NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

COUNCIL

7.30pm – 9.05pm **27 January 2015**

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

Apologies: Councillors Gihawi, Henderson, Packer and Price and Mr Armstrong (Sheriff)

1. LORD MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor thanked those councillors who had joined her in attending the Holocaust Memorial Service earlier that morning. It had been particularly poignant as it was 70 years ago to the day that Auschwitz Death Camp had been liberated.

The holocaust commemorations were continuing with a concert at the Norwich Synagogue which the sheriff was attending on the Lord Mayor's behalf. The Lord Mayor said that she was sure that fellow councillors would join her in congratulating Bill Armstrong, the Sheriff, on his award of an OBE in the New Year's Honours List. It was awarded for his services to the health and voluntary sector and especially his work with the bereaved. Members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

The Lord Mayor said that she only had 4 months left in her term and said that if any councillors wished to accompany her on any of her visits and engagements in that time please contact the civic office who would make the necessary arrangements.

2. PRESENTATION OF LONG SERVICE AWARD

At the invitation of the Lord Mayor, Councillor Bremner, portfolio holder for housing, informed Council that Dennis Foster had retired after 25 years working in the Norwich Community Alarm Service. The Lord Mayor presented Dennis Foster with his long service award and members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Mr Vaughan Thomas asked the cabinet member for environment, development and transport the following:

"The council has just finished consulting on its second environmental strategy and I note that the vast majority responses have been positive and indeed some respondents have been most complementary about the previous achievements and current ambitions of the council on environmental issues. However, I also have read press reports which have raised doubts in my mind about how ambitious the strategy really is and who has contributed to it. Would the portfolio holder for environment, development and transport please clarify who initiated and steered the development of this strategy, and would he also provide some reassurance about its level of ambition and what it will deliver for the people of Norwich?"

Councillor Mike Stonard, cabinet member for environment, development and transport replied as follows:

“Thank you for the question and for the opportunity to clarify a number of issues around the draft of the council’s third environmental strategy.

This administration is very proud of its record of achievement in environmental matters, which has been recognised in a number of prestigious national and international environmental awards. Our first environmental strategy was launched in 2008 and since then we have delivered a 14% reduction in per capital carbon dioxide emissions for the city – the largest fall in the East of England - and a 27% reduction in the council’s own carbon dioxide emissions.

Also, during this time, residual waste levels in the city have fallen faster than in the rest of Norfolk and we have improved the energy efficiency of the Council’s own housing stock through a major programme of improvements while working hard to promote grants and incentives for private homes.

In 2010 the council received recognition at the United Nations Environment Programme LivCom Awards, achieving Gold standard for the management of the environment; in 2014 the council also won an international Green Apple Award for its Raspberry Pi project; and in 2014 the council’s environmental strategy manager was named Energy Manager of the Year in the National Energy Services and Technology Association awards.

This has been achieved because of a firm commitment to a sustainable environment which improves or maintains the quality of life for us all. This administration is carefully balancing the need for homes, jobs, economic infrastructure and quality of life with the need to create a sustainable City that we and our children and grandchildren can all enjoy in the future.

The new draft environmental strategy is an ambitious document. For example, the carbon reduction targets are the equivalent, in carbon terms, of more than 110,000 double-decker buses. Similarly there is a large range of ambitious

actions within the action programme. To highlight just five of the more than 70 different actions:

- To look to run a major collection auction for photovoltaic panels (PV) so that private households and landlords can purchase and install PV at a lower cost (we would be the first city in the UK to do this).
- To look at the potential for investing in a major PV scheme for the City's housing stock.
- To explore with partner organisations the potential for a district heating scheme for the city.
- To work with residents and organisations across the city to jointly develop a bid to be the UK Green Capital 2019.
- To deliver programmes and projects to improve energy efficiency measures in privately owned housing.

The draft strategy sets out how the council will deliver its environmental priorities within four key areas of its responsibility: as community leaders; as service providers; as a purchaser of goods and services; and as estate managers.

You ask who initiated and steered the development of the draft strategy.

You will of course be aware that this council is run by a Labour administration. The development of the draft Strategy has been driven and underpinned by this administration's ongoing commitment to environmental improvement and sustainability, as captured in the 2014 Norwich Labour Manifesto's explicit promise to ensure an environmentally sound Norwich and the development of a sustainable, low carbon city that can be enjoyed for generations to come.

The same 2014 Norwich Labour manifesto promised the many environmental initiatives now being reported as delivered, including: increased energy efficiency in our housing stock; reduced waste to landfill; maintenance and development of Switch and Save; further reductions in the council's carbon emissions; improved recycling; and the introduction of a city-wide blanket 20 mph speed limit. There are of course many more.

As I say, this administration is proud of its record of achievement in Environmental matters. This does not mean, however, that we are complacent and that us why we have drafted such an ambitious replacement strategy. In that regard, I would direct those who suggest a lack of ambition to this council's prestigious national and international environmental awards and to contrast our performance with the disastrous performance in similar matters of Brighton and Hove Council. As I have said before, this administration does not just talk the environmental talk, it delivers practical outcomes."

Vaughan Thomas asked, as a supplementary question, if the portfolio holder could expand on who initiated and lead the development of the draft environmental strategy. **Councillor Stonard** said that it had been initiated and lead by relevant portfolio holders starting with Councillor Bremner then himself and with contributions from labour colleagues. Good practice had been reviewed, input from experts

sought and a public consultation undertaken. The administration had been politically inclusive inviting others to contribute. He said it was unfortunate that green councillors had - through the press - implied only they had contributed to the strategy.

5. PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November, 2014.

7. QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS/COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The Lord Mayor advised that 14 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 Howard to the cabinet members for neighbourhoods and community safety on the Russell Street Community Centre

Question 2 Councillor Bogelein to the cabinet member for customer services on responses to consultations and Freedom of Information requests.

Question 3 Councillor Jackson to the cabinet member for customer services on council consultations.

Question 4 Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on planning enforcement.

Question 5 Councillor Neale to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on compensation to Connaught workers.

Question 6 Councillor Boswell to the leader of the council on the "Cities outlook 2015" report.

Question 7 Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on green street verges.

Question 8 Councillor Herries to the cabinet member for housing on the Learning, Employment and Accommodation Project (LEAP).

Question 9 Councillor Manning to the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources on the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Question 10 Councillor Brociel-Coulton to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on the Cycling Ambition Grant Programme.

Question 11 Councillor Maxwell to the cabinet member for customer services on digital inclusion.

Question 12 Councillor Button to the cabinet member for environment, development and transport on the Switch and Save scheme.

Question 13 Councillor Ackroyd to the cabinet member for housing on overcharging leaseholders for caretaking and lighting.

Question 14 Councillor Wright to the cabinet member for customer services on reporting issues through the website during Christmas and New Year break.

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

8. NOMINATIONS FOR LORD MAYOR AND SHERIFF 2015-16

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Wright seconded that Councillor Arthur be nominated as Lord Mayor and Beryl Blower be nominated as Sheriff for the 2015/16 civic year.

RESOLVED, unanimously, to receive the following nominations for the 2015-16 civic year which would be formerly considered at the council's annual general meeting –

(1) Lord Mayor – Councillor Brenda Arthur
(2) Sheriff – Beryl Blower

9. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2015 – 16

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Button seconded the recommendations in the annexed report

RESOLVED, unanimously, to –

(1) approve the council tax reduction scheme 2015–16 by continuing with the council's 2014–15 scheme with the following modifications –

(a) To calculate the income someone gets for council tax reduction in the same way as it is calculated for housing benefit;
(b) To disregard war and armed forces disablement income when assessing a reduction in council tax;

(c) To 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 6 months.

10. MOTION – COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

Councillor Haynes moved and Councillor Boswell seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Maxwell seconded that the procedural rule in paragraph 14.7 of Appendix 1 of the council's constitution be suspended to allow wider amendments

RESOLVED, with 21 voting in favour, 13 against and no abstentions, to approve the procedural motion.

Councillor Bremner moved, and Councillor Maxwell seconded, the following amendment:-

After "….stock is lost" add "…which are contrary to what our tenants and this council have consistently committed to."

And

After "…… commitment to

insert …. " 1) and after "….a housing association add :-

2) planned growth across all housing tenures to meet the diverse needs of all residents in the city and including the opportunities contained within the Lyons Housing Review, LAMS, delivering the Joint Core Strategy for Norwich and greater regulation of the private rented sector.

RESOLVED, with 21 voting in favour, 10 against and 3 abstentions, to approve the amendment which then became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED that –

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, 1995) had been introduced encouraging council housing to be transferred to housing associations, meaning democratic control of housing stock is lost which are contrary to what our tenants and this council have consistently committed to.

RESOLVED –

1) unanimously, 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

2) with 21 voting in favour, none against and 13 abstentions, to ask cabinet to include within its corporate plan proposal a commitment to planned growth across all housing tenures to meet the diverse needs of all residents in the city and including the opportunities contained within the Lyons Housing Review, LAMS, delivering the Joint Core Strategy for Norwich and greater regulation of the private rented sector.

CHAIR

APPENDIX A

Question 1

Councillor Lucy Howard to the cabinet member for neighbourhoods and community safety:

> "Following the closure of Russell St Community Centre, the management of the Belvedere centre presented the council with a business proposal which would allow the centre to re-open. Provided that the use of the community centre can be shown to meet the needs of the local community, will the council work with the community group and invest to make the centre usable?"

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

> "Ward councillors were notified in November that Russell Street community centre had closed as a result of the committee standing down, the building being handed back to the council, and the council needing to explore the best option for the community centre.
>
> I would like to take this opportunity to recognise and thank the committee and volunteers for their hard work in running this centre.
>
> As a result of the closure, the building was made secure to protect it from vandalism and a short review of the facility was undertaken to inform the next steps. This is normal procedure when an asset such as this is returned to the council and this review included community needs, the quality of the building and repair requirements, other community provision in the area and other relevant information.
>
> During this period, the council was approached by the management committee of the Belvedere community centre who expressed an interest in running Russell Street community centre as an extension to the Belvedere centre. Given the success of the Belvedere in the extensive range of activities that is provided for the community, the proposal from the Belvedere community association provides an opportunity to grow the use and reach of the Russell Street centre. Portfolio holders agreed that officers should explore in more detail the proposal from the Belvedere community association but if this is progressed then the council will need to ensure that the centre would be available for use by and meeting the needs of the local residents in the vicinity of the centre."
>
> A follow up discussion with the Belvedere committee has been suggested to discuss their proposals in much more detail. If these discussions are successful, the council will need to consider how the investment the community centre requires can be achieved. There is no funding specifically allocated to any community centre as yet, with funds allocated on a

programmed basis from the council's general repairs and maintenance budget. Work on this will start shortly.

The report to cabinet in July 2013 from the scrutiny committee review of community space highlighted the council's financial constraints and the council being unable to invest in the fabric of the buildings to the level it desired. The report also recognised that the council's financial constraints would not improve in the short to medium term and community centres will continue to have to compete for financial resources with other council owned assets and programmes. This issue remains the case today and as that report stated, greater collaboration with partners and communities in the development of community centres and other community spaces provides an opportunity to access external sources of funding and achieve greater use of these facilities.

There are a number of very successful examples where council officers have worked collaboratively with community centre management committees to raise external funds and this broad approach, including investment of officer time and use of council budgets, will be how the council can realise investment in all of its community centres."

Councillor Howard asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would consider holding a public meeting with all stakeholders. **Councillor Driver** said he would consider it but hopefully the centre would be up and running before Purdah.

Question 2

Councillor Sandra Bogelein to the cabinet member for customer services:

"I would like to ask cabinet the reason why I, and a resident have still not received any answer to our request to the council on 14 November on details about a reported previous consultation regarding the skateboarding issue? I am also aware that Long Live Southbank and the Drug Store have to date not received an answer to their freedom of information request made on the 21November 2014, and my colleague Lucy Howard is also still waiting for a response to a request. I am not trying to bring up the skateboarding issue at this point; I would just like to point out a gap in the council's system with regards to transparency and would like to enquire why that gap appears and what is going to be done about it?"

Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for customer services' response:

"In respect of your request and that of a resident, I understand that an answer was provided for the majority of your enquiry. Unfortunately the request for information about a previous consultation was accidently not passed on to an officer for comment. This will be rectified and an apology issued.

In respect of the freedom of information (FOI) request the required information was pulled together by city wide services and provided to democratic

services, who administer the FOI process, within the statutory timescale. Unfortunately, due to human error in democratic services, the final response was not drafted and sent. As soon as this was highlighted the response was sent with an apology for the error. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. Along with my colleague Councillor Waters I will be looking at a means for regularly monitoring the response times to FOIs.

I am concerned to hear that Councillor Howard is still awaiting a response to a request, but I am informed that there are no related enquiries from Councillor Howard within the councillor email system for which she has not had a response. If the enquiry was submitted through another route I would suggest that in the first instance Councillor Howard might wish to follow it up with the officer concerned, otherwise I would be more than happy to assist in progressing the enquiry if I could be provided with the necessary details."

Councillor Bogelein asked, as a supplementary question, what the cabinet member would do to ensure the council met its statutory obligation. **Councillor Harris** said she had already held discussions with the relevant officers to ensure this was monitored and thanked Councillor Bogelein for bringing it to her attention.

Question 3

Councillor Simeon Jackson to ask the cabinet member for customer services:

"I would like to suggest to the cabinet member that there should be a formal written strategy for council consultations. This would include time scales, procedure for advertisement and contact of key stakeholders and most importantly a formalised procedure and time line detailing how answers to consultations are dealt with and incorporated into policy drafts. Does the cabinet member support this idea?"

Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for customer services' response:

"Thank for you question and your suggestion. The council is already required to have a formal consultation strategy for planning. This is called our statement of community involvement. This is a published document which outlines what we will do to improve the way in which the community can get involved in plan making and in decisions on planning applications.

Based on our current success and lessons learned from previous consultations, the statement of community involvement outlines a range of consultation approaches that can be used in consultation including:

- Letters/emails to groups and individuals;
- newspapers and Citizen magazine;
- paper documents;
- council's website;
- 'planning for real' type events;
- presentations to community groups;

- public meetings;
- focus groups;
- exhibitions;
- local councillors;
- social media;
- local radio.

It also sets out guidelines on timeframes for consultation on planning issues. For example:

- Where the consultation period overlaps with either the holiday periods of Christmas, Easter, or August. In such circumstances the consultation period shall be extended from 6 to 8 weeks.

- Where there is no indication of the intention to prepare the document in the Local Development Scheme. In such circumstances the consultation period shall be 12 weeks;

- Where there has been significant additional material included within the document between first publication of draft papers and formal consultation commencing. Again in such circumstances the consultation period shall be extended to be 12 weeks.

The Norfolk Compact

The council is also a signatory to the Norfolk Compact, this code of practice aims to improve the way in which both the statutory, voluntary and community sectors in Norfolk consult each other on policy developments, leading to the planning and delivery of better services.

The compact provides framework for consulting with the voluntary and community sector including timescales.

This means that any major changes to policies or changes in funding arrangements have to be consulted on for a 12 week period.

Other consultations

For all other consultations we use a set of guiding principles to help shape how we consult. These principles are:

Proportional - the time and resources put into the consultation exercise should be in line with the purpose and impact.

Genuine – the results of the consultation exercise should be used to inform the decision making process.

Consistent – given that different methods of consultation may be employed, it is important to ensure consistency in approach.

This means that we do not adopt a 'one size fits all' approach and can use many ways to listen to what people think about what we do and how it could be improved.

We believe consultation with our residents and partners is very important, and helps us to shape the services we deliver and the things we do."

Councillor Jackson said he was aware of the statement of community involvement for planning and asked, as a supplementary question, whether a similar robust procedure should be initiated for other consultations to inform policy. **Councillor Harris** said that her response clearly emphasised that a one size fits all approach would not be appropriate. If Councillor Jackson wished he could suggest this as a topic for discussion by scrutiny committee.

Question 4

Councillor Denise Carlo to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"At full council on 25 November, the cabinet member for environment, development and transport rejected a member request to take action over the white film in numerous windows of non-listed buildings under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 on grounds that white film is not considered to harm local amenity in accordance with the requirements of the Act (as amended).

The cabinet member said that amenity is narrowly defined. However, planning guidance describes amenity as a fundamental concept in planning law; a broad concept which is not formally defined but one which is a matter of fact and degree and common sense. The Planning Portal defines amenity as 'a positive element that contributes to the overall character or enjoyment of an area."

The white film on all the windows of five hotels and apartments in Unthank Road and Earlham Road (several of which are locally listed) give the buildings a derelict appearance and detract from the once former attractive buildings and from the character and appearance of the Heigham Grove Conservation Area and from people's enjoyment of their local environment. The blanked out windows create a sense of unease for local residents and raise concerns over activities within the buildings and the level of security (several of the hotels were raided by the police in December 2013).

Will the cabinet member reconsider and ask the officers to take action over these buildings and the blanked out windows on grounds that they adversely impact on local amenity?"

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

"Following my answer provided to your question at council on 25 November, I did ask officers to look into this matter further. They have looked into the issue of whether there is any form of consent needed for the film that has been applied or whether serving a Section 215 notice is a potential solution to the problem that you identify.

The application of film to the internal windows of buildings does not constitute development given that the works are internal and Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act explicitly excludes internal works from the definition of development. Therefore no planning permission is required.

As you are aware irrespective of the need for planning permission Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act provides a power to the local planning authority (LPA) to serve a notice on an owner of land where the amenity of a part of their area is adversely affected by the condition of that land. The notice would require steps to remedy the condition of the land within a specified period. The use of Section 215 is discretionary and it is therefore up to the Authority to decide whether a notice would be appropriate. However the land owner has a right of appeal to such a notice via the magistrates' court.

There is best practice guidance available on using Section 215 and there is guidance and advice on amenity, which is relevant to section 215. The guidance advises that each case will be different and what would not be considered amenity in one part of an area might well be considered so in another. LPAs will therefore need to consider the condition of the site, the impact on the surrounding area and the scope of their powers in tackling the problem before they decide to issue a notice.

The best practice guidance gives examples of the use of Section 215 notices. Officers can find no similar examples where Section 215 notices have been served. Case law indicates that they are typically used where refuse or materials are left on land or where the external of a building is in a dilapidated or derelict state. Whilst the regulations do not prevent use where an internal alteration has an effect on amenity it is considered that the application of film to the internal side of windows would certainly be very much at the lower end of the scale in terms of the degree of harm to amenity even taking into account the buildings location in a conservation area. Therefore there has to be a risk that any notice would not be upheld if challenged.

Furthermore the council does need to take a consistent and proportionate approach to serving Section 215 notices and have regard to the resources involved. There are certainly many other sites in the Norwich area which are affecting the amenity of the areas to a far greater extent than is being done in this case. There would be a significant increase in the resources directed towards planning enforcement, if the threshold for action under Section 215

was set as low as in this case and the council was to maintain a consistent approach across the city. So I cannot see that the course of action you propose is appropriate in this case."

Councillor Carlo asked, as a supplementary question, what were the other examples where the impact of amenity were worse than this case and would this be an appropriate topic for sustainable development panel? **Councillor Stonard** emphasised that it was important that the council did not do anything whereby it could be challenged for not being consistent. He said that if he believed that there was power to address the issue raised by Councillor Carlo he would do so tomorrow.

Question 5

Councillor Paul Neale, to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:

"I was interested to read in the Evening News (6 January) that former Connaught Workers who carried out work on behalf of the council have only recently been awarded compensation because Connaught failed to consult with the workforce before making them redundant. Was the cabinet aware at the time that Connaught was treating their staff in this way, and if so, what did the cabinet do to encourage Connaught to treat their workers in line with employment law?"

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources' response:

"This question relates to events that took place over 4 years ago and a decision has only been made by an employment tribunal late in 2014. This should give some indication as to the complexities of this case. To suggest that cabinet should be aware of a breach of employment law that has taken over 4 years to be decided upon by a judge who is an expert in such matters is quite frankly ridiculous. Indeed, in the article Brian Rye of UCATT who brought the claim is quoted as saying "This has been a very long and protracted fight for justice".

The newspaper article also makes brief mention of a failed application for unfair dismissal. There was also an application that TUPE applied and staff and unions were not consulted by contractors who worked on the council's contracts post Connaught but this application also failed. I hope this gives you a better perspective on just how complex the issues are in employment law and that a whole number of alleged breaches of employment law were dismissed.

To take you back to September 2010, our first contact with the administrators was on 9 September 2010 when they advised that they had already decided to make the Connaught staff redundant the following day. The council persuaded the administrators to allow the council until the following Monday to try to find an alternative solution and not make staff redundant so rapidly.

The council managed to find a solution for the environmental contracts (waste collection, street cleansing etc.) and successfully enabled over 200 staff to retain their jobs.

Unfortunately the council was not able to find a solution for the housing contracts and the administrators took the decision to make the Connaught staff redundant on Monday 13 September 2010.

The council worked with a variety of other agencies to support the staff who had lost their jobs staging an event at St Andrews Hall to help those staff find alternative employment. The council took details from those staff who wanted their details passed on to the new contractors and a significant number of those staff found work this way. Some staff were eligible to take their local government pension scheme early because of their age. I am aware that other staff took the opportunity to find new careers not connected to the work provided for the council. The council also managed to find successful placements for four apprentices who were only part way through their apprenticeship allowing them the opportunity to continue their learning.

The council managed to successfully maintain critical services during this hugely disruptive time and quickly get services back up and running to provide employment opportunities for the Connaught staff who had been made redundant.

It is a testament to those staff who suffered losing their jobs that they picked themselves up so quickly and went on to work for new employers and continued to provide services to the council and the tenants."

Councillor Neale said that he welcomed the lengthy response to the second part of his question but the first part had not been addressed and asked, as a supplementary question, was the portfolio holder aware of the way Connaught was treating its staff. **Councillor Waters** said that he had given a very detailed response to something that had happened 4 years previously. The High Court Judge had decided that Connaught did not treat its workforce well and he was delighted that they were receiving recompense. His answer had explained all the work the council had undertaken on this matter and he hoped that Councillor Neale found it reassuring.

Question 6

Councillor Andrew Boswell to ask the leader of the council the following:

"What reasons would the leader give for Norwich's poor rating in the recent Centre for Cities "Cities Outlook 2015" report (published: January 19th 2015 and highlighted on BBC Look East) in which Norwich's employment rate and average weekly earnings are both well below national medians?"

Councillor Brenda Arthur, leader of the council's response:

"The recently published report is interesting reading and the comparative data it provides is a useful benchmark of cities' economic health. In the case of Norwich relatively poor performance in respect of average weekly earnings is a matter of concern and something the council is seeking to address as I will explain.

In collating the Centre for Cities Outlook data cities are defined in terms of "Primary Urban Area" (PUA); and both the Broadland and the Norwich local authority areas are included in the city of Norwich definition used in the analysis. Around 49% of Broadland's population is classed as "rural". This therefore immediately puts Norwich at a relative performance disadvantage when compared to cities such as Cambridge and Ipswich, for example, as the Cambridge and Ipswich PUAs only include the Cambridge City Council and Ipswich District Council areas which are entirely urban. This means that the Norwich PUA is based on a working age population of 167,600, compared to 92,100 for Cambridge PUA and 87,200 for Ipswich PUA.

Turning firstly to employment rate, the Norwich PUA employment rate stands at 71.8 per cent of the working population in 2014 Norwich is ranked 35th lowest out of 64 cities on this measure. It therefore compares well to the national median and I would therefore question whether Councillor Boswell's assertion is correct. Furthermore, looking at the change in employment rate from 2004 to 2014, Norwich PUA ranks 26th highest which is well above the national median.

Comparing Norwich to the national average, Great Britain's employment rate stands at 73 per cent. The data used in the Cities Outlook is the Annual Population Survey (API) and this dataset is subject to a margin of error of at least +/-5% at the local level. The difference between Norwich PUA and the Great Britain average is not therefore statistically significant.

As regards average weekly earnings, the Norwich PUA is ranked 25th lowest out of 64 cities on this measure, below the national median.

Average weekly earnings in the Norwich PUA and in Norfolk as a whole have been below the national average and the national median ever since the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) has reported earnings figures. This is most likely caused by Norwich and Norfolk's relatively isolated location which means that employers in the area are not in competition with neighbouring urban conurbations for certain workers, particularly those in low level occupations. To an extent it also reflects the types of jobs based in the local area, reflecting Norwich's position as a major regional service centre which means it has a high percentage of jobs in relatively low pay sectors such as retail and leisure.

The low wage economy and the need for better paid jobs are reflected in the Norwich Economic Strategy and the Joint Core Strategy. It is part of the underlying rationale behind the ambition in Norwich's City Deal to accelerate

jobs growth in high value/high pay sectors - creative digital, engineering and health and life sciences."

Councillor Boswell asked, as a supplementary question, what will be the real impact of the City Deal and how were we monitoring it. **Councillor Arthur** said that the Skills Board was working well and the living wage campaign was making a significant contribution to increasing wages. The aim was to provide more jobs especially for young people; the right jobs and to attract people to Norwich. She would report progress to a future council meeting.

Question 7

Councillor Lucy Galvin to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"Norwich's many green street verges make our city pleasant for all, and help to prevent flooding. Yet increasingly they are defaced and damaged due to cars inappropriately parked on them. Many of the cars display notices showing them to be openly for sale, blatantly as a business proposition.

I trust that the cabinet member welcomes scrutiny committee's recent commitment to tackle this problem which has dogged the city for two decades and causes ongoing distress to many local residents. Will he detail why he considers past efforts to have failed and describe how he will work to ensure support for this initiative so that action can be both timely and effective?

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

"As Councillor Galvin notes the city's grass verges are a very important asset making a major contribution to Norwich's amenity. In good condition, they help reduce surface water run-off to help prevent localised flooding.

I therefore welcome scrutiny committee's interest in the condition of our verges and work to review the council's approach to managing verges which is being incorporated into 2015-16 service planning. Damaged verges are found in all parts of the city and whilst one must not lose sight of car sales as a contributor to such damage, most damage is caused by motorists in general, who are often local residents, using them as a parking place.

In 2006 work took place to begin to tackle the issue of verge parking across the city and a number of traffic regulation orders to prevent parking on verges were introduced in areas where there were alternative parking provisions available. The bulk of the problems that remain are in areas where there is no alternative provision and so any solution is likely to include a redesign of the verge area to accommodate parking, in the way that the Push the Pedalway scheme on The Avenues between Colman Road and Bluebell Road will do later this year. However such schemes are extremely expensive, and lack of funding is the key reason that past efforts have stalled. I am sure Councillor Galvin is aware of the very large cuts in highways

budgets since the coalition came to power and of the impact this has had on our ability to deliver such improvements.

Residents (who have space for off-street parking) are offered the opportunity of having a verge crossing constructed whilst we undertake footway reconstruction schemes. However, take up of this offer is variable as the costs to the resident can be from a few hundred pounds to perhaps £2,000 depending on the verge width.

Turning to the issue of car sales specifically there are powers contained in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 1985 which are intended to control such activity. However the powers have been found to have weaknesses (for example in proving that vehicles parked closer than 500m to each other are owned by the same person). Hence it has become very difficult for officers to enforce.

Officers have therefore been examining alternative approaches including:

- The issuing of warning letters (as undertaken by Great Yarmouth Borough Council with some success);
- Use of section 149 of the Highways Act 1980 (but which only can be used if the vehicle is causing a danger);
- Verge or other parking TROs;
- Use of powers contained in Schedule 4 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 which enable a Local Authority to prohibit trading on specified streets (i.e. including car sales); and
- Use of Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 powers to create a public spaces protection order.

Work to confirm the practical feasibility and the merit or otherwise in taking any of the above forward has been delayed due to long-term staff sickness. However, this resourcing issue has now been resolved and officers intend to bring a report to cabinet to consider options early in the new civic year."

Councillor Galvin said that work began looking into this 9 years ago and asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member would commit to sorting this out once and for all. **Councillor Stonard** said that he clearly could not give such a commitment. The council was addressing this as fast as it could taking into account the massive cuts in highways budgets and the staffing issues.

Question 8

Councillor Chris Herries to ask the cabinet member for housing:

"Earlier in December the city council backed Learning, Employment and Accommodation Project (LEAP) received national recognition in the form of a major funding boost. Since this announcement can the cabinet member update council on

his view of the success of the scheme and the difference this funding will make to tackling homelessness in Norwich?"

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for housing's response:

"I'm very pleased to confirm that LEAP has been awarded £387,710 from the Big Lottery Fund which will enable the continued support of those most at risk of homelessness in Norwich.

LEAP will continue to be a key component in the city council's homelessness prevention strategy and the grant award provides a further three years funding for the project, which was set up in 2009 in partnership with St Martins Housing Trust to help homeless people in Norwich by providing them with employment, education and training opportunities in conjunction with secure housing. It is an innovative approach to addressing some of the issues of homelessness particularly in respect of housing and employment.

LEAP takes a holistic approach to addressing the needs of homeless and hostel-dwelling clients by providing accessible, individually tailored support to individuals in housing crisis by building their skills through coaching, training and mentoring. In this manner the scheme addresses single homelessness, offending and re-offending, substance misuse and mental ill health, developing a legacy of skills and stability within the community.

In awarding the grant the Big Lottery Fund has recognised the fantastic outcomes that have been achieved since the project's inception. Over the last three years 75 LEAP clients have moved into their own independent accommodation. 81 people have found employment and a further 242 clients have gained access to work-focused opportunities and placements.

These results, working with a marginalised, vulnerable and often challenging client group, in tough economic times, are not to be underestimated. In addition to freeing up bed spaces in hostels, the demonstrable reductions in substance misuse and re-offending, give further evidence that LEAP really is transforming lives.

The new grant will facilitate the recruitment of an employment and enterprise co-ordinator, tasked with building links with employers, generating more work experience opportunities for LEAP clients and expanding 'The Feed' catering project. In addition, the award will guarantee the project's ability to run weekly drop-in and interview sessions for clients and run regular 'GOALS' training programmes, focused on improving clients' self-esteem and helping them set clear steps towards the life they really want. Of these clients, at least 25 per annum will be assisted into their own independent accommodation.

The project is open to every individual over the age of 16 who is facing homelessness or in supported accommodation in Norwich and the ongoing success of LEAP ensures that the disadvantaged people of Norwich have an opportunity to live a fulfilling life of their choice.
I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the work of the LEAP team and our

partners St Martins whose vision and positive approach has produced remarkable successes."

Question 9

Councillor Patrick Manning to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources:

> "The Coalition's provisional Local Government Finance Settlement confirmed that councils will continue to face significant spending cuts and huge financial challenges. Can the deputy leader and cabinet member for resources comment on the impact of this upon Norwich City Council?

Councillor Alan Waters, deputy leader and cabinet member for resources' response:

> "Thank you for your pertinent and timely question.
>
> Norwich received (and not for the first time) one of the worst financial settlements from the Department for Communities and Local Government with a further £1.9 million sliced off our Revenue Support Grant from £6million to £4.1 million and a reduction of 6.2% in our 'spending power'. The Revenue Support Grant is a key element in the financial building blocks that make up the General Fund Budget. This budget pays for council services and employs the staff to deliver those services. Pressure on our General Fund Budget has been growing since the economic recession of 2008 and has become acute since 2010 with the determination of the Coalition Government to sharply reduce the funds to local councils. Urban areas with high levels of deprivation and low council tax bases – like Norwich - are particularly hard hit by cuts in the RSG.
>
> The Revenue Support Grant is needs based: a mechanism designed to help equalise funding between richer and poorer areas. Councils in affluent areas and with a high council tax base, depend much less on RSG. Inequality in the United Kingdom is entrenched across society – it is also reflected in the deep inequalities between local authorities – particularly across England - as a result of deep cuts in Revenue Support Grant.
>
> Since 2008 Norwich has had to reduce its controllable budget cumulatively by £40million with further projected budget reductions of £11.6 million over the next five years (cumulatively £34.7m) if as expected the RSG disappears altogether, by the end of the decade. This does not take account of having to absorb each year £1million plus for inflation and unavoidable growth. Despite our successful efforts up to now, to sustain the services and activities residents expect us to provide; cuts in services, within a couple of years, on current projections will be difficult to avoid.
>
> This mirrors the situation facing councils across England (reported in a recent Local Government Audit Committee briefing) as a shortfall in funding of

£5.8 billion created by a combination of funding cuts and spending pressures is growing by an average rate of £2.1billion per year. Spending on social care and waste management, both of which have significant statutory elements, is taking up an increasing proportion of the funding available to councils, which means that according to the Local Government Association (LGA) model, funding for other council services will drop by 43% in cash terms by the end of the decade. Bringing together the predicted income and expenditure trends, the LGA forecasts a gap of £12.4 billion between funding and net expenditure by 2019-20. LGA research indicates that in many authorities savings are starting to come from service reductions rather than through efficiencies.

Problems are compounded by a reformed system of local government finance based on funding local services through the retention by each council of a proportion of locally collected business rates. This creates a funding instability for local government, because income from business rates is sensitive to local economic circumstances. Services require long term predictable funding. The Coalition finance reforms introduced in 2013 create a dangerous unpredictability for local councils.

If we needed reminding the forthcoming General Election, for Norwich and other councils up and down the country, will determine whether local government has a future as a service provider with an ability to meet the pressing needs of the communities it is elected to represent. “

Councillor Manning asked, as a supplementary question, what the cabinet member’s expectations were from the Independent Commission on Local Government Finance. **Councillor Waters** said that the future for local government would be different in the hands of the various main political parties. The commission’s work reflected that a better way of funding public services was required. The conservatives were proposing a shrinking state and the future would be bleak for local authorities. We need a stable system of funding local government that was robust and allowed local authorities to plan for future years. A strong local state was needed to meet the needs of local people.

Question 10

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

“Could the cabinet member for environment, development and transport give his opinion to Council on the opportunities and benefits for the Cycling Ambition Grant Programme?

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

“In the last two years the city council has successfully positioned itself in the premier league of cities that are investing in cycling in England. We are in the company of large cities like Birmingham and Manchester as well as smaller cities

already noted for cycling such as Oxford and Cambridge. We have successfully applied for £3.7m of government funding and a further £8.4m has been provisionally allocated to us, subject to our application.

This investment allows us to make the city a better place. Here are some examples:

- Chapelfield Gardens has an attractive new entrance, better lighting and crossing points. You can cycle in both directions along Little Bethel Street where, until recently, there were two lanes of traffic and poor safety.

- Yesterday work started on Magdalen Street to enable people to ride their bikes directly into the city centre from the north. It will also make the pedestrian crossing better at Magdalen Gates and help eliminate the anti-social pavement cycling problem.

- The Avenues project will provide cycle tracks which are separate from the buses and the pedestrians. It will also deal with the problem of residents having to park on the verges which get muddy and damaged.

- I am delighted that the Tombland project was unanimously approved at committee last week. It is a wonderful historic space that will be made even better when the pavements are wider, more crossing points are provided and you can ride through without having to negotiate a busy roundabout. More people will visit Tombland and spend money there.

These sorts of projects show that making places better for cycling can make places better for business, for residents, for people on buses and for pedestrians.

I am optimistic that we will be able to fund these sorts of projects in other parts of the city for at least the next three years. By doing so we can make big strides towards helping tackle health problems, make it easier for people to access jobs without spending lots of money on travel, save carbon from unnecessary car journeys and avoid tragic accidents happening."

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Brociek-Coulton**, **Councillor Stonard** confirmed that it was only possible to attract funding for these schemes because the council was part of the City Deal.

Question 11

Councillor Marion Maxwell to ask the cabinet member for customer services:

"In late November the city council received news that our 'Transformation Challenge Award' bid had been successful. Will the cabinet member for customer services give council her opinion on the opportunities to promote digital inclusion in the city with this funding?"

Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for customer services' response:

"We are delighted to have been successful with our bid to the transformation challenge fund and have received £446k over a three year period. This gives us a great opportunity to escalate our digital inclusion action plan over this period.

Working with a range of partners including the third sector, county, CCG, Social landlords and Barclays we will be able to ensure that citizens do not lose out on opportunities to learn, save money and keep in touch with friends and relatives.

When individuals are digitally active it can improve the accessibility of services and provide support to people who find themselves physically and emotionally isolated.

By making sure that opportunities exist to enhance peoples skills and confidence in the use of technology we will be making great strides in keeping people in touch with their community and society in general.

Digital exclusion impacts the city council both as a service provider and community leader and its partner organisations. The scale of change required is beyond the scope of one organisation and needs to be tackled from a partnership approach. Working together we can ensure that trained volunteers within partner organisations, who come into contact with a member of our communities, can provide support and real help to enable them to become digitally confident

Increased employability, increased confidence, reduced isolation and independence are some of the benefits from this project but also the wider socio-economic benefits particularly within the health sector, with fewer visits to doctors or use of NHS services, or reducing the need of older people to go into care at an early stage, therefore enabling them to live longer independent lives."

Question 12

Councillor Sally Button to ask the cabinet member for environment, development and transport:

"The popular Switch and Save scheme is now in its fifth tranche with the closing date of 2 February. Can the cabinet member give his opinion on the progress to date and the energy cost saving benefits already achieved with previous schemes?"

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

"The fifth tranche of the popular scheme runs until 2 February 2015. So this is the last week you can register for the scheme which is expected to provide some excellent results due to the reduction in the wholesale costs.

The result from the last tranche showed that better savings can be made with Norwich's Big Switch and Save than with other online comparison websites.

An amazing 98% of households who signed up for the last scheme, which ran from August to October, last year, were offered a saving. If all of them had switched, £34,624 would have been saved giving the potential for the savings made to be spent elsewhere in the Norwich economy.

The average household was offered a saving of £221 a year. This was between 3.6 to 5% cheaper than the best available price available on online comparison websites on the day of auction.

Some 6,500 people have previously signed up to the previous four tranches of the scheme with more than 70% being offered a saving. More than £35,000 of real savings has been delivered so far.

Any income that we get from the Switch and Save is used for affordable warmth activities such as urgent heating need and warm and well packs. Lowering fuel poverty and helping people in the city who are most at need during the cold winter months."

In reply to a supplementary question from **Councillor Button**, **Councillor Stonard** confirmed that people who had already made savings under the Switch and Save scheme were able to apply again for future tranches.

Question 13

Councillor Caroline Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for housing:

"In a recent court decision reported in the press, it was state that the council had overcharged leaseholders for caretaking and lighting. Is the cabinet member concerned about the impact this will have on council budgets?"

Councillor Bert Bremner, cabinet member for housing's response:

"Norwich City Council provides a mobile caretaking service to 32 sites, 925 tenants and 215 leaseholders across the city.

The service ensures that communal areas are kept clean and safe and all necessary repairs are identified and carried out.

The service was introduced in the late 1990s and was subject to a separate charge for service recipients from 2002 as part of the government's rent restructure regime.

The service costs £150K per year to provide. Tenants pay £2.50 per week and leaseholders £130 per year.

When a council property is sold under the right to buy it is done so under a lease and includes a list of the services the council will provide and the leaseholder will pay for.

Leases on property sold before the service and charge were introduced, between early 1980s and 2002, do not have a specific clause referring to mobile caretaking, because the service was not being provided at that time. The Council has relied upon a clause in the lease regarding maintenance of the common areas to provide and charge for the service.

This has been challenged at FFT (First-tier tribunal – Property Chamber (Residential Property) in relation to one property and the tribunal has found that the full cost of the service, ‘’which may be desirable’’ is not recoverable unless a lease has a specific clause to that effect. The challenge was supported by the Norwich Leaseholders Association (NLA). The application to the FFT was for a period of eight years.

This decision does not set a legal precedent and the council has made an appropriate refund in respect of this determination. To be clear, the service has been provided and the costs incurred in doing so. These have been recharged to tenants and leaseholders. The council is obviously concerned any retrospective refunds will be borne by the housing revenue account and will mean less money to spend on activities such as maintaining and improving tenant’s homes.

Out of the 215 leaseholders receiving this service approximately 130 leases do not have the relevant clause and these leaseholders may have call for a return of monies paid, if they so wish. Until this is known, and relevant calculations carried out involving the current let time, the final cost to the housing revenue account (HRA) cannot be calculated. However, we have HRA reserves to cover unforeseen expenditure as necessary.

The FFT also suggested that the council and leaseholders should work together to ‘vary’ leases to enable such a charge to be made and recovered. Unfortunately, it is not easy to vary leases before their extension or expiry and the process to vary will need individual leaseholder agreement and may incur significant legal costs

As a result of this determination the council will work with tenants and leaseholders to review the mobile caretaking service. The Norwich Leaseholders Association has been kept informed of the options being explored by the council and this work will be completed as soon as possible. An initial letter will be sent to affected leaseholders in the next couple of weeks.

A second case regarding how the costs of landlords lighting maintenance are apportioned, has also been considered by FFT following a further application backed by the NLA and this is currently subject to the appeal process. This is again in respect of work that has been carried out and paid for. The council is awaiting the outcome of the appeal before undertaking any further work on this issue.”

Question 14

Councillor James Wright to ask the cabinet member for to ask the cabinet member for customer services:

"Can the portfolio holder for customer contact please comment on the effectiveness of the services offered during the Christmas closure period, and whether they believe the ongoing policy of channel shift to the website is working, given that residents have complained that they were unable to report issues – eg, a damaged food waste bin - as the web form was taken offline during the Christmas and New Year break?"

Councillor Gail Harris, cabinet member for customer services' response:

"During the Christmas period demand for our online forms and activity on our website was significantly increased with nearly 150 service requests being received. The activity on our spatial service 'MyNorwich', where citizens were able to find information on council services and also continue to report the majority of service requests, received at its peak nearly 600 hits in one day more than any other day during December. Online activity continues to grow month on month and the Christmas and New Year period was no exception.

The decision to take down the non-urgent repairs and missed bins online forms over the Christmas and new year period was to ensure that we did not raise customer expectations when the request would not have been progressed until the council offices reopened on 5 January 2015. The council's website advised customers who wanted to report non-urgent repairs or waste issues that the forms were unavailable with the following message:

> "Please note – this form is currently offline. Any non-urgent housing repairs will not be dealt with until the city council reopens on Monday 5 January."

Over the Christmas period, customers could report urgent repairs by calling the out of hours service at NCAS who would ensure that the contractors' duty officer was alerted and dealt with the specific issue in accordance with the council's normal arrangements outside normal office hours.

During the coming year we will be further developing our online forms with our contractors and IT provider so that they can remain in place over this period."

Councillor Wright asked, as a supplementary question, if the cabinet member could confirm that all forms would be available 24/7. **Councillor Harris** confirmed that work was being undertaken to achieve this.