NORWICH
City Council

Council

Members of the council are hereby summoned to attend the meeting of the council to be held in the council chamber, City Hall, St Peters Street, Norwich, NR2 1NH on

Tuesday, 27 January 2015

19:30

Agenda

Page nos

1 Lord Mayor's announcements

2 Presentation of long service award

3 Declaration of interest

(Please note that it is the responsibility of individual members to declare an interest prior to the item if they arrive late for the meeting)

4 Questions from the public

5 Petitions

6 Minutes **5 - 30**

Purpose - To agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2014.

7 Questions to cabinet members / committee chairs

(A printed copy of the questions and replies will be available at the meeting)

8 Nominations for Lord Mayor and Sheriff 2015-16

Purpose - To receive nominations for the Lord Mayor and Sheriff for the next civic year.

9 Council tax reduction scheme 2015-16 **31 - 44**

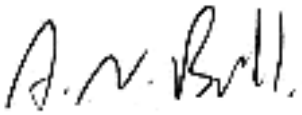
Purpose - To consider a council tax reduction scheme for 2015 - 16 and to consider discounts and exemptions.

10 Motion – Council housing stock

Councillor Haynes to propose and Councillor Boswell to second:

With the rising need for affordable, good-quality housing, council housing is highly important. New rules (government implementation in autumn 2013 of provisions within section 34a of the Housing Act 1985) have been introduced, encouraging council housing to be transferred to housing associations, meaning democratic control of housing stock is lost.

Council **RESOLVES** to ask cabinet to include within its corporate plan proposal a commitment to keeping our housing stock council owned and run and not to initiate a transfer process to a housing association.



Anton Bull
Executive head of business relationship management and democracy

For further information please contact:

Andy Emms, democratic services manager
t: (01603) 212459
e: andyemms@norwich.gov.uk

Democratic services
City Hall, Norwich, NR2 1NH
www.norwich.gov.uk

Date of publication**: Monday, 19 January 2015**

Information for members of the public

Members of the public and the media have the right to attend meetings of full council, the cabinet and committees except where confidential information or exempt information is likely to be disclosed, and the meeting is therefore held in private.

For information about attending or speaking at meetings, please contact the committee officer above or refer to the council's website

If you would like this agenda in an alternative format, such as a larger or smaller font, audio or Braille, or in a different language, please contact the committee officer above.

NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30pm – 9.50pm **25 November 2014**

Present: Councillor Lubbock (Lord Mayor), Mr Armstrong (Sheriff), Councillors Ackroyd, Arthur, Barker, Blunt, Bogelein, Boswell, Bradford, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Button, Carlo, Driver, Galvin, Gayton, Grahame, Harris, Haynes, Henderson, Herries, Howard, Jackson, Jones, Kendrick, Little, Manning, Maxwell, Neale, Packer, Price, Ryan, Sands (M), Sands (S), Stammers, Stonard, Waters, Woollard and Wright.

Apologies: Councillor Gihawi.

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor welcomed everyone to the council meeting and said that as she understood that so many members of the public had attended the meeting for the skateboarding item she would take that item earlier on the agenda.

Since the last meeting, the Lord Mayor said that she had attended a number of engagements including earlier that day an event organised by the East Anglian Children's Hospices (EACH) attended by its patron the Duchess of Cambridge, to support the campaign to raise funds to provide new purpose built premises.

The Lord Mayor said that members would be aware that Bill Webster had passed away. Bill had done a tremendous amount of work to promote the city through his work with Norwich in Bloom and he would be greatly missed.

The Lord Mayor said that at the last meeting council agreed to delegate the appointment of the new monitoring officer to the chief executive in consultation with the three group leaders. nplaw had subsequently proposed Hugh Ferguson as the new monitoring officer and on 14 November 2014 the chief executive and the three group leaders met Hugh Ferguson after which the three group leaders were happy to endorse his appointment. A record of that decision is attached as Appendix A.

The Lord Mayor said that the council had received two awards which would be presented later in the meeting after item 9 had been discussed.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gayton declared an "other" interest in item 9 as vice chair of the Royal British Legion.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Lord Mayor said that two questions had been received from members of the public.

Question 1

Gawain Godwin to the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community saftey:

"With over 5500 signatures on the petition against the ban, opposition from local businesses, the Chair of the Norfolk Combined Services Group stating that he was against the idea of a ban and nearly all consulted rejecting an extension of the banning area; why has there been no consultation asking whether anyone actually wanted the ban, and how can the cabinet justify going ahead, with no evidence that it is what the community wants and when there are other ways to protect the War Memorial?"

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"In the council we have to balance the views of many people and take into account a wide range Norwich residents views. Sometimes we have to balance very different points of view. This can be difficult sometimes, but that is our job as democratically elected representatives.

In this case we have tried to listen to everyone's views, including those of Norwich skateboarders. I propose to recommend to council later this evening that we use different powers, a Public Space Protection Order to protect the city's War Memorial (and Memorial gardens). This will allow us to deal with those who disrespect the memorial without a byelaw.

I will also be proposing that we ask the Norwich skateboarding community to work with us to come up with joint solutions to tackle issues caused by skateboarding (and other related activities), in the city centre. In particular, I want us to look with you at the area originally proposed as part of the consultation on the byelaw. This will help to ensure that it is a space that can be enjoyed by all."

Gawain Godwin said that a number of organisations had raised concerns about Public Space Protection Orders and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member had talked to the people that mattered, ie the community and skateboarders themselves. **Councillor Driver** reiterated that the council would want to hear from all parts of the community as part of its 12 week consultation on a Public Space Protection Order.

Question 2

Jan McLachlan to the cabinet member for resources:

"Given increasing public concern regarding Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), could you please explain what has been resolved by cabinet with regards to the motion (below) recently submitted to Council by the Green Party to urge rejection of TTIP'.

Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources' response:

Thank you very much for your question.

The short answer is that the cabinet will be considering this matter on 10 December 2014 and the TTIP report will be available on the council website as part of the cabinet papers, from the middle of next week. The cabinet meeting takes place at 17.30 on Wednesday 10 December and is open to the public.

While I cannot at this stage give you a precise response to your question, since I would be pre-empting the discussion and recommendations that will be considered by cabinet, what I can say is that we have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the issues around TTIP from an ever growing body of literature – both general and highly technical.

Major areas of concern

As you will know the TTIP negotiations were launched at the G8 summit in June 2013 and the 7th round of negotiations started on 29 September. Like previous bilateral and multinational trade agreements TTIP is highly contentious and for good reason. In our consideration of our public position and the representations we wish to make, we share views outlined in a House of Commons library research note on TTIP – I quote:

> ' *There are concerns that liberalising public procurement markets, combined with measures to protect foreign investors from government action, could constrain the power of national governments to decide how public services are provided'.*

Naturally, (though not exclusively) our particular worry is the NHS and the risk that TTIP will threaten universal access to health care. The possible exclusion of public services like the NHS from the TTIP agreement looks very shaky as a result of the passage of the Health and Social Care Act (2012) and the explicit creation of a health care market in competition with other providers. This is also true of a wide range of other public services that now operate within a commercial framework.

The 'investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), as currently framed, allows trans-national corporations under TTIP to sue individual countries directly, for loss of profits suffered as a result of public policy decisions, including predicted reductions of profits in the future.

The possible threat to key environmental regulations within the EU, which are known to guarantee higher safety levels than in the US.

Shortcomings in transparency and consultation: for example, of the 560 meetings that the EU Commission's Directorate-General for Trade held in preparation for negotiations, 520 were with business lobbyists and only 26 were with public interest groups.

And of course not forgetting the potential impact of TTIP on local government, particularly in relation to food safety, environmental standards, public procurement and public services.

We are also looking very closely at the economic modelling around the perceived benefits of TTIP in terms of increased trade, investment and jobs.

The report to cabinet and the recommendations that will flow from it, will seek to influence the current round of negotiations in the areas I have touched upon in my response to your question. We will also be pressing the Government, local MPs and MEPs on specific issues – e.g. taking the NHS out of TTIP through 'negative listing'. In a wider context we will continue to play our part in bringing these very important issues to the attention of residents in the city.

Jan McLachlan asked, as a supplementary question, that in view of the possible effect of TTIP on the NHS and the possibility that it would give companies the ability to override other laws if it affected their profits, did the cabinet member agree that it would be best if TTIP was "thrown out" now? **Councillor Waters** said that the government needed to publish more details of how TTIP might be implemented and we needed to look into all of those details. He was particularly concerned that the government's definition of public services did not fit the way public services were actually delivered and how this would be affected by TTIP needed to be considered.

4. PETITIONS

The Lord Mayor said that three petitions had been received.

Petition 1

Martha Goddard presented the following petition:

"We, the undersigned, believe that the proposed rule amendments for the allotments in Norwich should not be introduced, that the rule changes should be considered at a council meeting and the consultation process should be referred to the scrutiny committee of Norwich city council for the following reasons.

1: Most people would struggle to comply with these rules. This suggests that the rules are impractical, on workable and heavy-handed, and means that many tenants will be unable to work their allotments in peace.

2: Despite the very welcome extension of the deadline for the responses to the rule amendments, there are some very serious concerns about the consultation

process. These rules are almost a complete rewrite, and the normal procedures for consultation on such a large change have not been followed. There has been no public meeting, only some tenants on email were contacted and it is not listed in the consultations section on the Council website.

3: A number of the rule amendments conflict with the current rules, but since they appear to be additions to the current rules, this will be very confusing, making the rules on workable and unenforceable."

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"Thank you to all the people who have shown an interest in the allotment consultation and provided valuable and constructive comments regarding the review of the rules.

The majority of the rules provide clarification on aspects of the existing rules. Through the consultation we have received responses from tenants supporting the rule changes and also some responses who say they do not go far enough to ensure plots are worked properly. All comments will be taken into consideration when producing the final rules.

The level of consultation undertaken for any piece of work is proportionate to the project, to avoid wasting resources whilst still providing an opportunity for tenants to be involved.

A first draft of the rules based on experience of the issues which had been raised under the existing rules was presented to a focus group of association members and site representatives.

A second draft of the rules was discussed at a further meeting with site representatives. Following this, a third draft was sent via e-mail to 830 tenants. The email bulletin was followed up with posters and a copy of the draft rules were displayed on a every site noticeboard, informing tenants about the planned changes and, urging them to contact us either by e-mail, letter or telephone. Having listened to concerns regarding the timescale in which tenants had to respond the deadline was extended. Tenants had 46 days in which to provide their comments to the council.

The need for the additional rules was identified through dealing with tenants about problems relating to their plot, and a recognition that in certain rules could be misinterpreted. The aim behind the new rules was to provide greater clarity for tenants about what they need to do and to enable the council to deal with problems in a more transparent and consistent way.

The authorisation of the rules for implementation is a decision that will be made by a senior officer of the city council in accordance with Appendix 8 of the city council's constitution (scheme of delegation to officers). A review of the consultation process is a decision which would be made by Scrutiny committee. Should you wish to raise this as a topic for discussion, you can access the submission form via the council's website, or a committee officer can arrange for a copy to be sent to you."

Petition 2

Steph Serazin presented the following petition:

"We, the undersigned, call on our elected representatives to make preventing catastrophic climate change a top level priority in corporate plans and all policy areas, for example procurement of goods and services, investment strategies, transport and trade relationships."

Councillor Mike Stonard cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"Many thanks for the petition. We recognise that our council has an important role to help our residents and businesses to capture the opportunities and benefits of early action on climate change. These include saving money on energy bills, generating income from renewable energy, attracting new jobs and investment in 'green' industries, supporting new sources of energy, managing local flood-risk, water scarcity and protecting our natural environment.

We will progressively address the risks presented by a changing climate, in line with local priorities, through our role as:

- Community leader – helping local people and businesses to be smarter about their energy use and to prepare for climate impacts;
- Service provider – delivering services that are resource efficient, less carbon intensive, resilient and that protect those who are most vulnerable to climate impacts;
- Estate manager – ensuring that our own buildings and operations are resource efficient, use clean energy, and are well prepared for the impacts of a changing climate.

We will:

- Set locally-owned and determined commitments and actions to reduce carbon emissions and to manage climate impacts. These will be specific, measurable and challenging, delivered by our new Environmental Strategy.
- Publish our commitments, actions and progress, enabling local communities to hold us to account;
- Share the learning from our experiences and achievements with other councils; and
- Regularly refresh our commitments and actions to ensure they are current and continue to reflect local priorities."

Petition 3

Sam Avery presented the following petition:

"We believe this ban is unnecessary and heavy handed. Laws regarding damage to public property already exist (this is the basis of the councils plan to ban

skateboarding around the war memorial area) and we believe singling out skateboarders for special treatment is an extremely negative way to approach a diverse group of mostly respectful, active and creative individuals. We also believe that skateboarding is an activity that should be encouraged by the city council as a positive, healthy, sociable and green way for people, from a wide range of social backgrounds and age groups, to enjoy themselves and interact with the world around them. We are in agreement that the war memorial should NOT be used by skateboarders (or BMX, Inline, scooter etc) and should be left as a place of respect and contemplation for those it represents (the ban covers a much larger area than the memorial gardens and monument), however we believe that a simple sign or even CCTV camera would suffice to discourage anyone who tries to misuse this area. We believe the ban would also be difficult to enforce, waste police time and criminalise youths who are just trying to enjoy themselves."

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety's response:

"Thank you for your question. And thank you for meeting with myself and Cllr Arthur before the start of the original consultation. Your advice on what was, and was not; damage caused by skateboarding was very helpful.

As you are aware, the matter will be considered later in the agenda. There is a revised proposal which will be debated then"

9. BYELAW TO MANAGE SKATEBOARDING IN THE CITY CENTRE

The Lord Mayor took this item next because of the large no of members of the public who had attended to hear this debate. She said that a revised report had been published and circulated and she considered that this was of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration because of the public interest in this matter.

An amendment had been received from Councillor Howard. The mover of the motion set out on the agenda has indicated that he will not accept the amendment so it will be dealt with in the usual way after the main motion has been moved and seconded.

Councillor Driver moved and Councillor Ryan seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Councillor Howard moved and Councillor Galvin seconded that the recommendations be amended to read –

"To ask cabinet to –

(1) fully engage with users of the city centre (including skateboarders, war veterans, people with disabilities and traders) and other stakeholders (including English Heritage and the police) to develop a strategy for protecting the war memorial and Memorial Gardens and promoting appropriate use, and to develop understanding of how their needs can

be met in a way that keeps the city's streets and public areas accessible and welcoming to all;

(2) commence a 12 week consultation on a Public Space Protection Order to protect the city's war memorial and Memorial Gardens only once all other options have been exhausted."

With 15 voting in favour, 22 against and no abstentions the amendment was declared lost.

RESOLVED, with 23 voting in favour, 7 against, and 7 abstentions, to ask cabinet to –

(1) commence a 12 week consultation process on a Public Space Protection Order to protect the city's war memorial (and Memorial Gardens) from damage caused by skateboarding (including rollerblading and non-motorised scooters);

(2) ask the local skateboarding community to work with the council to come up with joint solutions to issues caused by skateboarding (and other related activities) in the city centre area originally proposed to ensure that it is a space that can be enjoyed by all.

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (CONTINUED)

At the invitation of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport said that the council had been named as winner in the Green Apple Awards 2014 for best environmental practice. This was for the "raspberry pi" initiative in which Norwich City Council worked with ICT Refurbishment Ltd to use redundant council computers to fund providing ICT packs for schools as part of the "hack pack" project. The scheme had earlier been recognised with a silver award in the transformation in waste and environment category of the iESI awards.

The Lord Mayor then presented the Green Apple Award 2014 to Councillor Stonard, Richard Willson, environmental strategy manager, and Robin Hare, strategic contracts manager.

At invitation of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for housing, said that the council had won the ARCH Award 2014 for encouragement and support for tenant empowerment. The award highlights the work that councils do to support tenant empowerment and develop their communities and neighbourhoods and the council had won the 2014 award for its new tenant involvement structure which was designed, tested and approved by tenants.

The Lord Mayor then presented the ARCH 2014 award to Councillor Bremner, Cyn Cant, tenant representative; Sandra Franklin, tenant involvement manager.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2014 subject to Mr Armstrong (Sheriff) being added to the list of those present.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS / COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that 13 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members of which notice had been received in accordance with the provisions of appendix 1 of the council's constitution, and the questions were as follows.

Question 1	Councillor Sands (M) to the cabinet member for housing on the bedroom tax.
Question 2	Councillor Maxwell to the cabinet member for resources on the living wage.
Question 3	Councillor Button to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on recycling policy.
Question 4	Councillor Ryan to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on "push the pedalways".
Question 5	Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on Marriott's Way.
Question 6	Councillor Boswell to the cabinet member for resources on software spending.
Question 7	Councillor Grahame to the leader of the council on the co-operative council's innovation network.
Question 8	Councillor Bogelein to the leader of the council on drug policy.
Question 9	Councillor Little to the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety on managing green spaces.
Question 10	Councillor Neale to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on adaptive road lighting.
Question 11	Councillor Stammers to the cabinet member for resources on Train Wood.
Question 12	Councillor Jackson to the cabinet member for customer services on the provision market.
Question 13	Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on planning enforcement.

(Details of the questions and replies, together with any supplementary questions and replies, are attached as Appendix B to these minutes.)

As more than two hours had passed since the start of the meeting the Lord Mayor invited members to consider whether any of the following matters could be dealt with as unopposed business.

7. POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW

RESOLVED, unopposed, to retain the current polling districts, polling places and polling stations subject to the following amendments:

(1) change the boundary between polling districts MX2 and MX3, to move voters in MX3 living adjacent/north of Drayton Road into MX2;

(2) change the polling station in polling district CG5 to Shipfields Community Room from St Georges Church Hall; and

(3) to identify preferred reserve polling stations and the process for finding replacement polling stations if a polling station is unavailable for a particular election/by-election, as detailed in appendix A of the report.

8. ADOPTION OF LOCAL PLAN DOCUMENTS

RESOLVED, unopposed, to –

(1) adopt the development management policies local plan as modified by the inspector's report and additional (minor) modifications (set out in appendix 1 of the report);

(2) adopt the site allocations and sites specific policies local plan as modified by the inspector's report and additional (minor) modifications (set out in appendix 2 of the report);

(3) adopt the policies map as modified by the inspector's report, which forms part of both local plan and documents (appendix 3 of the report); and

(4) delegate authority to the head of planning, in consultation with the portfolio holder for environment, development and transport, to make any further minor factual updates and corrections required to each local plan document prior to adoption and to proceed with the necessary legal and administrative procedures to secure adoption of both local plan documents to form part of the development plan for Norwich.

10. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION – CODE OF GOVERNANCE

RESOLVED, unopposed, to change appendix 19 of the council's constitution to include:

(1) the additional governance arrangements from the CIPFA statement on the role of the chief financial officer in local government in the code of governance; and

(2) updating paragraph 4.3 of the code of governance to bring it in line with Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011.

11. MOTION – BLACKLISTING

RESOLVED, unopposed, to –

(1) deplore the illegal practice of "blacklisting" within the construction industry;

(2) ask cabinet to amend its procurement procedures to ensure that any company known to have been involved in blacklisting practices and not to have indemnified its victims, is not invited to tender for council contracts until they have identified the steps taken to –

(a) remedy blacklisting for all affected workers
(b) ensure blacklisting will not happen again.

12. MOTION – DEVOLUTION FOR COUNCILS

RESOLVED, unopposed, that the enthusiastic participation shown by the people of Scotland in the democratic process leading to the referendum on 18 September 2014 has resulted in increased discussion on the devolution of powers from central government in Westminster, including further devolution of powers to local areas of England. The coalition government's city deal programme, in which Norwich is participating, has gone some way to devolve power away from Whitehall to reflect better the needs of localities and regions.

Council therefore, **RESOLVES**, unopposed, to ask the leader of the council to write to our city MPs to lobby for urgent major devolution of power, including tax raising and spending, from central government to local areas of England, emphasising that:

(1) the devolution of powers and finance to English councils be carried out in ways that enhance and strengthen local democratic bodies including agreement that it shall be for local people and communities to decide their form of democratic leadership without having a specific model (for example directly elected mayors) imposed in return for more powers; and

(2) English devolution must include both cities and county areas, as the many councils not within city regions must also gain greater powers and finance in order to build successful and prosperous futures.

CHAIR

Authority to appoint the monitoring officer

On 23 September Council resolved to

To delegate the appointment of the monitoring officer to the chief executive, in consultation with the three group leaders.

npLaw have proposed Hugh Ferguson to be the monitoring officer for the council.

On 14 November 2014, the group leaders and the chief executive met with Hugh Ferguson.

The group leaders:

a) confirm that they have been consulted by the chief executive; and
b) approve the chief executive exercising her delegated authority to appoint Hugh Ferguson as the monitoring officer

Signed .....(Signature redacted).....

Cllr Brenda Arthur - Leader of the Labour group

Signed .....(Signature redacted).....

Cllr Andrew Boswell - Leader of the Green group

Signed .....(Signature redacted).....

Cllr James Wright - Leader of the Liberal Democrat group

The chief executive hereby exercises her delegated authority to appoint Hugh Ferguson as the monitoring officer

Signed .....(Signature redacted).....

Laura McGillivray
Chief executive

APPENDIX B

Question 1

Councillor Mike Sands asked the cabinet member for housing:

"Could the portfolio holder update the council once again on his understanding of the impact on Norwich families and individuals of the 'bedroom tax' and the steps that are being taken to support those afflicted by this vicious tax?"

Councillor Bremner, cabinet member for housing's response:

"At the end of Oct 2014 a total of 2405 social housing tenants in Norwich are having a weekly reduction in their housing benefit entitlement in respect of the bedroom tax.

15% of Norwich council tenants are facing a weekly reduction. 1889 have a one bedroom 14% reduction and 344 have a 25% reduction for two bedrooms plus.

The average amount of weekly housing benefit deducted for those with one 'surplus' bedroom is £11.17 and for those with a two bedroom plus deduction the average is £20.96.

The anticipated annual benefit loss for those with a one bedroom deduction is £558 and similarly for two bedroom plus deductions £1048.

The impact on individual and total rent arrears continues to be significant. The 15 % of tenants facing a bedroom tax deduction account for 22% of the total rent arrears. The average rent arrear for one bedroom tax deduction cases is £225 and equates to 9 weeks average payable rent. The average rent arrear for two bedroom plus deduction cases is £190 and equates to 5 weeks average payable rent. The average rent arrear for tenants not affected by the bedroom tax is £122. To date no council tenant has been evicted for rent arrears that are solely due to bedroom tax.

The current rent arrears situation has been mitigated by three main factors:

- Extensive support available to tenants in preventing and resolving budgeting difficulties
- An effective campaign to ensure the discretionary housing payment scheme is fully utilised.
- The refund of all bedroom tax wrongly deducted between April 2013 and March 2014 for those tenancies that started before 1996.

As members are aware the housing service made strenuous efforts to contact and make sure all affected tenants were prepared for the implementation of the bedroom tax in April 2013. Two budget adviser posts have been added to the establishment in addition to the existing resource of income officers and money advisers all providing support to those who engage. Grant funding has been provided to the voluntary sector

to ensure independent debt advice is available for all tenures. A third welfare reform event for all residents is planned for St Andrews Hall in January and will focus on jobs and training.

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 Breckland in February with significant effect in Norwich planned for October 2015."

Question 2

Councillor Maxwell asked the cabinet member for resources:

"Can the portfolio holder give his views on the impact that the benefits and successes achieved through the recent Living Wage Week has made to Norwich?"

Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources' response:

"I am delighted to say that Living Wage Week, close on a year in preparation, was a great success. The reasons are in part down to the fact that the issues raised about low pay are now part of a national debate as living standards for millions of people in Britain continue to fall. Locally it was about the strong partnership between the city council and Living Wage Norwich in developing a comprehensive week long programme – involving, (among others) businesses, trades unions, churches, artists, voluntary sector organisations and public sector bodies.

There was extensive media coverage throughout the week and public awareness about the living wage has been greatly enhanced. A number of new businesses have signed up for living wage accreditation. We have to sustain the momentum that has been generated by Living Wage Week and play our part in making Norwich a Living Wage City.

The presentations during Living Wage Week by Richard Wilkinson, Owen Jones and Baroness Patricia Hollis, highlighted the deep structural inequalities in British society both in terms of wealth and income and power. Low wages (people working for their poverty) are one manifestation of inequality. It's a reminder that spreading a living wage needs to be supported by greater rights at work, an end to zero hours contracts and comprehensive social security for those who fall on hard times or into difficult circumstances. Preparations for next year's Living Wage Week will be underway early in 2015."

Councillor Maxwell said she understood that more companies had signed up to the Living Wage and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could confirm how many. **Councillor Waters** said that he was delighted to confirm that there had been an affirmative response from a number of new companies. He added that Living Wage Week had provided good early memento which he hoped organisations could build on.

Question 3

Councillor Button asked the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"Colleagues have reported that feedback on the new recycling policy has been very favourable. In the view of the cabinet member will we be able to build on this initial success?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport's response:

"The recycling revolution means that residents throughout the county can now recycle a whole range of new materials in their recycling bins. The addition of clean plastic food pots, tubs and trays, glass bottles and jars, waxed food and drink cartons, aluminium foil and foil food trays, along with shredded paper, wrapping paper and greetings cards makes the service much easier to use.

In Norwich we have seen an immediate effect with October's blue bin recycling up by 60 tonnes on the combined blue bin and glass figure for October 2013 and 90 tonnes up on the same figure for last month. The increased awareness also appears to have impacted on other recycling, with October's food waste recycling at the highest level for 12 months.

The city council is part of the Norfolk Waste Partnership and it is pleasing to report that there is positive feedback on the new service across the county and with residents embracing the new service we are hopeful that we can buck the national trend of stagnating and falling recycling rates and instead show that our residents are committed to recycling and to reducing waste to landfill.

The city council can and will build on this initial success. The ongoing programme of engagement with residents continues to provide education and support to those who may be struggling with waste and recycling issues. The programme of providing new recycling facilities to all of the council's housing stock is nearing completion and has proven to be a success – this year we were able to reduce the frequency of waste collections from the city's tower blocks because more residents were separating and recycling more of their waste.

Going forward, the city council has committed to a set of strategic objectives for waste and recycling which are supported by an Action Plan to guide us through to 2020. These objectives include our ambition to reduce household waste per household to 80% of the 2013 levels by 2020 and to seek to achieve a recycling rate of 60% by the same date. These would represent very significant achievements for an entirely urban authority. Further recycling and waste prevention initiatives will be implemented by officers as part of the Action Plan and progress is continually monitored and challenged by members on the Sustainable Development Panel."

Question 4

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

"The Push the Pedalways scheme has so far been mainly funded by a government grant. Will the portfolio for environment, development and transport ask officers to explore further funding opportunities are available to build on this excellent scheme?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport response:

"The Push the Pedalways scheme will indeed produce an excellent route for people to cycle between key destinations across Norwich. Many of the projects will also benefit people walking around the city.

This is just the start. We have set an ambitious target to double the level of cycling between 2013 and 2023. This can only be achieved if the level of investment we are making through Push the Pedalways is sustained.

I know that our officers are looking at options for funding future projects and I will urge them to explore every possible option. The injection of £3.7m government money was critical for getting us this far and we hope that there will be an announcement of more funding for cycling in the Chancellors' autumn statement.

There are new sources of local funding sources such as the Community Infrastructure Levy and Local Growth Fund. We have recently allocated £50,000 of Levy funds to Marriott's Way with the likelihood of a further £250,000 to follow next year.

Marriott's Way is part of national cycle route 1. A feasibility study is about to start that will identify projects and funding requirements for the yellow pedalway, which links Lakenham to the Airport via the city centre.

The Clinical Commission Group and Norfolk County public health provided some funds to Push the Pedalways as part of the Healthy Norwich initiative and may be willing to support future projects. We all recognise that it makes sense to spend money to keep people well rather than spending much more money to curing them when they get sick.

When Push the Pedalways is finished next September we are confident that the Norwich will be put on the map as one of the best cities to ride a bike in the country.

More local people will experience the freedom, health giving and money saving pleasures of cycling and they will want us to build more great routes for them to enjoy."

Cont'd

Question 5

Councillor Galvin to ask the portfolio holder for environment, development and transport:

"I have heard from county council officers that the forthcoming CIL budget allocated to Marriott's Way is to be spent mainly on measures to aid commuter use of the route. Could the cabinet member please explain whether they support this decision?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport response:

"Marriott's Way and the surrounding land in the Wensum Valley is a green infrastructure asset that serves many purposes. It is a wildlife haven. It is a place where people like to stroll and enjoy natural surroundings. There are precious fragments of our railway heritage like those at the site of City Station. It is also part of national cycle route 1 and the Norwich cycle network because it provides vital links for people on bikes to get around the city or out to the countryside without encountering cars.

The city and county councils are working closely together on improvements to Marriott's Way. The Greater Norwich Growth Board approved £60,000 of funding for 2014/15 and a further £250,000 of CIL funding is likely to be approved for 2015/16 to be spent on the section between Thorpe Marriott and the city centre. This is the busiest part of Marriott's Way. People commuting to jobs in Norwich city centre on bicycles use it and we want more people to do this so that people can be healthier and fewer journeys are made by car, reducing the exposure of our residents to pollution and traffic danger.

I have been assured by our officers that the projects that are undertaken will be carefully selected so they do not just benefit cycle commuters. For example, the work that will be undertaken with the 2014-15 allocation of funds includes removing invasive plant species, taking out ugly and obstructive barriers and preparing for the installation of lighting between Dolphin Path and Barn Road so that people living nearby can use the route more confidently at night.

No decisions have been made about the projects that will be undertaken in 2015-16. A feasibility study will be produced evaluating the options and the views of local groups such like the Friends of Train Wood will be sought before the work programme is agreed."

Councillor Galvin suggested there was doubt in the community that priority would be given to ensuring Marriott's Way was a shared trail and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could allay those fears. **Councillor Stonard** said that he had not heard of any doubt being expressed and would investigate further.

Question 6

Councillor Boswell to ask the portfolio holder for resources:

"I am concerned that the council is spending more than necessary on software, and raised this concern at September's audit committee meeting. Will the cabinet member

ask for an audit of all software used across council departments with the objective of rationalising licences and saving costs?"

Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources' response:

"On 11 March 2014 Audit committee resolved to endorse the draft internal audit plan for Norwich City Council for 2014-15. No concerns were raised at this time that the council may be spending more than necessary on software.

The minutes of September's audit committee show that this was discussed and that "Members were advised that ICT governance arrangements covered all potential areas surrounding software licensing and the scope for savings from cancelling extra software licences followed out of that." The committee did not make any resolution in relation to an audit of all software. It seems clear that the committee was satisfied that there are already satisfactory arrangements in place.

ICT services are delegated to LGSS (a decision which allowed significant savings on the previous costs to be made). The council and LGSS work together to identify further opportunities to reduce costs. Part of the transfer process included identifying and reviewing all software and support costs.

Reviewing software used across council departments is an ongoing part of the service that is delivered by LGSS. Further, we are also subject to licensing audits by our systems providers from time to time to ensure that we are correctly licensed.

I am not inclined to as for an audit of all software used across council departments as this already happens. Where there are opportunities for rationalising licences and saving costs we already take these.

I would be grateful if you could articulate more clearly the concerns you have and whether there is any evidential basis for this or if it is just a 'hunch'".

Councillor Boswell said that significant savings had been identified at the county council on such an exercise. He said that audit committee had discussed looking at software and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could ensure him that this was not "off the agenda". **Councillor Waters** said he was always grateful for advice from knowledgeable councillors on ICT strategy and Councillor Wright, for example, had made valuable contributions. He reminded members that moving to the IT arrangement with LGSS had saved the council approximately £1.5 million and this would continue into the future. Identifying cost effective provision was already embedded into the work of LGSS and the savings delivered would continue to contribute to the transformation strategy.

Question 7

Councillor Grahame to ask the leader of the council:

"Norwich City Council is a member of the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (formerly the Cooperative Councils Network). Could the cabinet member please give their view on what it means for our residents to be part of this network?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"The Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN) is a relatively new organisation set up by Cooperative Councils to enable local authorities to collaborate and to find better ways of working for and with local people for the benefit of their local communities. It is built on the founding traditions of the cooperative movement - collective action, cooperation, empowerment and enterprise and explores cooperative ways of working for economic, social and cultural development.

The council formally joined the CCIN as the principles within the council's own council blueprint, which is its operating model that guides how its design services and structures, aligned very closely with the co-operative council approach.

In fact, as you will be aware, the key overriding theme within the council's blueprint is to be a collaborative council that works effectively with its citizens and partners from all sectors to maximise the impact of its limited resources in the city.

Joining the network also provides the council with the ability to benefit from the shared learning provided from the other councils who are pursuing similar directions.

The application of the council's blueprint and learning we have had from the CCIN, our membership of IESE and a range of other sources have helped us to continue to improve performance and efficiency that have directly benefited residents. I have summarised just a few of those performance highlights over the last year below:

- Overall customer satisfaction with the council our highest ever achieved with an average of over 94% for the last year.
- The city was recently voted the top place in the country for children to grow up due to the combination of parks, open spaces, play and safe roads.
- Created over 380 new jobs in the City through council activity against a target of 300.
- Successfully secured over £1.1million of additional regeneration funding against our target of £250,000.
- Leading the implementation of a City Deal with partners that will eventually deliver huge benefits including 13,000 jobs and 3,000 new homes and a further 6,000 constructions jobs.
- Satisfaction levels with culture and leisure provision were at a staggering 97% against a target of 70%.
- Prevented over 600 individuals/ families from becoming homeless against a target of 300.
- Following a huge investment programme 96% of our 16,000 council homes now meet our new 'Norwich standard', a significantly enhanced version of the old decent homes standard which was developed collaboratively with our tenants.
- Brought back 142 long term empty homes back into use our best ever
- performance.
- Re-let times for council housing averaging 16 days – comparable to the very best landlords in the country.

- Improved the energy efficiency of over 150 private sector households against a target of 75 and now having signed up over 350 private households to our 'Cosy City' green deal home improvement service
- 80% of surveyed local residents said that they felt safe in their local area against a target of 70% following a range of teams and community safety work with the police and other partners.
- Resident satisfaction with our waste and recycling over 80% considerably above our target.
- Winning a green apple award for environmental excellence for our innovative 'raspberry pi' project that is recycling old ICT equipment for use in schools to help children develop ICT skills.
- Played a leading role in the development of Healthy Norwich a programme of health improvements activities.
- Continued our excellent efficiency and income generation work with £3.1 million savings delivered for 14/15 against a target of £2million and a package of £3.1million in place for 2015/16 without any significant impact on frontline services.

Looking beyond the city at the most recent conference in Plymouth in the summer we were able to see how Plymouth's unitary authority has taken forward cooperative working with tenants, schools, local community groups and local businesses. We have been able to share with them our successes in Switch and Save, our support for growing the credit unions in the city, and most recently our support for Living Wage week resulting in the largest amount of activities and support for the campaign during living wage week, across the UK. As the name of the network suggests it is seeking innovative solutions for challenges which are common to many local authorities and we are pleased to be a part of this.

Question 8

Councillor Bogelein to ask the leader of the council:

"Given the impact on many council services of current national drug policy, does the cabinet member consider that reform of government policy in this area will make things easier for the council's role in supporting people?"

Councillor Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"The government's national drug strategy, 'Reducing Demand, Restricting Supply, Building Recovery: Supporting People to Live a Drug Free Life', was published in December 2010 and primarily focussed on drugs but said alcohol services should be closely linked and where appropriate incorporated with drug services as many of the people with the most severe problems struggled with both.

The strategy set out to have a "fundamentally different approach" to preventing drug use, by placing greater responsibility on individuals to seek help and calling on those involved in tackling the issue to look at wider concerns such as employment, offending and housing.

Cont'd

The strategy also indicated that this approach would:

- place a greater emphasis on offering “every support to people to choose recovery” in an attempt to break the cycle of dependency
- address traditional drug use, as well as warning about dependency on prescription drugs and legal highs
- highlight the importance of multi-agency partnership working and working over larger geographical areas to achieve greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness
- tailor each individual’s drug or alcohol treatment on their individual needs (which could include issues with housing, employment, education and emotional wellbeing)

In Norfolk the responsibility for the implementation of the national drug strategy is through Norfolk County Council which leads this work through the Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership (NDAP).

NDAP sets out to prevent and reduce drug and alcohol related harms, to individuals, families and communities in Norfolk.

The Home Office recently published a policy document covering the findings from a study of the approach taken to drugs in other countries. This, as would be expected, provided a range of different approaches and received considerable media coverage.

Two particular elements were highlighted in the media coverage and subsequent debate following the publication of this report.

Firstly e-criminalising the use of drugs and that broadly drug users should be considered as victims rather than criminals and secondly, the particular challenges of how society deals with the use and sale of so called “legal highs” or new psychoactive substances.

The debate that the publication of this report has generated is to be welcomed.

What is important is that services are in place to prevent the number of new drug users, particularly young people and to support those individuals who do seek to reduce or stop their dependency of drugs as well as the consumption of alcohol.

The impacts of the increased availability of cheap alcohol is often missed as an issue but is one we raised as part of our night time economy 12 point action plan.

Clearly this is a complex debate, as many drug users face challenging lives, often abusing a mixture of substances and help and support often requires a multi-agency approach to reduce this impact on them, their families and communities.

Sadly the resources available to this council and other public agencies to deal with these issues and so there is a danger that their impact will reduce. We therefore need to focus on working in a collaborative way across agencies.”

Coucillor Bogelein said that the answer had been very informative but didn't actually answer her question. She asked, as a supplementary question, if the leader of the council believed that there should be an evidence based approach to reform of the National Drugs Policy. **Councillor Arthur** said it would have been helpful if this had been asked in the original question. She would look in to it and respond.

Question 9

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

"I am delighted that all over the city people are getting involved in managing their green spaces. What structures does the cabinet member feel are appropriate to be put in place to help them do this?"

Councillor Driver, cabinet member for environment, development and transport response:

"The city council actively encourages and supports local people getting involved in managing their green spaces. This can be anything from individuals undertaking litter picks to the formation of friends groups. There are many well documented benefits volunteering provides including: increasing physical activity; improving mental wellbeing; relieving stress; overcoming isolation; developing new skills and improving social cohesion.

The council can help with:

- Understanding of how open spaces are managed
- Working with volunteers
- Organisation of meetings
- Production of promotional material
- Advice on the structure and official formation of groups
- Information about sources of funding
- Providing contact information for other organisations
- Attending meetings and providing information relevant to the issues of the group
- Project delivery

The council recognises and greatly appreciates the time people give. During the last financial year it is estimated that volunteers have contributed over 11,500 working hours to managing and improving our open spaces. We have worked closely with a number of the groups to support them with funding applications and assisted them in the delivery of the projects. In the past three years in excess of £70K has been secured from external grants helping to support our stretched resources.

There are many ways people can get involved through individual actions: joining a local 'friends of' group, volunteering to work with the Norwich Fringe Project, being involved with Friends of Norwich in Bloom and much more. There is a huge range of activities people can get involved in including hedge laying, litter picks, floral displays, fund raising, herbaceous planting, maintaining biodiversity etc. If there is a space near you,

or an area which you use and care about I would encourage anybody to get together with friends and neighbours and help to make it a space to be proud of and part of the community. You are welcome to contact our parks and open spaces team for more information."

Councillor Little said he welcomed the approach being undertaken and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member supported the work of the scrutiny panel looking into the way the council works with community groups. **Councillor Driver** said yes. The council already worked with many community groups and would continue to so.

Question 10

Councillor Neale to ask the portfolio holder for environment, development and transport:

"Local users have asked for the Marriott's Way to be better lit at night. Will the cabinet member ask officers to look into trialling sustainable 'adaptive road lighting' using a group of technologies (LED, solar, glow in the dark) to deliver light where and when needed, resulting in an increased path safety and a potential Co2 reduction as compared to traditional road lighting?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport response:

"We are already using new lighting technologies that save money and energy on our capital projects. Solar studs have been installed on the path across Pointers Field and LED lanterns have been used in Chapelfield Gardens. We are working with the County Council and their contractors on the first large scale installation of motion sensitive lighting in the UK on the Push the Pedalways project near Heathgate and on Valley Drive. If this proves successful it could then be considered for use at other locations.

Marriott's Way is dark at night. If lighting is installed more people work be able to use it. The part of Marriott's Way within the city boundary is adopted public highway and therefore any lighting would normally be a matter for county council who would also adopt the lighting and be responsible for maintenance, although they are not under an obligation to either provide or adopt.

In question 13, Cllr Galvin asks about the use of CIL funding to upgrade Marriott's Way. One of the projects we might implement using that money is installing lighting at the city centre end of Marriott's Way. The County's lighting contractors are being commissioned to investigate the cost and practicality of doing this. Their brief will mention the need to consider using of innovative energy saving technology. This will enable us to decide whether the considerable cost of lighting should be treated as a higher priority than other uses of the limited funds and whether the ongoing cost of electricity and maintenance can be supported. The CIL funding would not provide for future maintenance of lighting and we would need to be confident that this can be supported by the county council before committing any capital expenditure."

Question 11

Councillor Stammers to ask the portfolio holder for resources:

"Will the cabinet member join me in congratulating Friends of Train Wood on the success of the campaign to prevent the sell off at auction of one of Norwich's unique pieces of green infrastructure, and could the cabinet member please detail their views on how the city council can best work alongside the county council and community to ensure this area is effectively managed with the community in the future?"

Councillor Waters, cabinet member for resources response:

"Thank you for your question. There are of course different interpretations to the recent history of Train Wood including the considerable efforts by County Councillor Steve Morphew (former leader of this council) to work with the Friends to enable them to take on a lease for Train Wood at a peppercorn rent.

As you will know, the city council has already made a £500 community grant to the Friends of Train Wood.

As with all natural areas, support is offered through the Norwich Fringe Project, which does an excellent job maintaining and improving our designated wildlife sites involving local communities and volunteers. I understand that the Friends of Train Wood have already contacted them for their advice. Norwich Fringe Project would be happy to accept any commission for future work on the site"

Councillor Stammers asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would also acknowledge the hard work undertaken by the community to ensure that Train Wood remained in public hands. **Councillor Waters** said that many people in the local community had been involved which he welcomed and hoped would continue.

Question 12

Councillor Jackson to ask the portfolio holder for customer services:

"I'm pleased to hear from officers that the provisions market is currently undergoing a general review by officers and on completion of the review a report will go to members. Can the portfolio holder please comment on what they feel is an appropriate level of involvement of ward councillors and interested members of the public in this review?

Councillor Harris, cabinet member for customer services:

"Please note the market is reviewed regularly with regard to the support the council can give to the market. For example we publicise the market regularly through our in-house magazine, which reaches 64,000 households and also take opportunities when we can to publicise it in the local media. Special events like Love Your Market fortnight are run regularly and we had a Making Markets Matter fun day relatively recently. Further suggestions from ward members and members of the public are always welcome. As a result I am pleased to report to council that the market has benefitted from an influx of

several new stalls bringing a wider choice of goods and improving the shopping experience in Norwich City Centre.

Any future review of the direction of the market that is undertaken will naturally include a full engagement and consultation process giving not just ward members a chance to contribute but also the wider public and all other stakeholders"

Councillor Jackson said he was "baffled" by the answer as he had been informed that a review was ongoing but the answer refers to a future review. He asked, as a supplementary question, if he could be consulted as part of the future review. **Councillor Harris** said that the council was taking a measured approach to looking at the best practical way to support the future of the market. For example, she had asked for notices helping people find the individual stalls to be redesigned. She would, of course, want to engage with as many people as possible in any review.

Question 13

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

"Fifteen months ago, following complaints from residents I investigated and reported a large number of issues to the City Council concerning seven budget hotels/apartments on Earlham and Unthank Roads relating to the run down appearance of listed and non-listed buildings in the Heigham Grove Conservation Area that includes white film on all the windows and also hygiene, health and safety, trading standards and lack of on-site supervision contributing to anti-social behaviour. In December 2013, the police raided some of the buildings and made arrests following incidents in which the blanked out windows may have been a factor.

The City Council Environmental Health officer has been undertaking excellent work in pursuit of this difficult case and updating me on a regular basis.

It has taken the owner a year to remove the white film from the nationally listed property and install white blinds (which remain closed). However, white film remains on the non-listed properties and apparently the owner has no intention of removing it. City Council planning officers have stated previously that the buildings are not in a sufficient bad state of repair to warrant taking action over land affecting local amenity under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

However, I would like to request that this decision is re-visited. Local residents continue to express concerns about the disconcerting sight of the blanked out windows on these once attractive prominent buildings in a Conservation Area and what might be happening inside and there appears to be no end in sight of resolving this case.

Could the cabinet member ask officers to reconsider this decision and use all the powers and resources within its means to seek an improvement to the amenity of the land in question?"

Councillor Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport response:

"I am, of course, aware of local concern about the appearance of the 'whited out windows' at certain hotels in the city end of the Earlham and Unthank roads and have been working with officers over a lengthy period to try to find a solution to the issue.

The Council has powers to take action on issues which "materially and adversely affect the character and appearance" of nationally listed buildings and, as you are aware, where the hotels in question are housed in such buildings, we have investigated the matter and have taken action

However, where the hotels are housed in other buildings which are not nationally listed - even if they are located in a Conservation Area - the council's powers to take action on the white adhesive film attached to windows are limited

In this case, within our limited powers, it has not been possible to take action because the white film is not considered to harm local amenity in accordance with the requirements of Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

Therefore, I can confirm that the case has been reviewed and, for the above reasons, there is no further action the council can take at this present time."

Councillor Carlo said she was disappointed with the response and asked, as a supplementary question, what the cabinet member considered the definition of amenity to be under the Act. **Councillor Stonard** re-emphasised that the council had done as much as it could under current legislation and regulation. The council complied with the planning definition of amenity and he would be happy to send that to Councillor Carlo if she wished.

Report to	Council 27 January 2015	**Item**
Report of	Executive head of business relationship management and democracy	9
Subject	Council tax reduction scheme for 2015 - 16	

Purpose

To consider a council tax reduction scheme for 2015 - 16 and to consider discounts and exemptions.

Recommendations

To:

(1) approve the council tax reduction scheme 2015 - 16 by continuing with the council's 2014/15 scheme with a number of modifications:

(a) calculate the income someone gets for council tax reduction in the same way as it is calculated for housing benefit;

(b) disregard war and armed forces disablement income when assessing a reduction in council tax;

(c) align council tax reduction and housing benefit processes wherever possible;

(2) remove the one month discount for vacant dwellings (Class C) so that the discount is zero for six months.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priority *Value for money services*.

Financial implications:

The proposed changes to the council tax reduction scheme will result in additional income to the council of around £17,500. This is because the disregard for war and armed forces disablement income is currently funded by the council. If this is included in the scheme the burden will be shared by all precepting authorities.

Removing the one month empty discount for vacant dwellings will increase the income to the council's general fund by around £70,000. However, based on previous year's figures this will increase the cost to the Housing Revenue Account by around £40,000.

Ward/s: All Wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Waters – Deputy leader and resources

Contact officers:

Anton Bull, executive head of business relationship management 01603 212326

Report

Introduction

1. In April 2013 the government abolished the previous national council tax benefit scheme which helped those people with no or low income to pay their council tax. The government set the rules regarding who can claim and how much benefit they would receive. Previously the government funded 100% of the council tax benefit scheme.

2. To replace council tax benefit the government told local councils to come up with their own locally run scheme called the council tax reduction scheme. As part of this the government reduced the amount of funding it provided to councils for this by 10%. In Norwich this was a reduction of about £1.5 million per year. However, the government also said that pensioner households could not lose any of their council tax benefit.

3. On 29 January 2013 council considered options for the council's first council tax reduction scheme and opted for no changes to the then existing scheme for council tax benefit. This meant adopting the "default regulations" [The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012]

4. Further, on 29 January 2013 council approved raising income through changing council tax discounts and exemptions.

5. On 28 January 2014 council

   RESOLVED, unanimously, to –

   (a) approve the council tax reduction scheme for 2014 - 15 i.e. continue with the council's 2013 - 14 scheme which adopted the "default regulations" [The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012] and gave 100% disregard to war pensions when calculating a claimant's income;

   (b) adopt the Department for Work and Pension's 2014 housing benefit figures for personal allowances; premiums; employment and support allowance work-related and support components for its council tax reduction scheme;

   (c) adopt the Department for Communities and Local Government advised council tax reduction scheme pensioner applicant prescribed figures for non-dependant deductions and alternative council tax reduction scheme ('second adult reduction') and also apply these to working-age applicants; and,

   (d) approve continuing with the same discounts and exemptions as for 2013 - 14 ie:

      (i) to increase the amount of council tax payable by second home owners from 90% to 95% and that the additional income generated is utilised in accordance with the existing second homes council tax agreement.

      (ii) to allow a 50% discount for up to 12 months for empty dwellings undergoing major repairs (Class A).

      (iii) to grant a 100% discount for vacant dwellings (Class C) for the first month and that the discount is then reduced to zero up to 6 months.

(iv) to charge 100% council tax for long term empty properties (vacant between 6 months and 24 months) and allow no discount.

(v) after two years to levy an empty homes premium of an additional 50% in council tax.

Consultation process for 2015 - 16 Council tax reduction scheme

6. Schedule 1A to the Local Government Finance Act 1992 states:

(1) For each financial year, each billing authority must consider whether to revise its scheme or to replace it with another scheme.

(2)The authority must make any revision to its scheme, or any replacement scheme, no later than 31 January in the financial year preceding that for which the revision or replacement scheme is to have effect.

7. The council consulted with the other precepting authorities, the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Norfolk County Council. No adverse comments have been received.

8. The council has also consulted through the wider consultation on the development of the council's budget for 2014 - 15. The following questions were asked and responses received:

(a) QB3a: Do you agree that the amount of income someone gets should be calculated for council tax reduction in the same way as for housing benefit and change at the time and amount? – Yes 81.4% No 18.6%;

(b) QB3b – Do you agree that war and armed forces disablement incomes should not be counted when assessing a reduction in council tax? – Yes 62.4% No 37.6%;

(c) QB3c - Do you agree that CTRS and HB process should be aligned wherever possible as outlined? – Yes 83.9% No 16.1%;

(d) QB3d – Do you support removing the one month period when council tax is not paid on an empty property? – Yes 58.3% No 41.7%.

9. At the time of writing this report the full comments and analysis for the consultation was not available. However, from the raw data as above there is clear support for the proposed changes.

10. A copy of the consultation questions is attached as Appendix 1.

11. A copy of the further information available explaining the potential changes is attached as Appendix 2.

Proposal for 2015 - 16 Council tax reduction scheme

12. The proposal is for the 2015 - 16 council tax reduction scheme to continue with the council's 2014/15 scheme with a number of modifications to be made to:

    (a) calculate the income someone gets for council tax reduction in the same way as it is calculated for housing benefit;

    (b) disregard war and armed forces disablement income when assessing a reduction in council tax;

    (c) align council tax reduction and housing benefit processes wherever possible.

Proposal for 2015-16 tax discounts and exemptions

13. The proposal for 2015-16 is to continue with the same discounts and exemptions as for 2014-15 with the exception of the one month empty property discount ie:

    a) To remove the discount for vacant dwellings (Class C) so that the discount is zero for six months.

Integrated impact assessment

NORWICH
City Council

The IIA should assess **the impact of the recommendation** being made by the report

Detailed guidance to help with completing the assessment can be found here. Delete this row after completion

Report author to complete	
Committee:	Council
Committee date:	27 January 2015
Head of service:	Anton Bull
Report subject:	Council tax reduction scheme for 2015 - 16
Date assessed:	20 January 2014
Description:	Council tax reduction scheme for 2015 - 16

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Comments**
Finance (value for money)	☐	☒	☐	The removal of the one month empty property discount will increase revenue for the council
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	☒	☐	☐	
ICT services	☒	☐	☐	
Economic development	☒	☐	☐	
Financial inclusion	☐	☐	☒	The report recommends continuing with the council tax reduction scheme adopted for 2014/15 and aligning CTRS with Housing benefit
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Comments**
Safeguarding children and adults	☒	☐	☐	
S17 crime and disorder act 1998	☒	☐	☐	
Human Rights Act 1998	☒	☐	☐	
Health and well being	☒	☐	☐	

	Impact			
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Comments**
Relations between groups (cohesion)	☒	☐	☐	
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	☒	☐	☐	
Advancing equality of opportunity	☒	☐	☐	
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Comments**
Transportation	☒	☐	☐	
Natural and built environment	☒	☐	☐	
Waste minimisation & resource use	☒	☐	☐	
Pollution	☒	☐	☐	
Sustainable procurement	☒	☐	☐	
Energy and climate change	☒	☐	☐	
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Comments**
Risk management	☒	☐	☐	

Recommendations from impact assessment
Positive
Negative
Neutral
Issues

Section B3

National government abolished Council Tax Benefit two years' ago as a national benefit and all councils had to design their own schemes (called "Council Tax Reduction Schemes"). We asked you about this at the time and we continue to have a scheme which is the same as the national benefit before it was abolished. We also took the opportunity to raise more money from second homes and empty homes by removing certain discounts which had applied. We would now like to make a few minor changes to our scheme and to bring it in to line with how housing benefit is calculated. More detailed information is included here.

Amounts of money you can keep before the amount you get off your bill goes down.

The CTRS reduces your Council Tax bill dependent upon what your income is. Included in this is a basic amount (called an "applicable amount"). If you get below this you receive maximum reduction. The amount you get off your bill then goes down as your income goes up. At present if you get housing benefit the government increases the applicable amount each year (there was a 1% increase this year). The same sometimes applies to the small number of students who can get benefits and the amount they can keep for books, travel and loans. We want to increase the applicable amounts for CTRS in exactly the same way and at the same percentage as for housing benefit if and when such changes are made:

QB3a: Do you agree that the amount of income someone gets should be calculated for council tax reduction in the same way as for housing benefit and change at the time and amount?

The city council has not included income from a number of war income, war disablement or other similar armed forces incomes for many years. We wish to carry on ignoring these incomes when assessing council tax reductions. At present we use our own local powers to do this. However we now want to put this in to the scheme itself rather than rely on local powers. It also means that the money needed to pay for this is shared between the bodies which raise Council Tax in relation to how much of the overall bill they raise (Norwich City Council (about 15%), Norfolk County Council (about 72%) and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (about 13%)).

QB3b: Do you agree that war and armed forces disablement incomes should not be counted when assessing a reduction in Council Tax?

Calculating CTRS in the same way as housing benefit.

As well as the changes suggested above we would also like to make CTRS and Housing Benefit work in the same ways wherever possible. This will make

it easier for people to understand as well as making the two calculations easier and cheaper. The changes are:

- Use national government figures when deciding how much a family member aged 18 and over should contribute to bills if they live at home before reducing Council Tax

- Use national government figures when deciding how much a non-family member adult should contribute when the bill payer lives on their own and would otherwise get 25% a single person reduction

- When someone does not reply to requests for more information after two requests their council tax reduction be cancelled. Unlike all other changes this would also apply to pensioner aged households

- Changes to national housing benefit regulations will alter at what stage changes to benefit take effect when income changes. CTRS changes should be applied using the same process to make it both easier to understand and easier to calculate

- Remove CTRS from the very small number of European Economic Area nationals who receive Jobseekers' Allowance but cannot receive housing benefit if they do not have "retained status"

QB3c: Do you agree that CTRS and HB process should be aligned wherever possible as outlined?

Empty homes discounts

In previous years we took the opportunity to reduce the length of time Council Tax was not payable on empty homes from six months to one month and now also charge extra when those homes have been empty over two years. We wish to consider if this one month discount should be removed completely and that Council Tax become payable on all empty homes whenever they are empty. There will still be very specific exemptions for periods of time after the death of a resident for example. This will not change.

QB3d: Do you support removing the one month period when Council Tax is not paid on an empty property?

Changes to Norwich Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2015

The CTR scheme was introduced in Norwich in April 2013. All local authority schemes are required to be administered within the framework of *The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012.* Additionally local authorities are able to devise their own local scheme regulations. Norwich adopted *The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012* as the framework for their local scheme. The Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme may be changed each financial year by the administering local authority, subject to public consultation and councillor agreement to any changes.

We are recommending that the Norwich CTR scheme now has some technical changes. Both HB and CTR are administered by the same service area and many applicants apply for and receive HB and CTR at the same time. Therefore it makes administrative and financial sense to consider the potential impact of any miss-alignment between the HB and CTR regulations, especially where the income of applicants is affected. If these changes are made they will also impact on those customers who receive CTR only.

There is a requirement through the Prescribed Requirement regulations that CTR entitlement for pensionable aged applicants is protected from many local changes. Therefore the changes to the Norwich CTR scheme are likely to impact primarily on working-age applicants, but where changes may also affect pensioner-aged applicants these been mentioned.

Recommended areas of change:

1. **When calculating CTR for working-age customers use:**
   DWP 2015/2016 HB figures collectively referred to as the 'applicable amount', and…
   the same Department for Communities and Local Government for 2015/2016 pensionable-aged figures for non-dependant deductions and second adult reduction income brackets.

What will this mean for my CTR award?

If we do not do this customers of working-age may find their CTR award does not rise in line with other benefits received. This process has been applied to the Norwich CTR scheme in previous years so we are recommending that this carried out for 2015.

2. **Where Social Security HB student disregards for books, travel and student loans change the Norwich CTR scheme student disregards would reflect these changes.**

What will this mean for my CTR award?

Enables 'eligible' students claiming HB and CTR to have student income calculated at the same level.

3. **Disregard in full the following war pension incomes: war disablement pensions; war widow's pensions; war widower's pensions; armed forces compensation scheme payments.**

What will this mean for my CTR award?

These incomes have been disregarded in full for previous years. We would like to continue this in future years for both 'pensionable aged' and working-age customers.

4. **The CTR award will end if customers fail to respond to an official request for information or evidence required for a CTR decision to be made.**

What will this mean for my CTR award?
Although many customers respond to requests for information, a minority of customers fail to reply. In these cases customers may receive either too little or too much CTR which may result in council tax recovery issues further down the line.

Customers will have one month to reply to requests. Where a customer fails to respond to a request a reminder will be issued giving one further month to respond. If no contact has been made with the council the CTR award would ended. It is proposed that this change will be applied to both working-age and pensionable age CTR customers.

5. **Reflect changes to the period to which earned income is applied to CTR in line with HB.**

What will this mean for my CTR award?
There is currently proposed in HB regulations a 'clarification' to when earnings and changes in earnings are applied to the award. If the Norwich CTR scheme is not aligned to any future HB regulation changes for earnings, customers receiving both HB and CTR may find earnings and changes to earnings are applied to different dates and periods within the HB award and CTR award.

6. **Nationals from European Economic Area (EEA) who are in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance without a retained-worker status will be unable to receive CTR.**

What will this mean for my CTR award?
HB is restricted for non-British EEA nationals in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance who do not have a 'retained worker' status. It is proposed that Norwich CTR scheme aligns with changes to HB. This will mean non-British EEA nationals in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and without 'retained worker' status will not be able to receive CTR.

Note. You may still be able to receive CTR if you satisfy an alternative status – see Norwich CTR regulation 21. A link to the scheme regulations can be found on the Norwich City Council website here:
http://www.norwich.gov.uk/CouncilTaxAndBenefits/Pages/CouncilTaxReduction.aspx

References:

The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2013: Regs. 12; 13

The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 [SI2013/3181]: Regs. 5 & 6 amends 12; 13.