



COUNCIL

7.30 - pm - 9.15 pm

30 November 2010

Present: Councillor Dylan (Lord Mayor), Councillors Altman, Arthur, Banham, Bremner, Driver, Fairbairn, Fisher, Gee, George, Gledhill, Grahame, Haynes, Holmes, Hooke, Jeraj, Little, Lubbock, Makoff, Morphew, Offord, Ramsay, Sands, Stephenson, Storie, Thomas, Waters, Wiltshire, Wright (J) and Wright (R),

Apologies: Blower, Bradford and Read

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor said that since the last meeting he had attended the dedication of the new war memorial and the Remembrance Sunday parade. He had also hosted an event for David Bullock recognising his excellent service over 25 years as town crier.

He said that Christmas cards designed by the sheriff's lady were available, the proceeds of which would go towards the civic charities.

He was delighted to have met two distinguished authors, Anthony Gray who had been a hostage in China and Illuminee Nganemariya, who had survived the civil war in Rwanda.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Carl Mayhew asked the leader of the council - "what has the council done to investigate the impact of the new road scheme at St Augustine's?"

Councillor Morphew said that the city and county councils had carried out considerable work to investigate the impact of the St Augustine's Street road scheme. The main impact of the scheme is to improve air quality in the street, a statutory requirement and something the councils had been working on for the

last 7 years to address.

In addition, there are a number of other beneficial impacts anticipated:

1. Regeneration: the scheme forms an integral element of redevelopment proposals for the Anglia Square area – improving sustainable access to a key regeneration priority
2. Road safety: the junction of St Augustines Street and Aylsham Road has a poor accident record. However, it is anticipated that the changes being implemented at this location which include simplified turning movements and the closure of Bakers Road will improve road safety at this location;
3. Pedestrian facilities: there were no formal pedestrian crossing facilities at the junction of St Augustines Street and Aylsham Road. However, the scheme provides signal controlled facilities which will greatly improve access (and safety) for pedestrians travelling to and from both the Magdalen Street area and city centre as well as local destinations such as the shops on the east side of Aylsham Road; and
4. Pedestrian footfall: the scheme includes footway widening on St Augustines Street which together with reduced traffic volume will make St Augustines Street a pleasanter street to use. This should help increase footfall in the street to the benefit of local businesses

The impacts have been investigated using a range of techniques including detailed traffic modelling and a sustainability appraisal. Proposals have also been subject to widespread consultation: for example in connection with the Northern City Centre Area Action Plan options consultation in 2006 and scheme specific consultation in 2008. This work has been reported to members of Norwich Joint Highways Agency Committee on several occasions and amendments made to the developing proposals accordingly.

The councils' traffic modelling work does not suggest significant detrimental impacts. However, with a major highway scheme such as the St Augustines gyratory, there is inevitably some uncertainty over the scale and nature of potential impacts.

One of these uncertainties concerns the potential traffic impact on neighbouring streets, a particular issue raised in consultation and which even detailed traffic modelling may fail to predict completely accurately. For this reason, Norwich Joint Highways Agency Committee has asked for additional pre-scheme traffic counts in the local area to provide objective baseline data and for these to be repeated post construction. This will enable evidence based assessment of the scheme impacts.

Such an approach was followed in the case of the Barrack Street roundabout improvement scheme. With the "before and after" information and following public consultation it resulted in making some subsequent changes to traffic circulation in Silver Street area, such as making Silver Street one-way eastbound.

Carl Mayhew asked, as a supplementary question, whether the leader of the council would honour the commitment made at a public meeting to ensure that Eade Road

and Patteson Road and adjacent streets were not adversely affected by the changes at Magdalen Street and Waterloo Road.

Councillor Morphey said that a commitment had been made at a public meeting to look at the impact of adjacent roads after the work had been completed. It was inevitable that, whilst the work was being carried out, additional traffic would use these roads. Now that the scheme has been completed its impact can be properly assessed. There has been no variation to what has already been committed to in that area.

4. PETITIONS

Carl Mayhew presented the following petition to council - "we the undersigned are concerned about the closure of the cashiers' desk at City Hall and request the council investigate continuing the service".

In response, Councillor Sands thanked Mr Mayhew for presenting the petition and said that closing the cashiers' service was a decision that was not taken lightly, and something that was given considerable thought and consideration. The context is that the city council has had to save £10 million over the last 2 years, and now, with the spending reductions that the coalition government have handed to us, at least another £3 million in the next financial year, and over the next 4 years an estimated £13 million cuts to expenditure.

So far we have managed to minimise the impact on front line services, and the decision to close the cashiers was based the knowledge that we are still able to offer the option for residents to pay by cash, in post offices and pay points. We have maps showing the location of all of the places that people can pay in cash if this would be of help to you.

We have offered advice and support to people to help them to make new arrangements for making payments. We have also carefully monitored the changes people are making to their payment methods and know that 92% of customers who used the service have now put in place alternative ways to make those payments. The remaining 389 customers are being supported throughout the change. People can also choose to pay by direct debit, by using a debit card on our website or using a debit card over the telephone or by cheque.

Because it takes some time to make this type of change and involves staffing adjustments the closure of the service has been carefully planned and the staffing adjustments are already in place. Also, if we did continue the service we will need to make the same level of saving from another service.

Changing habits is always difficult but the customer contact team had worked hard to help people on a one-to-one basis and most people had made arrangements to pay in other ways.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September, 2010.

6. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised members that 18 questions plus 1 question relating to urgent matters, had been received from members of the council to cabinet members and committee chairs, of which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of appendix 1 of the council's constitution. The questions were as follows

Question 1	Councillor Arthur to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on changes to benefits.
Question 2	Councillor Ramsay to cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on privatising public services.
Question 3	Councillor Little to cabinet member for wellbeing on an integrated customer contact system.
Question 4	Councillor Stephenson to cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on publishing details of council spend.
Question 5	Councillor Jeraj to cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west on the disabled parking bay at Marston Marsh.
Question 6	Councillor Makoff to cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on recording and publishing councillors' attendance.
Question 7	Councillor Grahame to cabinet member for the environment on the National policy on planning for new energy infrastructure.
Question 8	Councillor Altman to cabinet member for housing on painting council sheds.
Question 9	Councillor Offord to cabinet member for the environment on recycling rates.
Question 10	Councillor Haynes to cabinet member for the environment on refuse collections.
Question 11	Councillor Gledhill to cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west on Unthank Road surface condition.
Question 12	Councillor Holmes to cabinet member for housing relating to digital switchover.
Question 13	Councillor Fairbairn to leader of the council on street signs.
Question 14	Councillor Fisher to labour member for housing on empty homes.
Question 15	Councillor Collishaw to leader of the council on support for new businesses.

Question 16	Councillor George to leader of the council on gritting roads and pathways.
Question 17	Councillor Wiltshire to cabinet member for wellbeing on customer enquiries.
Question 18	Councillor Lubbock to cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on use of consultants.
Question 19	Councillor Morphew to cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services on proposed Norfolk County Council budget cuts.

(Details of the questions and replies together with any supplementary questions and replies are attached at Appendix A to these minutes).

7. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND VICE CHAIR OF NORWICH HIGHWAYS AGENCY COMMITTEE

Councillor Morphew moved and Councillor Arthur seconded the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to appoint -

- (1) Councillor Stephenson as chair of scrutiny committee, retrospectively from 14 September 2010;
- (2) Councillor Bremner as vice-chair of Norwich Highways Agency Committee.

8. INTRODUCTION OF NEW EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor Morphew moved and Councillor Waters seconded the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to -

- (1) note that no responses were received from the public to the consultation on the preferred model for executive arrangements;
- (2) adopt, with effect from May, 2011 the "strong" leader and cabinet governance arrangement with a councillor elected by the authority as leader of the council and two or more councillors appointed to the cabinet by the executive leader;
- (3) ask the head of legal and democratic services to amend the constitution accordingly;
- (4) note the government's intention to introduce a bill to further change governance arrangements.

9. PETITIONS SCHEME

The lord mayor said that the following amendment to his own motion had been received from Councillor Morphew –

"To insert after ...scheme"with trigger points for the number of signatures requiring debate and officer attendance at a public meeting to be set at 1000 and 750 respectively, ..."

and at the end ..."to ask the constitution working party to review the petitions scheme after 6 months".

With no member objecting, the amendment was accepted and became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Morphew moved and Councillor Waters seconded, the report as amended.

RESOLVED to –

- (1) adopt the revised petition scheme with trigger points for the number of signatures requiring debate and officer attendance at a public meeting to be set at 1000 and 750 respectively, and amend the constitution accordingly;
- (2) ask the constitution working party to review the petition scheme after 6 months.

10. LICENSING ACT 2003: REVIEW OF NORWICH CITY COUNCIL LICENSING POLICY STATEMENT

Councillor Driver moved and Councillor Lay seconded, the report.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to adopt, in accordance with Section 5(1) of the Licensing Act, 2003, the revised Norwich City Council Licensing Policy as detailed in Appendix A to the report and to publish it as the council's licensing statement.

11. MOTION - TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS TO BUILD 150,000 NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES

Councillor Lubbock moved, and Councillor Fairbairn seconded, the following motion -

"Council resolves to write to our 2 local M.P.s welcoming the coalition government's policy commitment and plans to build 150,000 affordable homes over the course of this parliament, a policy which will help some of the 8,000 plus people on the housing waiting list in Norwich".

Councillor Morphew moved and Councillor Gee seconded, to proceed to the next business in accordance with paragraph 13.7 (ix) of Appendix 1 of the council's constitution.

With 23 voting in favour, 8 against and no abstentions, the motion was carried.

LORD MAYOR

APPENDIX A

Question 1

Councillor Brenda Arthur to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

“Will the Cabinet member please explain from what we know so far how the proposed housing benefit changes will effect individuals, communities and the city of Norwich as a whole.”

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services’ reply:-

“The full implications of these changes are not at all clear but we can be sure that the changes will have significant impacts on some of the most vulnerable people. This is what we can see so far:

Short Term

In April 2011 the first major changes to HB\CTB will be in place.

- Up-rating for both benefits will be on the basis of CPI and therefore will be lower than expected. The actual figures are not expected to be available until the New Year.
- Non-dependent deductions will be dramatically increased to take account of freezes on increases since 2000.

Of these, the increase in non-dependent deductions is by far the most dramatic in terms of income and expenditure for tenants.

In Norwich we currently have approximately 600 claims where there is a deduction for non-dependents reducing (but not completely) the amount of benefit that the claimant is paid. Of these, 500 are Council tenants. The remaining 100 are evenly split between private sector tenants and Housing Association tenants.

It is envisaged that in every one of these cases reductions in benefit will be enforced resulting in a significant number of people coming off benefit entirely. No accurate number can be predicted at this stage until actual increases are announced.

Medium Term

In October 2011 changes in LHA will be implemented including;

- LHA rate calculated on the 30th percentile as opposed to the 50th percentile as at present
- Increased age for shared room rate from 25 to 35

Both of these changes will see a marked reduction in the rates paid to LHA claimants. The DWP’s own Impact Assessment has accepted that there will be 100% of claimants adversely affected with an average reduction in benefit of between £7

and £11 per week. Nationwide that means nearly 700,000 households will be adversely affected.

Long term

As yet it is still unclear about exactly when reforms to housing costs of social tenants will be brought in but these could include restricting HB to household size as is the case for private sector tenants at present. In addition, benefit, if paid as part of the Universal Credit, will mean that Council Tenants will receive their benefit directly and be expected to pay their rent in full to the Council. This might be problematic at best but when allied to the likelihood of benefit being restricted/cut the prospects of increased rent arrears is high.

From 2013 measures will be put in place to pay new claimants the Universal Credit which will be an amalgam of all means-tested benefits including Housing and council tax costs. This benefit is to be administered by the HMRC with minimal input from local authorities.

The full picture is still unclear and like all long range forecasts will be subject to slippage/change however it is clear that the Government intention is to take back the administration, payment and adjudication of HB and CTB under the aegis of the Universal Credit. This will be a rolling programme and will only initially affect new claims. The ultimate target however is that all claims will be being handled by HMRC by 2017.

Clearly therefore there will be a reducing role required by the authority through this period of transition. The DWP have made no comment other than that discussions are on-going with local authorities as to their changing role. Other duties may be inserted but it is unlikely to take on all the staff affected.

Changes could include 'Support for Vulnerable Tenants', operating a 'localised' Council Tax Rebate scheme."

Councillor Brenda Arthur asked, as a supplementary question, what would be the impact on the people of Norwich of the recent announcements by the coalition government on proposals to delay implementing the caps on housing benefit and to bring forward other changes in housing benefit, in particular the reduction of the LHA rate. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that the intention was that caps on housing benefit will now be delayed for new claimants until January 2012. This will have no effect on claimants in Norwich. However, in order to pay for this delay the coalition government will bring forward changes in housing benefit scheduled for October 2011. In particular, the reduction of the LHA rate from the 50th percentile to the 30th percentile for new claimants. This will now take place in April 2011.

The impact on Norwich will be extreme. In addition to the non-dependent deductions due to take place at this time, we will see all new claims for LHA being restricted. As this only applies to new claims at this stage there will be an increased workload on the benefits staff to correctly adjudicate claims as in essence two schemes will be running side by side. Basing the figures on current LHA levels we will see cuts in weekly benefit of between £2.50 a week for single room rents up to £12 per week for 4 roomed properties.

In addition, the likely impact on the housing services, options and choice based letting teams will be a marked increase in work as private sector tenants get into difficulties with their rent or landlords seek to divest themselves of housing benefit claimants.

It is the most disgraceful proposal I have seen in my time as a councillor particularly at a time when the government is accepting huge bonuses for bankers.

Question 2

Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

“In 2000, a Labour administration privatised City Works, to become CityCare. In 2002, a Labour administration privatised the Council's IT support, contracting out to Steria. In the years leading up to 2010, a Labour administration failed to do the necessary preparations to bring CityCare services back in house when the contract ended. Yet in the last year, the Labour administration has repeatedly said that it does not favour any further privatisation of Council services. When and why did the administration change its mind on the principle of privatising public services?”

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services' reply:-

“We have many types of question come to full council: works of fiction are however, a new departure. Councillor Ramsey would benefit from the facts.

In the late 1990's the government reduced the support to local government and the council had to refocus service delivery. This had a major impact on the council's direct labour organisation, City Works. The council was faced with two choices – either to scale down City Works by making people redundant, at a significant cost, and endangering the viability of City Works, or to diversify and bid for work elsewhere, thereby maintaining and even expanding the workforce, giving greater flexibility to City Works and the ability to cover the peaks and troughs this kind of industry experiences.

As the financial implications of downsizing City Works were enormous the decision was to expand and bid for work. The consequence of this was that this could be best done with a private sector partner, and the District Auditor had also made it clear that expansion into other markets could only be achieved with a private sector partner. This was not an outsourcing in the conventional sense – the 10 year contract which transferred all the DLO services and workforce to 'City Care' was designed to (and did) preserve the DLO infrastructure and the jobs of the workforce.

You have clearly misunderstood the contract that the council entered into with Steria in 2002. The council required a significant investment in ICT. This was a ground breaking contract which gave

- capital investment from Steria into the councils ICT infrastructure
- £1.5 million per year PFI credits
- innovative ICT that enabled the council to improve customer service and become more efficient

In order to secure the PFI credits which were an essential part of the investment needed the council were required to outsource the IT division.

In 2010, when the contract with CityCare expired, the council had 25 contracts to a value of £37million per year, and these all ended on 31st March 2010. The council did not have the knowledge, skills or systems in place to run these services in house, and the scale of the operation meant that it was not possible to consider insourcing at that point. This was discussed by the cross-party contracts working party. What the council did was to stagger the length of the contracts which will allow full consideration to be given to service delivery options in the future. As you know, following the demise of the Councils main contractor, interim contracts have just been awarded for the housing services contracts, and the council has the opportunity to look again at service delivery options.

At no point during the discussions about how the relet contracts were to be delivered did you or any of your colleagues in the Green Group ask Scrutiny Committee to 'call in' any of the decisions on the contract relets.

I'm sorry that we don't all live in 'Greenland' where all things are possible and the city council has ample resources at its disposal. If that was the case, then your question might have some substance to it. The Labour administration is committed to the principle of strong, directly provided public services. However, even the most cursory research (which Councillor Ramsey has obviously failed to do) show that the council has been under continued financial pressure since the 1990s. I wish it were otherwise. In dealing with these financial realities we have always sought, to find innovative ways to tackle the financial constraints that we face, to become more efficient and to protect service delivery to the residents of Norwich."

Councillor Adriam Ramsay asked, as a supplementary question, why the administration had not looked at in-sourcing options earlier. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that, if Councillor Ramsay had read the response provided, he would have understood the journey of the two years contract preparation during which the recession had hit; that there had been a change of government and budget cuts. To take on a large area of responsibility at that time would have de-stabilised the council budgets. If Councillor Ramsay can suggest any alternatives that would, in the "real world" be practically possible he would be pleased to look at them.

Question 3

Councillor Stephen Little to the cabinet member for wellbeing:-

"I noticed (from the Cabinet Forward Agenda) that the 24th November Cabinet meeting was to discuss an item regarding "Business Case for Integrated Customer Contact Systems" as part of the "Spend Save agenda". What does this involve, and why was this discussion cancelled or postponed?"

Councillor Susan Sands, cabinet member for wellbeing's reply:-

"The Business case for an Integrated Customer Contact System is a proposal to provide the organisation with the building blocks required to implement considerable

change to how we deliver services to our customers in line with the 'Blueprint for a lean council'."

Further information was required and the report is now due to go to Cabinet on the 8 December 2010, the report has been published today and can be accessed via e-councillor."

Councillor Stephen Little said that this was the fourth telephone number in 3 years and asked, as a supplementary question, how long will this one last. **Councillor Susan Sands** recognised that introducing new council telephone numbers was a major issue which caused some discussion. However, she was confident that the public would be pleased that there would be a 01603 number which was more efficient and cost the council less. The current system was no longer supported by the suppliers and so a new system was required and she hoped customers would enjoy having a local telephone number again.

Question 4

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

"On 1 October the government asked local authorities to publish their spending over £500 on-line for public scrutiny. Some local authorities have done this voluntarily already. How is the Council progressing towards having done this by the deadline at the end of January 2011?"

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services' reply:-

'We are currently working on developing the reporting software to enable us to download our spending information directly from our financial systems, and this will be tested during December. Our current payroll reporting mechanisms are sufficient to produce the information required. We have every confidence that the January deadline will be met.'

Question 5

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west:-

"When will the disabled parking bay at Marston Marsh be repainted? This work was originally meant to be carried out in the 2009/10 financial year but despite repeated enquiries from a constituent and then myself over the past year the repainting has not happened."

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west's reply:-

"Unfortunately it was not possible to carry out the repainting last year due to insufficient funding. Turning to this year the lining budget is only £23,000, whereas the backlog of lining works is estimated to be approaching £100,000. With a

reduced budget, the repainting of the parking bay will have to be considered alongside other needs such as stop lines at traffic signals. I am therefore unable to say whether the repainting will come forward later this year or whether it will have to wait until 2011/12, when we anticipate an increase in the lining budget.”

Councillor Samir Jeraj said that the scheme was originally planned for 09/10 and asked, as a supplementary question, if it could be carried if there were any other similar work being undertaken in the area. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said that this was a problem of county council funding being cut leading to a degraded service that people of Norwich had to face because of the con-dem coalition government.

Question 6

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

“Does the cabinet member support the idea of the council making Councillors' meeting attendance records available to the public, along with an opportunity for councillors to give a personal explanation of any specific absences?”

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services' reply:-

“The public is able to see whether members are attending meetings of the main council meetings through accessing the agendas and minutes either by inspecting the minute books or through the council's website.

At the end of each civic year Democratic Services produces a record of attendance by members at the main committees of the council. This has mainly been used in the past for groups to inform decisions re allocation of seats on committee. I would be happy, in the spirit of openness, for this to be made available on the council's website.

Apologies for absence are recorded if notification is received. The only reason recorded is when the apology is because the member is “on other council business”. I see no reason/benefit of adding to the bureaucracy, the need to record explanations in each individual case.”

Councillor Ruth Makoff asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would reconsider providing an opportunity for councillors to give a personal explanation of any specific absences. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that if a way could be suggested of recording particularly significant reasons for non-attendance he would consider that on an individual basis.

Question 7

Councillor Lesley Grahame to the cabinet member for the environment:-

“Have Council officers investigated the implications for Norwich of the Government's revised draft National Policy Statements for energy infrastructure consultation, and do they intend to respond corporately before January 24th deadline?”

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, cabinet member for the environment's reply:-

"The government is currently publishing a large range of draft policies for consultation, some of which have already been the subject of previous consultations. The initial consultation on the National Policy on Planning for New Energy Infrastructure took place in 2009/10, and the current consultation focuses specifically on elements of existing national planning policy statements covering fossil fuels, renewables, gas supply/pipelines, electricity networks and nuclear energy.

Based on an initial assessment of the consultation documents it is clear that the potential impact on the City of Norwich is likely to be limited. For this reason we do not believe that there is a requirement for the council to provide a specific response. However, should it be determined that, following further review by officers, a specific response is required, and then this will be submitted within the required timescale ie by the 24th January 2011.

Councillor Leslie Grahame said that an airborne radioactive leak at Sizewell could reach Norwich within 1 hour and asked, as a supplementary question, what emergency provision was in place for major incidents at Sizewell. **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said that the council had emergency provisions in place for major incidents. If Councillor Grahame had any particular concerns she would be happy to consider them.

Question 8

Councillor Steven Altman to the cabinet member for housing:-

"Many council tenants have complained to Green Councillors about the condition of the tenants' sheds, which have gone unpainted for years and seem to have little prospect of being done soon. Will the Council consider allowing tenants to paint their own exterior doors and sheds if tenants want to do this?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

"I do wonder why this question has come to council. An email to the councillor's enquiry line would have provided an answer to this. Alternatively Councillor Altman might have asked the Green Party political assistant to undertake the research.

That said the Council does have a process in place whereby tenants can ask for permission to paint their own sheds, under the 'Tenants Own Improvement' scheme. A tenant has simply to make a written application detailing what they would like permission to do, in most cases, the Council will respond with a letter confirming permission."

Councillor Steven Altman asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could ensure that officers informed residents. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** said absolutely.

Question 9

Councillor Peter Offord to the cabinet member for the environment:-

“Is the council pleased to have increased the recycling rate from 33.61% in 2008/9 to “over 34%” in 2009/10? Was this in line with expectations and targets?”

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, cabinet member for the environment’s reply:-

“The recycling rate of 34% exceeded our expectations and targets. I would remind members that an overall aim of our waste management strategy was to double our recycling rates from 16% in 2007 to 32% by March 2010. Not only did we reach and exceed our recycling targets last year by recycling and composting over 34% of our waste but also managed to reduce the amount of overall domestic waste produced by some 18%; a fantastic achievement culminating in the council being commended at last year’s National Recycling Awards ceremony for our efforts. The council sent just over 14,500 tonnes of waste for recycling and composting last year which would otherwise have gone to landfill. The city should be proud of what it has achieved over the last two years with the successful introduction of green waste collections, moving to alternate weekly collections, kerbside glass collections, and food waste collections – the only authority in Norfolk to have such a comprehensive waste management service. However, we are not resting on our laurels and are committed to being amongst the best recycling authorities in the country. The introduction of the food waste collection service will ensure residents have access to an effective and efficient collection service that will see our recycle rates go past 50% by the end of next year.”

Councillor Peter Offord asked, as a supplementary question, what progress was being made on improving recycling provision in the city centre. **Councillor Victoria MacDonald** said she was very pleased that the recycling rate was increasing in the first quarter. The council was constantly looking to improve recycling rates and was looking at further options particularly in respect of black sack collections.

Question 10

Councillor Ash Haynes to the cabinet member for the environment:-

“There have recently been problems with refuse collection at many locations across the city where both food waste and refuse in black sacks have gone uncollected. Can we be assured that these problems are being swiftly resolved and that residents are fully informed about the latest arrangements?”

Councillor Victoria MacDonald, cabinet member for the environment’s reply:-

“As members will be aware, 18th October 2010 was a momentous day for the city’s waste management service. It saw the introduction of a comprehensive waste collection and recycling service (including food waste) to the majority of city residents. The service offered is a first in Norfolk with no other authority offering such a comprehensive service for its residents use and which will see our recycling rates go past 50% by the end of next year.

To achieve this, the whole service had to be restructured. This included re-routing collections for all 63,000 households in the city, mobilising new working practices, sourcing a brand new fleet of 20 refuse vehicles, delivering 55,000 food waste caddies as well as providing leaflets and information to our residents so they knew what to expect and when.

It was inevitable that any change to a service of this scale would lead to more enquiries. Working with our contractor, issues were quickly dealt with and resolved resulting in queries returning to a normal level sooner than expected.

I hope that Councillor Haynes will agree that it is a credit to our residents, our staff and our contractor that we have managed to introduce a major service change with only minor disruptions to the service occurring.”

Question 11

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west:-

“Despite some stretches of Unthank Road being resurfaced in the past year there is still a major problem with the overall condition of the highway. Will the Council take the example of Earlham Road and properly resurface the street to ensure that it is safe for all road users?”

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for neighbourhoods south and west’s reply:-

“The poor condition of Unthank Road, between Trinity Street and College Road in particular, is acknowledged. However, the maintenance budget for this type of C class road (along with the quieter residential roads) is extremely limited. Given a likely reduction in structural maintenance funding in 2011/12 and given other roads in need of treatment, it is therefore impossible to say with any clarity when a resurfacing scheme for Unthank Road is likely to come forward.

Earlham Road for example is a B road and alongside A roads, there is a much bigger budget available for structural maintenance. The reason for this is the A and B road network carry the most traffic and wear out the quickest.

BUT the road classification in Norwich has not been reviewed for several years, and work by officers has recently commenced to consider, for maintenance purposes, whether roads such as Unthank Road which carry significant traffic volumes should be effectively be classified as B roads. This would make real sense to everyone who lives in Norwich and has any knowledge of the traffic on Unthank Road. Even if this does occur, however, given the uncertainty over future year funding it is still impossible to say when a resurfacing scheme might come forward.”

Councillor Bob Gledhill asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would be willing to consider a c plus option for Unthank Road so that it could be regraded without reclassification. **Councillor Bert Bremner** said that, subject to the review, Unthank Road could effectively be classified as B.

Question 12

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the cabinet member for housing:-

“Residents on Coslany Street in Council properties which form part of the Barnards Yard complex are being denied digital switch over from the analogue communal aerial facilities. The reason stated by the City Council is that there might be legal repercussions in future if current council properties are sold off. Will the Council look at individual properties on a case by case basis and make a judgement on particular circumstances rather than assume a blanket restriction?”

Councillor Brenda Arthur, cabinet member for housing’s reply:-

“I am somewhat surprised that Councillor Holmes needed to ask this question as he will know from the experience of one of his colleagues, Councillor Offord that officers have discretion to allow connection of individual properties where there are reception issues owing to location and it is practical to make a connection to an existing aerial or dish. Any tenant in this position can contact the council to discuss the matter further.”

Councillor Adrian Holmes said that Councillor Arthur seems to have misunderstood the question and asked, as a supplementary question, if he could have an answer to his original question. **Councillor Brenda Arthur** suggested that Councillor Holmes get in touch with her and she would discuss any particular issues he had.

Question 13

Councillor David Fairbairn to the leader of the council:-

“Many of the streets in the city are cluttered with signs concerned with parking, travel directions, or traffic conditions ahead. They are distracting for drivers, and detract from the views of the city, especially in its older parts. Can the cabinet member for highways promote a policy of reducing or limiting the amount of signage, in order to improve the appearance of the city?”

Councillor Steve Morphew, leader of the council’s reply:-

“I would absolutely love to be able to do something more about that as it is one of those things that I find personally extremely irritating. However in current financial circumstances I doubt Councillor Fairburn will argue this will be a priority for council spending or officer resources

The council has taken a variety of steps to minimise street clutter due to signage and road markings etc. For example, the council has successfully pressed Government for dispensations to allow us to reduce the number of signs and road markings associated with controlled parking zones. Sign and line clutter has been minimised in introducing new schemes such as the Prince of Wales safety scheme and the St Georges Street pedestrian priority scheme.

The council’s approach is set out in the Streetscape Design Manual and it is pleasing that the need to reduced street clutter has also been recognised in recent statements

from Government. It must be appreciated, however, that most signs are required either to warn road users or, in particular, to clarify and reinforce restrictions, such as parking places. Such signage is prescribed in Government regulations and in its absence; the council may be unable to enforce a parking restriction for example. Similarly if a risk has been identified that requires a sign for it to be addressed, it is very difficult to remove such a sign subsequently.

In light of the Government's statements to encourage the removal of sign clutter, it has been suggested that an audit process is carried out and steps are taken to remove unnecessary signage. However, with highway budgets being significantly reduced it is difficult to justify such expenditure over health and safety maintenance (such as mending potholes) or schemes to improve conditions for road users (such as pedestrian crossing or bus priority schemes)"

Question 14

Councillor John Fisher to the cabinet member for housing:-

"How many empty homes has the council assisted with bringing back into use in the past 12 months?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, cabinet member for housing's reply:-

"In the last full year (09/10) we brought 22 empty properties back into use. This year, to date, we have brought back 8.

In the previous two years we brought 107 properties back into use. At that time we had been granted significant sub-regional funding which allowed us to provide financial incentives to the owners of empty properties in return for allowing us to let them directly to people at risk of becoming homeless. This was a highly successful, nationally recognised, project which turned some of the worst examples of abandoned, dilapidated, properties in Norwich into modern homes for people in housing need.

A further measure of the project's success can be seen with the reducing percentage of private sector properties in Norwich that have been empty for more than six months (compared against the total private sector stock.) Over the last four years this has reduced from 2% to 1.23%.

The project's funding has now been exhausted and this is reflected in the numbers of properties currently being brought back into use.

We are currently combining Strategic Housing with the Regeneration and Economic Development teams into a new 'Local Delivery Unit' which will be tasked with increasing jobs and homes in Norwich. An important part of the work of the unit will be to take full advantage of all opportunities for funding as they emerge over the coming months. Examples of these opportunities include funding from the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) which views empty homes work as an increasing priority, and the proposed New Homes Bonus which may extend to existing homes that are brought back into use. If funding for empty homes work does become available we will, as a result of the work done to date, be in a very good position to take full advantage of it."

Question 15

Councillor Evelyn Collishaw to the leader of the council:-

What support and advice is the City Council extending to new businesses and persons wishing to start a new business?

Councillor Steve Morpew, leader of the council's reply:-

"The Norwich Enterprise Centre, located at 4B Guildhall, opened in 2008 as a free business advice centre. Established as a part of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) programme, the centre supports people to start up in business with free information, impartial business advice and business skills training; also offering support to small businesses that have been running for two years or less. As a business support hub, the Norwich Enterprise Centre also provides signposting and referrals to other sources of support as appropriate to the individual – such as the soft loans and support available to young people starting in business via The Prince's Trust; access to finance for those unable to secure mainstream funding through high street banks via Foundation East, and specialist support and networks for social enterprises and women entrepreneurs.

City Council officers themselves provide a wide range of support services to the local business community such as free basic business information; economic data to support business plans – often in partnership with local banks; help to locate business premises and specialist online information to assist food businesses.

Through the LEGI Programme and as a part of our ongoing commitment to business support, Norwich City Council works with and supports a variety of partners and networks in Norwich, who all share our goal – to encourage more people to start and grow small businesses in the City. At the moment this includes working with our partners on the Business Support Alliance to identify and respond to gaps in local business support that will result from Government spending cuts such as the demise of East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and restructuring of the national Business Link service.

More than 540 small businesses have started up in Norwich with support from the City Council and its LEGI Programme since April 2007 with many areas of support, including Norwich Enterprise Centre, set to continue beyond 2011 as a part of the programme's ongoing legacy.

It is a great pity the coalition government has seen fit to take away the remainder of the LEGI funding that would have been available to continue this important and enormously successful initiative. Norwich has good right to be very proud of our record on small business creation, especially compared to the rest of the county. I have briefed Chloe Smith MP on the impact this will have but with no result."

Question 16

Councillor Niki George to the leader of the council:-

To what extent does the cabinet support the County Council's call for volunteers to help with gritting roads and pathways throughout the city?

Councillor Steve Morpew, leader of the council's reply:-

"There are 221 grit bins in the Norwich City Council area pad for by the county council for people to use to grit roads and footpaths during icy weather so it follows we are keen for people to volunteer to use the opportunities provided. These are usually located on residential roads with a slope and the council naturally encourages their use. On the inside of the lid to the bins is a phone number so that people can phone the council to arrange the bins to be replenished. If I have a criticism it would be that there is a demand for considerably more bins and it is a pity more of those wanting to use them will not have the facility available.

Alongside the County Council, the City Council is encouraging residents more generally to clear snow and ice from footpaths etc. In part, this will be through an article in the winter edition of Citizen Magazine. Information about clearing snow is provided in the Government's snow code which the Citizen article will refer to. I have asked officers to draw the snow code to Members attention via e-councillor"

Question 17

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the cabinet member for wellbeing:-

"What sort of quality control does Norwich City Council undertake to ensure enquiries are not 'lost' in the system, particularly letters and phone calls, and is the council meeting its response time targets?"

Councillor Susan Sands, cabinet member for wellbeing's reply:-

"In line with good practice for contact centres phone calls are monitored through a variety of performance measures. Last quarters figures show that we successfully met our target when answering telephone calls. However last months target (October) was not met due to the roll out of the new food caddies scheme.

Service standards for letters are in place with the results available broken down across service areas as well as for the council as a whole. Last quarters performance for letters shows that the target was met by 3 service areas".

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire asked, as a supplementary question, how many service areas were monitored and how the system flagged up a lack of response. **Councillor Susan Sands** said she would investigate this with officers and report back to Councillor Wiltshire.

Question 18

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

"Looking to budget constraints for the next few years I would like to ask how much has been spent by this authority on consultants over the last financial year 2009 – 2010 and in the first 6 months of this financial year?"

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services' reply:-

"In the financial year 2009/10, a total of £999,000 has been identified as spend on consultants, and in the first six months of the current financial year, a total of £393,000. These costs include:

Service	2009/10 £000s	2010/11 £000s
Management of Concessionary Bus scheme	78	33
Procurement advice re Contract Re-provisioning	213	0
Technical advice re Contract Re-provisioning	70	5
Pension scheme advice & valuations	17	15
Housing consultation	49	16
Building Control services (joint venture)	87	22
Tax Rebate & Accountancy advice	33	0
Transformation & Efficiency services	143	43
Outsourced Internal Audit services	0	26
Specialist Treasury Management services	25	0

Expenditure on services such as the transformation and efficiency services has been incurred in order to enable the achievement of major savings and new ways of working by the council. This included carrying out a cost diagnostic across the council in 2009/10 and developing and implementing a new target operating model (the lean blueprint) in 2010/11. These two key pieces of specialist work have been used to guide the council's transformation and efficiency programme and have helped the council to realise £6 million of general fund savings for 2010/11 and to identify £3 million of general fund savings for 2011/12 whilst protecting frontline services. They have also helped the council to develop a range of new ways of working including its corporate business support model, HR business partner model and elements of its neighbourhood model. This work will continue to be used in future years to help the council identify further savings, develop innovative new methods of service provision and continue to protect front-line services wherever possible.

Several of the other services, including management of the concessionary bus scheme, pension's advice, and treasury management services, are procured externally on an ongoing basis as this approach provides the best value for money for the council. These services are so specialised the council would not be able to recruit and retain adequately qualified and experienced staff, or to cost-effectively develop the in-house capacity.

Other services, including around contract re-provisioning and tax & accountancy advice, have been procured externally in order to cover short term requirements for specialist services, to deal with unusually high but limited life situations. This work has also contributed to the successful delivery of the significant savings highlighted earlier in the response including £1 million of general fund savings from environmental services and the recovery of over £600k of overpaid tax.

All consultancy services are procured in line with the council's procurement strategy, and business processes are in place to ensure that the need for and potential cost of services are scrutinised and that value for money is obtained.

Councillor Judith Lubbock asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would consider paying less for consultants in the future as £1.3 million could be used on other services. **Councillor Alan Waters** said that, as the answer pointed out, the council gained significant value from the use of consultants. This was money effectively and well spent which had led to finding efficiencies and savings and preserving services. Now that Councillor Lubbock is aware of that, he looked forward to reading in future editions of the Liberal Democrat focus magazines that this had been money well spent.

Question 19

Question relating to Urgent Matters (Appendix 1, Rule 12.3 (ii))

The following question relating to urgent matters was taken with the consent of the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services.

Councillor Steve Morpew to the cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services:-

"Anxiety about the impact of cuts by Norfolk County Council on the people of Norwich and the knock on effect on city council services is understandably growing. The annual accounts for Norfolk County Council show they have £60m in earmarked reserves in addition to around £15m in general reserves. Could those extensive reserves be used to reduce the cuts in county council services in Norwich and would he share with me concerns that such high level of reserves is being held at the same time as crucial services to vulnerable people are being reduced or threatened?"

Councillor Alan Waters, cabinet member for resources, performance and shared services' reply:-

"If we were living in the era of 'new politics' which David Cameron and Nick Clegg promised during the General Election campaign, Councillor Morpew might not have needed to ask this question.

A large hole in the public finances created by having to pick up the debts from the near collapse of the banking system might have been an ideal opportunity for a spot of 'new politics'. After all we are 'all in it together'. The distinguished political commentator and historian, David Marquand argues that the 'new politics' '*should have encouraged searching select committee inquiries, preferably in public, into its macroeconomic thinking and the options that implied before completing the Spending Review. Leading supporters and opponents of the government's approach would have been cross-examined: non-governmental organisations, local authorities, industrialists and trade union leaders would have given evidence; parliament and the public would have had a chance to appraise their arguments. Nothing of the sort happened*'. The Spending Review was preceded not by open discussion in a non-partisan setting but by massive cuts in public expenditure and vindictive policies towards some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

This general principle has been applied at Whitehall department level. Eric Pickles, in what is left of the Department of Communities and Local Government, has done little to defend local government and has relished taking an axe to its budgets. Without, it would seem, thinking through the consequences. As the announcement of Revenue Support Grant settlement draws closer, there is evidence of second thoughts. Should the 25% budget cuts be 'frontloaded'? There are rumours of local government ministers' going back to the Treasury to try to change the way the funding formula is being applied so that it doesn't look quite so obvious that poorer areas are going to be hit, to help to protect the funding for richer parts of England.

And so to the County Council, which seems to be caught up in the same 'cut now think later' culture. Its frontline services cuts, will, without doubt, fall disproportionately on Norwich residents. What is proposed are cuts in areas that should not even be considered as a last resort: sensory support, travel subsidies for students, day centres, meals on wheels; 'supporting people' budgets funding for youth services, street lights. Yet we learn from the County Council's statement of Accounts' that they have something in order of £75 million in reserves.

When Norwich was faced with a budget gap created by the recession in 2008; we used a proportion of our reserves to buy the time to think about the best way to deal with the deficit and to give ourselves the best chance of protecting services. With £75million in reserves the Conservative controlled County Council have no excuse for making deep frontline service cuts they should go back to the drawing board, start again."

In response to a supplementary question from **Councillor Morpew, Councillor Alan Waters** said that the conservative lead county council should listen to its own government. Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has urged councils in England to make use of the ten billion pounds in reserve funds at their disposal. Norfolk County Council's £75 million pounds of reserves should be used to mitigate the effect of budget cuts his own government are introducing. It should be used to underpin the budget, as the city council did, to preserve services. Norfolk County Council must go "back to the drawing board".