NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30pm – 9.50pm **23 June 2015**

Present: Councillor Arthur (Lord Mayor), Beryl Blower (Sheriff), Councillors Ackroyd, Blunt, Bogelein, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Coleshill, Driver, Grahame, Harris, Haynes, Henderson, Herries, Howard, Jackson, Jones, Kendrick, Lubbock, Manning, Maxwell, Neale. Packer, Peek, Price, Raby, Ryan, Sands (M), Schmierer, Stonard, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi), Waters, Woollard, Wright.

Apologies: Councillor Boswell, Button and Sands (S).

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor updated council on some of her engagements since the annual general meeting which included meeting volunteers involved in fundraising activities including cyclists who had cycled 100 miles for the Britsh Heart Foundation; Halifax Bank staff who had organised the Big Lunch for Children in Need and Waltraud Jarrold and her team organising the 45th annual Feed the Minds book fair.

She had also attended the St Francis Assissi School; the Gardening Club and the Assist Trust open day.

She had met volunteers who help keep our community centres vibrant and along with the Sheriff had attended the Norwich Sports Awards where she had presented awards to volunteers who help many Norwich sportsmen and women to compete at a national level as well as providing activities for people to simply participate in.

Finally, she had laid a wreath as part a ceremony to commemorate D Day. It was humbling to meet a number of veterans some of whom were on the beaches in Normandy and others who served in the Falklands. It was especially poignant that following this service she had walked to the Forum to open the Norwich Peace camp where again she met volunteers working through a range of organisations for peace here and across the world.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Doctor Jo Veltman asked the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development:

Public question from Dr Jo Veltman to the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development:

My question relates to areas of serious public health concern which are of relevance to both the city of Norwich and the council. These are climate change, obesity and type 2 diabetes.

These areas affect adults of course, but as a paediatrician I am particularly concerned about child health.

The public health issues of obesity and climate change are interlinked, in that they share many of the same causal pathways.

In itself, a society producing high carbon emissions leads to public health issues (air pollution etc.) and links with an 'obesogenic' society – sedentary lifestyles, processed food etc. Individuals living these lifestyles also tend to be high emitters of carbon.

Climate change has been recognised as the biggest public health challenge of this century (by UCL-Lancet Commission, the World Health Organisation and others)

The current inadequate responses to climate action are causing medical professionals – including myself - very grave concern. NHS England has also prioritised childhood obesity as a major concern.

In their 2014 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognised that 'transformative action' is necessary to tackle this global issue. Please can Norwich City Council outline to me what steps are being taken to ensure that we as a city take the transformative action required on climate change – which would also help address our childhood obesity crisis as a health co-benefit?

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

Thank you for this question Dr Veltman.

Firstly I must point out that Norwich City Council is a district council with limited responsibilities, and very limited resources, and I suggest you also raise this question with Norfolk County Council and also the Norfolk Health Overview and Scrutiny panel.

But that said, the labour administration at Norwich City Council does believe that climate change is happening and that we should be doing what we can within the limited resources, budgets, responsibilities and powers that we have to help ameliorate that.

I hope you will see below that the city council has gone the extra mile and more, and is one of the councils leading on this, far more than some councils supposedly with so-called green credentials!

We need to ensure that Norwich remains a living, breathing city that continues to develop in character in order to support the needs of residents, visitors and organisations alike. However, it is vital that this is sustainable development, which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' and, as such, it needs to be sensitively managed.

Our first environmental strategy was launched in 2008 and since then the council has gone from strength to strength in terms of its environmental achievements. The per capita carbon dioxide emissions for the city have fallen by 14per cent, which is the largest fall in the east of England. (Source: Department of Energy and Climate Change). The council's own carbon dioxide emissions have dropped by nearly 27 per cent. During this period our authority also received a number of national and international environmental awards in recognition of its environmental achievements.

As a low lying coastal county with a growing population, Norfolk is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Higher sea levels, heat-waves, droughts and storms are more likely to take place as average global temperatures rise. Recent flooding events in Norfolk have also highlighted how real this issue is.

We aim to enable sustainable solutions working with citizens and organisations to help them to meet their needs but also to contribute to creating a low carbon economy and support thriving, vibrant communities. A good example of this is the cycling ambition grant:

The city council is one of eight cities in England that have received cycling ambition funding from central government. Our applications gained £12.1m of funding for investment in the pedalway network. One of the reasons why our applications were successful is because they target several areas of obesity and poor health in the city where inactivity is a contributory factor.

Match funding was also supplied by the county's public health service and the Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group. The projects aim to create cycle routes where younger children can ride confidently with their parents and older children can ride alone. This will result in a healthier start in life for our young people and fewer people driving round the city contributing to climate change.

The Greater Norwich local authorities are committed through their city deal to building excellent cycling infrastructure to support our ambitious plans for sustainable growth. The city's ambition is to double levels of cycling in Norwich between 2013 and 2023 and use cycling as a catalyst for a more prosperous, liveable and carbon-efficient city. Two routes, 31km in length, connecting the city with peripheral towns, employment centres and growth areas within cycle commuting distance, will be redesigned so that everyone can ride in confidence and safety

I am also pleased our council is a signatory to the Local Government Association's climate local programme. I believe that we are at a cross roads. Food, fuel, poverty, financial and climate issues have led to a 'perfect storm'.

One route is 'business as usual', which won't achieve the change that is needed. The other route is one that truly engages with the changes the world needs, where government, businesses and civil society all work together to make the far-reaching decisions that are required to ensure we keep the planet safe for future generations.

At a local level our environmental strategy aims to deliver a sustainable environment which improves or maintains the quality of life for all of us. By making sure we use our natural resources wisely, emitting less CO2 and reusing and recycling as much as possible, we can create a more sustainable city that we, our children, and grandchildren can all enjoy for the future.

In addition we will continue to work with colleagues in NHS Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group and Norfolk County Council Public Health under the Healthy Norwich banner to promote health improvements across the city. Healthy weight is one of this groups current three priorities (along with smoking cessation and affordable warmth).

Finally the council works on two other significant projects aimed at reducing health inequalities across the city. Both aimed at encouraging people to choose active travel and recreation, the British Cycling partnership and Walk Norwich are delivered in partnership with public health, the CCG and Active Norfolk.

The British Cycling partnership includes a programme of led rides and cycle training with the aim of giving people the confidence to ride in the city, particularly in light of the new cycle infrastructure being delivered through Push the Pedalways.

Walk Norwich is a DoH/DfT funded project delivered as a result of the cities' status as one of five 'walking cities'. In partnership with Living Streets, the project has a number of strands aimed at targeting people through communities, schools and workplaces. Walk Norwich also provides a personal travel planning service to workplaces in partnership with Liftshare.

Desired outcomes are for more people to choose cycling and walking for both local journeys/part of longer journeys and for active recreation. A primary aim is to tackle health inequalities by transitioning people from an inactive state (less than 30 minutes moderate physical activity a week) to meet the CMOs guidelines of undertaking at least 150 minutes moderate to physical activity per week. Achieving this will positively affect physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Dr Jo Veltman said that a UCL report identified public awareness as low and asked, as a supplementary question, if the council would take this seriously and encourage transformative action? Councillor Bremner suggested that Dr Veltman should contact Norfolk County Council which had responsibility for schools. He said that the city council did use various channels, including its

citizen magazine, to highlight related issues. Everyone needed to do things to address climate change we all needed to take the public with us

4. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2015 and the annual general meeting held on 26 May 2015 subject to the letter being amended by deleting paragraph (2) (a) from the resolution of item 9, and renumbering the remaining paragraphs accordingly.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor said that 15 questions from members of the council to cabinet members had been received of which notice had been given in accordance with the provision of appendix 1 of the council's constitution.

QUESTION 1	Councillor Carlo to the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development on bus provision with the city.
QUESTION 2	Councillor Grahame to the portfolio holder for fairness and equality on food waste.
QUESTION 3	Councillor Howard to the portfolio holder for neighbourhoods and community safety on the Russell Street community centre.
QUESTION 4	Councillor Lubbock to the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing on overcharging leaseholders.
QUESTION 5	Councillor Sands (M) to the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing on the bedroom tax.
QUESTION 6	Councillor Ryan to the leader of the council on the Radio 1 Big Weekend.
QUESTION 7	Councillor Thomas (Vi to the portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces on Norwich Provision Market.
QUESTION 8	Councillor Harris to the portfolio holder for environment and sustainable development on the Northern Distributor Road.
QUESTION 9	Councillor Bremner to the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing on council support for people experiencing homelessness.

QUESTION 10 Councillor Maxwell to the leader of the council on resident satisfaction.

QUESTION 11 Councillor Woollard to the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing on tenant satisfaction.

QUESTION 12 Councillor Packer to the leader of the council on the Devolution Bill.

QUESTION 13 Councillor Herries to the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing on right to buy.

QUESTION 14 Councillor Peek to the portfolio holder for fairness and equality on the solar together Norfolk initiative.

QUESTION 15 Councillor Ackroyd to the portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces on a dog policy.

Copies of the questions and answers, together with supplementary questions and answers, are attached to appendix A to these minutes.

7. MOTION – QUEEN'S SPEECH

Councillor Thomas (Va) moved and Councillor Harris seconded, the motion as set out on the agenda.

RESOLVED, unanimously, that –

> "The Queen's speech included plans for legislation to extend the right to buy to housing associations, freeze working age benefits for two years, lower the benefit cap and remove automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18-21 year olds."
>
> Council, **RESOLVES** to ask the leader of the council to write to the Prime Minister and the interim leader of the opposition saying that -
>
> (1) it believes such move will:
>
> (a) have a huge impact both on housing associations and on local authorities, as councils would have to sell off their most valuable homes to fund replacements;
> (b) make it harder for people on lower incomes who are already struggling to access a decent home at a price they can afford and result in the loss of vital social and affordable homes.
>
> (2) freezing working age benefits for two years, lowering the benefit cap and removing automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18-21 year olds fails to reflect the reality of the housing crisis. Britain is not building enough homes, which means the cost of housing and therefore the Housing Benefit Bill is going up.

(3) millions of people have no choice but to rely on housing benefit to secure a roof over their heads. That includes an increasing number of people in work – a number of people in work who still have to claim housing benefit has more than doubled from around four hundred and forty five thousand to just over a million in the last five years.

(4) cutting housing benefit for under 21s fails to take into account the reality of many young people's lives. It could have a serious impact on vulnerable young people who have left home, including those who have been rough sleeping and may be forced to return to it. It could also mean that young people would be unwilling to take risks such as moving for work because there would be no safety net for them.

(5) the best way of helping people on lower incomes into home ownership is by increasing the supply of affordable housing.

8. MOTION – CO-OPERATIVES FORTNIGHT

Councillor Herries moved and Councillor Maxwell seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Councillor Bogelein moved and Councillor Neale seconded that the matter be now put and with four other members concurring the procedural motion was put to the vote.

RESOLVED, with 14 voting for, 7 against and 15 abstentions, that the matter be now put.

RESOLVED, unanimously, that –

"Co-operatives make a significant contribution to the Norwich and UK economy with their combined turnover of over thirty seven billion pounds. Many people believe that reciprocity and co-operation are vital for better communities and better economies."

Council, therefore, **RESOLVES**, to –

(1) recognise that co-operatives help narrow the gap between rich and poor through employee ownership and profit sharing and further recognises that community ownership can save local savings including village shops and pubs as well enable people to take action on housing, arts, sport, land, finance and renewable energy.

(2) welcome co-operatives fortnight.

(3) ask cabinet to –

(a) support co-operatives fortnight each year and where possible, the work of local co-operatives within the city;

(b) continue to work closely with the co-operative councils innovation network to harness and develop the benefits of co-operation to empower local people and improve services.

9. MOTION – UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE COP 21

Councillor Bogelein moved and Councillor Henderson seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

RESOLVED, unanimously, that –

In December 2015, the United Nations COP-21 faces a decision of great global importance: whether to commit to a binding legal agreement on world-wide emission reductions. Supporting pressure from the public and their local authorities will give governments strength to agree to bind commitments. In line with the council's strong commitment to a low carbon future, council-

RESOLVES to ask cabinet to –

(1) include an article in the *Citizen* to raise residents' aware of Cop-21, including the options they have to influence the negotiations by organisations like the Climate Coalition and Live Earth;

(2) update the council's website section on climate changing including information on COP-21;

(3) lobby national government to stand up for a strong binding commitment of the COP-21 negotiations; and

(4) support local and national groups of residents that aim to create public awareness for the COP-21 negotiations.

10. MOTION – BEDROOM TAX

Councillor Haynes moved and Councillor Howard seconded the following motion –

As the government has no plans to scrap the bedroom tax, council –

RESOLVES to ask cabinet –

(1) for a period of one year, to disregard the sum by which are households housing benefit payment has been reduced by under-occupancy restrictions when determining whether and when to initiate proceedings to recover a tenancy as a consequence of rent arrears;

(2) to repeat the call to the government to withdraw the provisions of the welfare reformat relating to the so called "under-occupancy" in social housing ("the bedroom tax"), ensuring that people are

not penalised as a result of the long-term chronic under supply of social housing or changes to family circumstances; and

(3) explore all legal acceptable ways of preventing evictions after the one year period mentioned in part (1).

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Thomas (Va) seconded the following amendment –

"To amend resolution (3) by adding "continue to…" at the beginning and deleting everything after "…evictions" so that the new substantive resolution becomes –

(3) continue to explore all legally acceptable ways of preventing evictions."

With 22 voting in favour, 12 against and 2 abstentions the amendment was carried and became part of the substantive motion

A member requested a recorded vote in respect of paragraph (1) of the motion and this request was supported by at least five other members.

With 12 councillors voting in favour (Councillors Bogelein, Carlo, Grahame, Haynes, Henderson, Howard, Jackson, Jones, Neale, Price, Raby, and Schmierer), 20 voting against (Councillors Arthur, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Coleshill, Driver, Harris, Herries, Kendrick, Manning, Maxwell, Packer, Peek, Ryan, Sands (M), Stonard, Thomas(Va), Thomas(Vi), Waters and Woollard) and 4 abstaining (Councillors Ackroyd, Blunt, Lubbock and Wright), paragraph (1) of the motion was declared lost.

RESOLVED –

"As the new government has no plan to scrap the bedroom tax, council -

RESOLVES, unanimously, to ask cabinet –

(1) to repeat the call to the government to withdraw the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act relating to the so called "under-occupation" in social housing ("the bedroom tax"), ensuring that people are not penalised as a result of the long term chronic under supply of social housing or changes to family circumstances.

(2) to continue to explore all legally acceptable ways of preventing evictions."

CHAIR

APPENDIX A

Question 1

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

"The importance of delivering a step change in public transport for Norwich based on a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network together with upgraded core bus routes and services is widely agreed. However, in their recent report on the NDR Development Consent Order, the panel of inspectors concluded that the scale of improvement to public transport services specified under the expanded NDR+NATS PT scenario may not be a realistic objective under existing regulatory structures and control in the industry and given the local financial performance in the bus market.

Bus Quality Contracts would allow the county council rather than the bus companies to set ticket prices, routes, timetables and types of bus vehicles in accordance with the city's needs. Will the cabinet member please give his opinion on the current level of bus provision within the city and ask Norfolk County Council as the transport authority to make use of the Transport Acts of 2000 and 2008 to establish Bus Quality Contract Schemes for delivering first class public transport for Norwich?**"**

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

"I think we can all agree that providing affordable reliable public transport in the city is key for the future growth and prosperity of Norwich. So far this has been achieved by relevant authorities and bus operators to working collaboratively together, though one of the biggest barriers to increasing the use of buses are the fares.

In the greater Norwich area we have many examples of such collaborative working; these included the recent Better Bus Area project, the joint investment plan with First group, the city centre public transport major scheme and the western corridor quality bus partnership. These initiatives have been consistently successful in delivering increased bus passenger growth, improved bus service performance and increasing standards of customer satisfaction and I think all this needs to be emphasised, and I hope Cllr Carlo appreciates all the good work to achieve this.

Clearly there is a need to continue and build upon the strong working relationship between county council and the bus operators but a bus quality contract is may not be the best way forward to achieve this. Bus quality contracts are primarily intended to be used when the deregulated bus market

can be shown to be failing to deliver the public sector's policy objectives. I has been suggested that this is not the case for the greater Norwich area.

I am pleased with the real progress so far, as I am certain Cllr Carlo is, and I am very happy therefore to ask the county council to continue search for innovative ways to improve the bus service and encouraging the bus company to make regular reviews of their fare structure to remain competitive and cheap. I will ask them to report back to me their views on the idea of Bus Quality Contract Schemes but at the same time ensure consideration is given to the use of all powers and means to further improve working with local bus operators so as to deliver value for money bus travel and more of the high quality improvements for passengers."

Councillor Carlo asked as a supplementary question, if the portfolio holder could explain how labour opposition to bus quality contracts "squared" with the Labour Party manifesto. **Councillor Bremner** said his answer was quite clear. There was need for improvement but there had been very good work done to ensure a more reliable bus network. He was more than happy to talk to Norfolk County Council and was therefore not opposed.

Question 2

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

"I welcome the fact that several national supermarkets have recently agreed to give edible food close to its sell by date to local charities for distribution. Does the cabinet member support the idea of Norwich City Council bringing together the different partners (supermarkets, charities, schools etc) to identify diverse ways of distributing the food to those who need it, for example setting up evening meal clubs in schools in addition to breakfast clubs and running three daily meals as part of school holiday activities?**"**

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

"The range of services in the city to help people who cannot afford to feed themselves or their families is commendable and is a reflection of the very active voluntary and community sector in Norwich.

Council should reflect that in March of this year, the Norwich Foodbank issued 705 food vouchers to families who could not afford to feed themselves. This is not something that society should be proud of in our city and is one example of the impacts of the Government's welfare reform.

I therefore welcome that supermarkets and voluntary organisations are coming together to make use of food that would otherwise be wasted and go into landfill and instead is being used to feed those in need.

The services appear to be well organised by the voluntary and community organisations and Council should congratulate those organisations for taking the initiative.

I understand that there has already been a suggestion that the organisations come together to share best practice and if required, coordinate what they do. However, if the activity is already in progress and it has already been suggested that they can collaborate by working together more, I am unclear what role there is for the council that would add value.

If as this dialogue progresses the groups consider there is something specific that the Council might contribute to or help with, then I would more than pleased to hear those suggestions.

In the meantime I suggest the groups keep doing what they are doing successfully as it appears to be working and making a real difference.**"**

Councillor Grahame said she was pleased to see how much work there was going on in the community and asked, as a supplementary question, if the council would show how much it supported people doing that work by allowing them to use council premises, for example the under-croft beneath the war memorial. **Councillor Thomas (VA)** said the council would continue to encourage all community activities however it could.

Question 3

Councillor Howard to ask the portfolio holder for neighbourhoods and community safety:

"Since the full council meeting of 27 January, Mancroft ward councillors have spoken to local residents about the re-opening of Russell Street community centre and lots said they'd like it to be reopened. Following on from that, city council officers conducted a survey of local residents in the immediate vicinity of the Russell St Community Centre and much officer time has been dedicated to deciding the building's future. Could the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety please confirm all the options which are currently being considered and outline the process and timetable for moving forward on reopening the centre?**"**

Councillor Driver, portfolio holder for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"As Cllr Howard will know from her question to Council in January, the volunteer management committee of Russell Street Community Centre stood down which resulted in the closure of the centre.

Portfolio holders have agreed that the centre should be retained for community use and officers have been tasked with exploring how this can be best achieved.

The Centre itself has a number of limitations:

- It is one medium sized room, with inadequate heating and no flexibility of layout
- Whilst it has been kept clean and tidy inside like many of the council's centres it would benefit from an upgrade.

NPS Norwich indicates that expenditure of at least £22,000 is required to undertake bare minimum repair requirements and these sums are currently not allocated in the repairs and maintenance budget.

Whilst there is a commitment to retain the building for community use, the council needs to reflect that locally there are other community facilities including:

- Three council run sheltered housing schemes that have some form of community room for use, largely by the residents of the sheltered housing
- Three other Community facilities:
    - Wensum Community Centre - a Council owned centre that currently is quite busy and may not be in a position to offer extra sessions to residents from the Russell Street area
    - St. Barnabus Centre - an independently run counselling facility
    - The Belvedere Community Centre - a large and busy Council run facility that is running to near full capacity

I would also like to draw Cllr Howard's attention to my answer to her question to council in January regarding the council's financial constraints and the council being unable to invest in the fabric of all the community centres to the level it desired. The council's finances will worsen over the next five years and as well as community centres having to compete for financial resources with other council owned assets and programmes I want to be reassured that any money that is spent is well spent.

There was also a recommendation in the review of community space undertaken by Scrutiny Committee in 2012 specifically:

Working with the community associations and providers, the council sets out a clear purpose for community space and develops a more sustainable business model and performance management framework for council owned centres and associated guidance for other centres with which it works.

As portfolio holder, I want to be confident that the work officers have been asked to undertake at Russell Street produces a sustainable solution for the future. With the centre closed, there is an opportunity to do this so that the council finds the right long term solution.

Therefore although I would very much like to provide an indication of timescale, I am unable to confirm what that is at this stage other than I would like to see this completed as soon as possible so that the local residents who are keen to access a community centre can do so.

Ward councillors will be engaged in the future of the centre in due course.**"**

Councillor Howard asked, as a supplementary question, when will the budget be set for community centres and was a district heating scheme available in the area that could bring down costs. **Councillor Driver** said he believed there was a district heating scheme nearby and he would check whether it could be used. He emphasised that the council was exploring all areas and he hoped the centre would be available to the public very quickly.

Question 4

Councillor Lubbock to ask the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing:

"I understand that there has been a recent court decision in favour of leaseholders with regard to the council overcharging for caretaking and electricity in communal areas.

Please could the portfolio holder explain the decision in full?**"**

Councillor Harris, portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing's response:

Two issues have recently been taken to First-tier tribunal – Property Chamber (Residential Property) (FFT) by a leaseholder.

One concerns mobile caretaking and whether a charge can be made where there is not specific provision in the lease.

The other is about landlords lighting maintenance and how the costs are apportioned to leaseholders.

In both cases the FTT determined the individual leaseholder was not liable to pay the charges, although the service has been provided and costs incurred by the council. Neither decision set a legal precedent.

Following the tribunal rulings the council has reimbursed the individual leaseholder in line with the rulings and taken note of the outcomes. With regard to other leaseholders refunds are being considered where appropriate for up to six years following advice from NPlaw in line with statute of limitation legislation**.**

Councillor Lubbock asked, as a supplementary question, what the council had done to communicate this. **Councillor Harris** said that a letter had been sent out in April 2015.

Question 5

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing:

"Could the cabinet member for housing and wellbeing update the council once again regarding the impact upon Norwich families and individuals of the 'bedroom tax'? What steps are being taken to support those afflicted by this vicious tax?**"**

Councillor Harris, portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing response:

"The numbers of households affected by bedroom tax remain at the same levels

To date no council tenant has been evicted for rent arrears that are solely due to bedroom tax.

At the end of March 2015 a total of 2071 (14%) of council tenants in Norwich were having a weekly reduction in their housing benefit entitlement in respect of the bedroom tax.

- 1761 have a one bedroom 14% reduction
- 310 have a 25% reduction for two bedrooms plus.

The average amount of weekly housing benefit deducted for those with one 'surplus' bedroom is £11.40 and for those with a two bedroom plus deduction the average is £21.39. The anticipated annual benefit loss for those with a one bedroom deduction is £570 and for two bedroom plus deduction £1070.

The current rent arrears situation for council tenants continues to be mitigated by three main factors:

- Extensive support available to tenants in preventing and resolving budgeting difficulties. The two budget advisors have provided one-off face-to-face advice to over 800 tenants since January 2014 with exceptionally high success rates.
- All new tenants are contacted following assessment against a risk index to check payment method/ benefits are in place and offer budgeting service or signpost to specialist advice where appropriate
- An effective campaign to ensure the discretionary housing payment scheme is fully utilised.

In Norwich, further grant funding has been provided to the voluntary sector to ensure independent debt advice is available for all tenures and another job fair /welfare reform event for all residents is planned for St Andrews Hall in September, focusing on jobs and training. This will be the fifth welfare reform event and will take attendance at these events to over 2000 residents.

The next welfare reform challenge will be the introduction of universal credit for new single claimants in receipt of jobseekers allowance. Under this change housing costs will be paid direct to claimants who will then have to make arrangements to pay their full rent. Currently housing costs are paid directly to the council. Locally this change will commence in Norwich in December 2015."

Question 6

Councillor Ryan to ask the leader of the council:

"Can the leader give his opinions on the benefits achieved from Norwich hosting BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 May 2015?**"**

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"There many are good reasons why cities up and down the UK compete so hard to get to host the Radio 1 Big Weekend.

The Big Weekend not only brought 50,000 people into our city for the largest free music festival in Europe – it also brought Norwich to the world through the millions who watched it, listened to it and talked about it through social media. And Earlham Park looked absolutely amazing and proved a perfect venue.

Norwich was also promoted relentlessly through Radio1, BBC TV and the national media for months before the event took place. And our fine city was trending on social media in a volume we will probably never see again. Marketing and promotion like this, if you had to buy it, would cost many millions of pounds.

Around 7,000 of our young also people got chance to take part in the week long academy that preceded the event itself. They worked alongside musicians, film makers, radio presenters, DJs and the media. Through this they learnt new skills and had access to people who could truly inspire them.

An incredible 55% of tickets went to people living in city council postcodes and they were able to see amazing, world class music acts for free.

Over the weekend itself thousands of people came to Norwich to spend their money in our shops, restaurants, bars and hotels. Local suppliers and caterers worked on site. Our residents around the park even rented out rooms and their drives!

All in all I think we can be proud of Norwich and how it responded to the Radio 1 Big Weekend.

I would like to thank the UEA and the Police for working so closely with us to help make this happen. But in particular I would like to thank BBC Radio 1 for choosing Norwich."

Question 7

Councillor Vivien Thomas to ask the portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces:

"Can the cabinet member for parks, markets and open spaces give his opinion on the anticipated benefits associated with the new signs and online web presence designed to promote and support the profile of Norwich market?**"**

Councillor Kendrick, portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces response:

"Norwich market's future success and vitality is a common goal for Norwich City Council, our traders and the public alike.

The market is a well-loved city institution with a proud history and we really hope these two new projects will give it a boost and be well-received by traders and shoppers, and give a clear message of the council's intention to rejuvenate the market.

In this financial climate, running any small business is challenging and markets all over the country have faced particular challenges over the last few years because the way people shop has changed.

However, our citizens and visitors to Norwich are really missing out if they don't visit and experience the market, with its many interesting stalls, local produce, great service and real character.

The new webpages and signs on Gentleman's Walk give lots more detail for people about what's on the market, where to find it and when it's open.

First of all we've divided all the stalls into categories and colour-coded those categories. This will make it far easier for people to find what they're looking for.

We've included a picture, the location of each stall, a brief description of what it sells and the days and times visitors can expect to find the stall open.

Many stalls now accept debit and credit cards, which is handy for shoppers, so that is indicated there too. There are also links to websites, Twitter and Facebook accounts where stallholders have them.

It's a great opportunity for people to see what's on offer and for stalls to reach new customers.

Our dedicated markets team has always worked hard to support Norwich market traders and encourage new businesses by keeping basic rents low and ensuring a broad mix of products and services to create a vibrant and diverse shopping experience. **"**

Question 8

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

"Can the cabinet member for environment and sustainable development give their opinion on the benefits to Norwich of the northern distributor road?**"**

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

"I am very pleased to hear that the secretary of state has given approval to plans to build the Northern Distributor Route (NDR) as it will provide major travel benefits as well as support the city's future growth and prosperity.

The NDR has the potential to bring over £1bn of economic benefits to Norfolk, providing jobs and helping businesses in Norwich, Broadland and North Norfolk. It will unlock new business sites, particularly in north east Norwich and Broadland, improve access to existing industrial and commercial estates, and make some of the most attractive parts of Norfolk more accessible to tourists.

Deliveries and customer journeys will be quicker, easier and more reliable, and it will enhance the value of recent improvements to the A11, and promised investment in the A47.

Alongside complimentary transport measures such as investment in public transport, cycling and traffic management, at the same time the NDR will benefit the city centre, enhancing the city's status as regional capital and premier shopping destination. Existing and new businesses in the city centre will benefit from reduced congestion, improved public transport services, cycling and walking improvements and public realm enhancements. This overall transport package will help to deliver an anticipated 100,000sqm or more of new office floor space in the city centre, reinforcing the key employment cluster in the area's most accessible location.

By supporting growth, particularly in the north east quadrant, the NDR will help maximise the exciting economic opportunity offered through the Greater Norwich City Deal with Government; designed to accelerate local growth and act as a catalyst to deliver 40,000 new jobs – a 30% uplift from previous projections – and 37,000 new homes.

The Northern Distributor Road will provide a high-quality link to Norwich International Airport – vital to business, and supporting Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft's designation as a national Centre for Offshore Renewable Engineering.

The road will also support the Norwich Aeropark proposals for aviation-related enterprises adjoining the airport, and around 30ha of other employment uses in the new Airport Business Park.

The NDR is needed to tackle a range of existing travel and transport problems that will only intensify as new housing and employment areas are developed to the north-east of the city. The absence of a high quality route around the north of the city has forced traffic on to increasingly busy routes through Norwich, or down unsuitable 'rat-runs' that blight communities and residential streets.

The NDR will carry around 40,000 vehicles a day. In drawing this traffic from less suitable roads it will also create capacity that allows significant improvements to public transport, walking and cycling, making them more attractive travel choices. It will also provide a quicker and more convenient route for a range of shorter journeys by linking existing roads into Norwich, cutting journey times and bringing relief to local communities and the city centre.

The scope for significant improvements in public transport is limited without the NDR due to the weight of traffic on the existing network, which will

increase as the north-east of the city is developed. The NDR will provide the relief that will allow further bus and cycle route improvements, including Bus Rapid Transit.

The council has always supported the NDR but our support has been conditional on delivery of the whole NATS package including improvements for public transport, cycling and walking and not simply the NDR alone. This need for a balanced approach is reaffirmed by the secretary of state and is the reason that I equally welcome the injection of some £20 million over the next four years alone in walking, cycling and public transport funded via the Government's cycle ambition grant and New Anglia LEP's Local Growth Fund."

Question 9

Councillor Bremner to ask the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing:

"Following the sad news of the death of a rough sleeper in Norwich on 10 June, is the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and wellbeing able to comment on the wider work and support offered by this council to people experiencing homelessness? **"**

Councillor Harris, portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing's response:

"Norwich City Council is seeing a year-on-year rise in people approaching us for housing advice and assistance. In addition there has also been an increase in the number of people sleeping rough.

The council takes a pro-active approach to dealing with rough-sleeping through the employment of a specialist Rough-Sleeper Co-ordinator who seeks to actively manage and co-ordinate outreach and homeless services. This is an approach designed to minimise rough sleeping through intensive management of rough sleeping and of hostel bed spaces.

The rough-sleeper co-ordinator works closely with a variety of agencies to fulfil both a strategic and operational role, ensuring a locally co-ordinated approach to the issues. This includes facilitating the Multi Agency Rough Sleeper group (MARS), which ensures a person-based approach to resolving each individual rough-sleeper's situation.

The council through its rough-sleeper co-ordinator has introduced innovations such as a hostels eviction protocol, reconnections approach and homeless services maps (www.searchnorwich.org.uk). The council is also working with and supporting partner agencies on innovative projects such as No Second Night Out, Housing First[i] and Make Every Adult Matter (MEAM[ii])

While the assistance that the council can provide will depend on each individual's circumstances and needs, a range of help is available including hostel referral, reconnection, specialist housing advice, statutory homeless application, rent deposits, the housing register and hostel move-on,

signposting to other services (health, social care), the LEAP project, food vouchers, rough sleeping kits, homeless services maps and SWEP (severe weather emergency provision).

There are 260 hostel beds in Norwich, by far the greatest number in the region. The hostel system in Norwich provides a key service in finding temporary housing for the majority of people who find themselves homeless in the area (including those who are street homeless).

Once a client has accessed the hostel system, usually through the direct access hostel at Bishop Bridge House, support packages can be put in place and clients can move through the hostel system. This system is managed through a weekly accommodation meeting chaired by the council's rough sleeper co-ordinator, to ensure that occupation of hostel beds is maximized.

This council's Home Options housing allocations policy contains a 'move-on' agreement enabling hostel clients that are deemed ready to maintain a tenancy to be awarded gold banding to ensure a managed transition into social housing and a through-flow within the hostel system.

The council supports and promotes StreetLink- this is a national service enabling general public to alert relevant organisations about anyone sleeping rough.

In light of this, I am pleased that the council, with its partners, is able to provide such a range of services to rough sleepers. This demonstrates our ongoing commitment to assist this vulnerable group, who face risks which have been recently, tragically evidenced."

Question 10

Councillor Maxwell to ask the leader of the council:

"The recent performance report received by Scrutiny Committee showed resident satisfaction with the last service they received from the City Council was above target at 95.4%. This compares with our target of 93% and continues a run of excellent results for this measure. Can the Leader give his comments on how this benchmarks with other councils of a similar size?**"**

Councillor Waters, leader of the council's response:

"As there is no longer any national requirement to ask specific questions in specific ways then precise benchmarking is difficult. One of the closest comparators is the "Are you being served" questions devised by the LGA. In 2013 / 14 the average satisfaction in English councils to how there were perceived to run things was 71%. Our surveys are but one way in which we test satisfaction with services and some work is done in specific areas as well. However, it is clear that a customer satisfaction level of consistently over 93% is something that any organisation would be rightly very proud of."

Question 11

Councillor Woollard to ask the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing:

"The latest Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) showed a marked improvement in Council housing tenant satisfaction with the overall service provided. 82% of tenants were either very or fairly satisfied with the service, a boost from 71% satisfaction rating in the last survey. Is the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and wellbeing able to comment on how these positive improvements have been achieved?**"**

Councillor Harris, portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing response:

"In December 2014 the council appointed an independent market research company called Wyman Dillon to carry out the STAR customer satisfaction survey on our behalf and between January and March this year they telephoned a cross-section of our tenant base and 975 tenants answered the seven questions in the survey.

By using the same STAR survey questions we can compare our results with other similar social housing services. The results show how well we have performed in comparison with other local authorities who manage more than 10,000 homes. We are joint third in terms of overall tenant satisfaction within our benchmarking group of 13 local authorities.

Overall satisfaction has improved by 11 percentage points showing that the hard work of officers and partners has continued to improve all aspects of the housing service for our tenants. Not only has satisfaction increased or remained the same for all questions asked within the survey, we are also performing well compared to our peers, showing that the work we have undertaken to assist tenants to maintain tenancies in the face of welfare reform, improve their homes and neighbourhoods and offer value for money services has been a great success.

The improvements are as a result of setting our annual continuous housing improvement plan measured against the corporate objectives and service plan.

Also through our commitment to ensuring that all our homes will meet the 'Norwich Standard' by 2017, combined with providing an effective, high quality repairs service for our tenants from start to finish.
And involving tenants and leaseholders in how we provide and deliver services, working with tenants to produce the annual report to tenants and learning from customer feedback.

Question 12

Councillor Packer to ask the leader of the council:

"The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill had its second reading in the House of Lords on 8 June, and went Committee yesterday. Given the

concerns expressed by some local authority leaders, including former Leader of Norwich City Council, Baroness Hollis of Heigham, can the Leader give his opinion on the opportunities and risks presented to our council?**"**

Councillor Waters, leader of the council response:

"The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill supports the Government's commitment to devolve powers and budgets to boost local growth in England. The Bill would provide the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with a series of order and regulation making powers, allowing for the devolution of functions currently owned by central government and local public bodies. It is intended as the means of delivering local "devolution deals", agreed between combined authorities and central government. Currently, the most advanced of these is the Greater Manchester agreement. The other main elements of the Bill include:-

- proposals for the creation of a 'Northern Powerhouse', to enable cities in the north of England to work more closely together on policy areas such as transport, housing, strategic planning, health, social care and skills training, and to compete more effectively with London in terms of economies of scale and access to human capital.
- Provisions to enable combined authorities to have an elected mayor. These elected mayors would take on powers agreed with central government, and established in the relevant order from the Secretary of State. These mayoral functions could also include taking on the role of a Police and Crime Commissioner. The Bill would also enable the remit of combined authorities to be expanded. Combined authorities would be required to establish overview and scrutiny committees under the Bill.
- The Government has recognised that the mayoral combined authority model may not be appropriate in all contexts, such as for areas outside cities. The Bill also includes measures to enable changes to be made to the role and the powers of local authorities in England where the Government agrees that it may not be appropriate to establish a combined authority.

It is widely recognised that devolution within England is the most effective way to create jobs, build homes, strengthen healthy communities and protect the vulnerable. All areas stand to benefit when decisions are made locally. Norwich welcomes devolution and the opportunities for greater local control. This would build on the collaboration and partnership work with our neighbouring Districts and the County Council that we have developed in delivering the City Deal for Greater Norwich. Norwich is a forward looking city, keen to work in partnership with our neighbours, local businesses, the Local enterprise partnership and our thriving universities.

We have also been working with the other Key Cities to identify how devolved powers could strengthen local economic growth and prosperity (see the Key

cities manifesto for devolution prepared by ResPublica). In that manifesto we argue that the 26 Key cities have a particular role to play in the economy and indeed have a combined GVA of £163b (more than the combined GVA of Core cities). Regional cities like Norwich also host a range of retail and support businesses and have more diverse economies e.g. Norwich has strengths in health and life sciences, financial industries and digital and media businesses.

On a Norfolk level, we are working with the county and the districts to develop Norfolk's devolution offer.

Norwich would like to have a conversation with the government about some or all of the following being devolved :

- Transport, housing, employment and skills, business support, planning, business rate retention, housing revenue account borrowing, and earn back deals.

In terms of risks, the biggest issue is that not pursuing a devolution proposal may result in central government imposing solutions that may not be right for Norwich. Government should reconsider its position on elected mayors a condition for greater devolution so that local government and central government can work together more effectively. There are other models of governance that could be adopted. It is important that the decision-making process is transparent with clear criteria and a route of appeal. The decision to devolve powers to a combined authority should not be based solely on financial matters but should take account of the wider impact so that changes are appropriate to the local area.

It is also recognised that the benefits of devolution are unlikely to be fully realised unless funding reforms accompany the legislative change. The Independent Commission on Local government finance report Financing English Devolution, argued that fundamental to securing good quality public services is a finance system which provides choice and enables local authorities to determine how ambitious they want to be.

Of course the devil is in the detail. At present no clear answers as to how the process of adapting to the new devolved powers will be managed or how long it will take. This will all depend on how far Government wants to go and how quickly. The key opportunities for Norwich will arise If we can gain more local control so that we can support business more effectively, grow the city fairly and sustainably and tailor these sources of funds to local need and circumstances. **"**

Question 13

Councillor Herries to ask the portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing:

"The Coalition government's previous failure on 1-for-1 replacement under the right to buy scheme - with building work starting on only one new house for

every ten sold off - has resulted in a significant impact on council stock in Norwich.

Does the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing have any confidence that the new proposed housing sell-off will be any different? ”

Councillor Harris, portfolio holder for housing and wellbeing response:

Unfortunately I am far from confident that any future right to buy schemes will result in the desired one to one replacement of our housing stock. Extending the Right to Buy to Housing Association properties will of course give more people the opportunity to buy their houses and the rather optimistic theory that for every home sold another should be built is just that, simply a theory.

The table below gives the level of sales of council houses from Norwich City Council stock under the Right to Buy scheme during the term of the last coalition government, with sales increasing due to the enhanced discounts granted by that same government from March 2014.

Year	Sales
2010/11	37
2011/15	38
2012/13	90
2013/14	145
2014/15	150

The Council has a retention agreement enabling the retention of a portion of receipts from Right to Buy sales, but these retained amounts must be used within three years of retention to enable the provision of replacement social housing. They may fund up to 30% of the overall cost of providing the replacement housing. Alternatively, they can also be used to provide grant funding to Registered Providers of Affordable Housing to contribute up to 30% to their build costs. Any retained amounts not used within the required timescale must be paid to the Secretary of State with interest.

Borrowing in relation to the Housing Revenue Account is subject to a tightly controlled debt cap which the council cannot exceed. The 2015/16 to 2019/20 capital plan for the HRA anticipates the building of 183 new council houses over the five years of the plan which takes projected borrowing levels up to the debt cap. Where there is not headroom within the debt cap to fund the 70% required to match Right to Buy receipts from the council’s own resources, Right to Buy receipts can be grant funded to Registered Providers for their developments.

In Norwich, building under these financial constraints makes it is impossible for the City Council to come anywhere close to replacing council properties that have been sold off. We have been forced to sell valuable properties at massively discounted prices.

This council should be rightly proud of the fact that in 2014 the first council built homes were built at Pointers Field in Norwich for over two decades, but that shows how difficult the task ahead of us is.

We should be under no illusion that we are dealing with a serious and deepening housing crisis across the United Kingdom and that of course includes Norwich. Our residents need homes that they can afford to rent and at the moment they are being driven into the more expensive private rental market. Ironically sometimes people are renting houses previously owned by the local authority and now owned by private landlords.

Question 14

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

"Can the Cabinet Member for Fairness and Equality give his comments on the progress achieved with the Solar Together Norfolk initiative? What benefits will it offer those who have signed up?**"**

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

"Well over 3200 people have signed up the UK's first Solar Auction. 455 of these registrations are from Norwich which accounts for potentially 4200 panels.

The council believes that approximately 1/3 of the registrants will accept the offer from the scheme. The remaining 2/3 have been made aware of the advantages of solar PV. Research suggests a substantial percentage of these people will look for an alternative, from which the local installers can benefit if they make themselves visible.

The benefits from the auction to the registrant are trust, quality and price. The council is a trusted provider of services. Helping people at act and make a decision on purchasing solar PV. The auction is all about getting the best Quality/Price combination. All work will be tested by an independent auditor throughout the process. All systems will have a 10 year guarantee including the inverters.

It took 6 rounds to get to the end result, being an average discount of 15.8% compared with the indicative prices we gave to registrants. The discounts differ per package, ranging from 11.2% to 19.3%. We will show this result on our website tomorrow.

As an example: The price for 16 panels ended in £4,630, which is over £1,100 less than the indicative price of £5,740.

Finally each house will have an EPC assessment so they can claim the maximum FIT. (Feed in Tariff). The scheme will also link to Cosy City as and when appropriate."

Question 15

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces:

"The City has marvellous parks for the enjoyment of young and old alike, however, there are times when the parks are not enjoyable and that is when dogs are allowed off leads. It can then be very intimidating particularly for young children and, recently, there have been instances of adults being knocked over or bitten. When dogs are off lead this also means greater opportunity for dog fouling going completely unnoticed by the owner.

Can the Portfolio Holder tell me whether the council has any plans to introduce a dog policy which could be applied to all the council's parks to prevent anti-social behaviour of this type?**"**

Councillor Kendrick, portfolio holder for parks, markets and open spaces' response:

The council has a policy in that where dogs are allowed in parks they need to be kept under control. Wensum and St Clements parks are designated as dog free parks as are all children's play areas. The council will act in proportion to the reports received. Where it is identified as a priority that there are issues with dogs, officers will visit our parks to monitor and challenge dog owners accordingly. Please note where dogs are perceived to be dangerous this is a matter for the police.

Councillor Ackroyd asked, as a supplementary question, what was the council's definition of " under control". **Councillor Kendrick** said the council followed the legal definition.