“The Norwich Evening News reported, in December, high levels of coliform bacteria from human and animal waste, identified in a sample of river water collected at Carrow Bridge. The local press previously highlighted 720 raw sewage spills into the River Wensum from drains in the Riverside Road area in 2020. This situation is clearly unacceptable in so many ways, and completely contrary to the River Wensum Strategy which seeks to improve use and enjoyment of the river and its biodiversity. The city council owns the riverbed south of New Mills and has an interest in maintaining a healthy river. Also, the council chairs the River Wensum Strategy Partnership, which includes the Environment Agency (EA) and Anglian Water (AW). What action is the city council taking to put pressure on the EA and AW to stop the practice of allowing raw sewage to run into the River Wensum and achieve good quality water?”

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

“The reported sewage spills in the River Wensum and resulting impact on water quality and biodiversity are concerning for the River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP). Responsibility for sewage spills lies with Anglian Water (AW) who are not members of RWSP. However, the Environment Agency (EA) is a member and has responsibility for monitoring water quality and a regulatory role regarding unconsented sewage spills to rivers. The council has contacted the EA to raise concerns who have informed us they are working with government, the water industry, farmers, and others to improve water quality in rivers and is seeking more funding to protect the environment in England. Locally, the EA work closely with the Broadland Catchment Partnership including water company and land management representation to identify and implement catchment wide environmental improvement projects within the River Wensum catchment. The EA continues to work to improve river standards through regulatory/permitting/partnership work.”

Question 17

Councillor Bogelein to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“Last year, Mancroft councillors were told that the council would go out to tender for a new secure entry system by October. That appears not to have happened. Can the cabinet member reassure residents who have to face finding faeces, vomit, needles and blood in their stairwells by explaining the reasons for the delay and committing to a date by which the new contract will be in place?”

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

“Consultation on the installation of secure entry systems commenced in October 2021. At the same time, planning applications were submitted by NPSN to progress upcoming works. A number of observations were received from residents regarding potential costs and quality of the proposed works. These observations are being used to shape the ongoing procurement process with a provisional date of going to cabinet for contract award in the spring.” Further conversations will take place with ward councillors to support the programme.”