



NORWICH City Council

COUNCIL

31 March 2009

Questions to Executive Members and Committee Chairs

Question 1

Councillor Joyce Divers to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

‘As local councillor in Thorpe Hamlet I have received a letter from the Norwich Society, which sets out their concerns about the condition of buildings in Elm Hill. It would appear that not only are many repairs outstanding but the condition of some are actually quite dangerous.

As this is one of Norwich's most outstanding Heritage areas, can the Executive Member reassure local residents and visitors that it is safe to visit and can they also clarify what arrangements are being put in place to remedy this situation?’

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

‘The Norwich Society has set out concerns relating to a number of buildings on Elm Hill, and we have been able to give them a comprehensive reply.

Where the issues are the responsibility of the City Council we have also updated them with the actions in hand to remedy the issues.

The only problem raised in the letter was with reference to one non operating fire sounder that had stopped functioning with ingress of some water. This was repaired as a matter of urgency and is now fully functional. We are not aware of any other issues that would put any users of Elm Hill at risk, and it therefore remains safe to visit.’

Question 2

Councillor Evelyn Collishaw to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

‘I have been contacted by many residents recently who are concerned that wheelie bins that are left on the pavement (often for the whole of the day that they are collected on) are becoming a nuisance for pedestrians, many disabled people and those with buggies. Does the Executive Member have any thoughts on how this could be dealt with in the future?’

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The roll-out of Alternate Weekly Collections (AWC) has provided an enormous boost to the Council's recycling rate and transformed the city into the most improved recycling authority in Norfolk. Alongside the successful introduction of the blue bins it has always been recognised that there would need to be measures in place to manage the way that residents set-out their bins.

The guidance regularly issued to residents, which was reinforced during the successful AWC communications campaign, is that bins should be set-out no earlier than 6 p.m. on the day before collection and no later than 7 a.m. on collection day. Residents should return their bins on to their own property at the earliest available opportunity after collection.

Environmental Services staff has carried out a number of targeted operations in various parts of the city to help residents to understand the need to keep their bins off the pavements as much as possible. Progress is being made and more and more residents are recognising the need to store their own bins securely. In the event that someone chooses not to heed our advice and deliberately causes a prolonged nuisance, Officers do have the power to take formal action, which could result in a Fixed Penalty Notice of £80.

The Council is committed to ensuring that the new AWC service operates as smoothly and successfully as possible and as part of the continuing communication campaign the March edition of Citizen contains a full-page article of wheelie bin guidance for residents, as well as supportive coverage in the local media.'

Question 3

Councillor John Fisher to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'I was surprised to learn that the Planning Department doesn't send out acknowledgement letters to residents who contact them in either response to a planning application or for a general enquiry. This often makes the resident feel that they have been forgotten. Is there a reason for this and could Council practices be changed in the future?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The Planning Department does acknowledge letters it receives in relation to planning applications. All people who comment on an application have their letters acknowledged, are advised of the date the application will be considered at Planning Applications Committee (if reported to Committee) and are notified on the decision on the application when it is made. With regard to general enquiries these are not currently acknowledged although we do aim to issue a substantive response within less than 3 weeks. It is intended that planning service standards will be re-examined as part of the Planning Improvement Programme this year.

If you have a specific incident you are concerned about please raise it with the Planning Department.'

Question 4

Councillor Niki George to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'As the Executive Member may be aware, the condition of Clover Hill Centre in Bowthorpe is a SNAP priority. Now that the Camera's have been put in place we would like to see continued development of this area and it is vital that the Council considers adopting this soon if we are to create a safe, prosperous village centre that will attract businesses and provide services to the people of Clover Hill and Bowthorpe. Does the Executive Member have an action plan for this to happen and what more could the council do to encourage business into this important community hub?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'This is a priority with focus on ensuring we can generate business and community activity.

The general store has been running successfully for many years and the leaseholder will shortly be taking over the former dental surgery initially as storage but ultimately as extra sales space.

The former white goods unit known as 16-18 Humbleyard is on the verge of agreement to let to an established business

We are looking at how best to market the former area housing office that will give the best chance of attracting an occupier

A large part of the village centre is utilised by Sure Start with the community balancing with commercial activity. The community centre further compliments this.

It is ultimately the intention to apply for the village centre to become adopted highway. In the meantime we are looking at ways we can address the issues that include access, litter, and weeds along with general issues such as lighting.

Of course, with regard to community safety issues, I don't need to remind Councillor George that the purpose of SNAPs is for them to come up with action plans to which we and our partners respond.'

Question 5

Councillor Antony Little to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'In the NELM area of Norwich, which includes the Earlham area of my ward, a recent "street leaders" pilot was set up that encouraged self-selecting residents to report

issues to the council and who could be used as a consultative body about changes to the area and the delivery of council services. This scheme is now being extended into other councils and I would like to ask the Executive Member if Norwich City Council has plans to do so?’

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development’s reply:-

‘The scheme that Councillor Little refers to was established in 2007 by the NELM Development Trust as part of their neighbourhood management work. Over 100 residents were recruited by the trust on a voluntary basis to report a variety of street issues such as litter, fly tipping and defective street lighting through to the Trust and then onto the various public bodies including the City Council.

Councillor Little appears to be rather behind the times in his knowledge of the street leaders pilot as the NELM area Neighbourhood Management programme, which included the street leaders scheme, ended rather prematurely in the latter half of 2008 when NELM Development Trust chose to redirect its remaining funds into other projects.

Although the pilot project was ended by NELM it is hoped that at least some of the street leaders have continued on an individual basis to report local issues through other recognised channels of communication such as the Residents Service Team (RST) and the Anti Social Behaviour Hotline or, where appropriate, to the area’s Safer Neighbourhoods Team.

Norwich City Council does not have any plans to operate its own Street Leaders scheme in the immediate future but we do already have a range of other initiatives which replicate the principles of such a scheme including a large number of Tenant and Resident Associations, Community Associations and Community Partnerships which are spread across the City. These groups all take an interest in their local community and the members of these groups regularly report issues of concern to the local area that they represent. Through the work currently being undertaken to strengthen community engagement across the Council we aim to build upon this good work and work with local residents to develop a more co-ordinated, better resourced service which enables volunteers to further develop their skills and encourages more residents to become involved within their local communities.’

Question 6

Councillor Andrew Wiltshire to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

‘Could the Executive Member tell me what consultation there was with the City Council and residents about changes to the location of lamp posts under the recent replacement scheme that is currently underway?’

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'Street lighting is the responsibility of Norfolk County Council and it is not one of the highway functions delegated to the Council through the highways agency agreement.

If Councillor Wiltshire has concerns about the location of lamp posts please can I suggest that he contacts Norfolk County Council's street lighting section via the County Council call centre accordingly?'

Question 7

Councillor Rosalind Wright to the Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development:-

'In the light of the recent Executive decision regarding use of the Sustainable Communities Act powers, could the Executive Member please clarify how the Council will work with the local community in drawing up these important proposals and ensuring that this is a truly bottom-up approach?'

Councillor Linda Blakeway, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Development's reply:-

'I am pleased to note that the Liberal Democrats are now embracing the principles of bottom-up, community-led initiatives. With regard to the use of the powers offered through the Sustainable Communities Act, the approach agreed recently by the Executive is to test the process by capturing community issues through the neighbourhood level work currently being undertaken by the community engagement team and neighbourhood management programme as they start to develop community profiles with residents in their areas.

The neighbourhood profiling and community planning work which will be co-ordinated by these teams will provide an ideal opportunity for community members, including local ward Councillors, to voice local issues and aspirations that may be appropriate for the Sustainable Communities Act and will ensure that as far as possible the issues that are captured are undertaken through a bottom up, community-led approach.

Issues raised which may be suitable for consideration under the Sustainable Communities Act will need to be 'tested' through a local panel of community representatives and reported to the Executive in June or July prior to submission to the LGA who are acting as the selector on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Councillor Wright needs to be aware that the qualifying criteria for proposals as laid out within the Sustainable Communities Act are very specific and when considering whether to submit proposals to the LGA, the Council will also have to give consideration the following criteria:

- proposals should be innovative and make a clear contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Community Strategy and link to the Local Area Agreement
- proposals should be something that requires intervention from Central Government to enable its delivery, for example a change in Central Government Policy. Proposals should not cover something that this Council or its partners already has the powers to deliver and,
- proposals should ideally be cost neutral and should command or be capable of commanding a broad range of community support including resident and employment / business sectors.

If it is found that some of the proposals raised do not meet the criteria laid out within the Sustainable Communities Act it is hoped that other more-localised solutions could be developed to address these important community issues. These solutions would also be developed using the principles of a bottom-up community-led approach which will greatly enhance the sustainability of any work undertaken.'

Question 8

Councillor Judith Lubbock to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'At the last full council a Liberal Democrat motion to support the Private Members Bill on Fuel Poverty was unanimously backed by this council.

A Bill which would have seen the launch of a major energy efficiency programme to 'fuel poverty proof' the homes of the fuel poor by bringing them up to the energy efficiency levels enjoyed by most homes. It would also have seen the use of social tariffs to limit vulnerable household's exposure to high energy bills. In short it would have addressed the statistics of 14,000 Norwich homes in fuel poverty and the 80 people who die in Norwich each year from cold related deaths.

Regrettably our Norwich MPs Charles Clarke and Ian Gibson were not present and regrettably the Bill failed to pass its second reading on Friday. The Government opposed it and were able to 'talk it out' using their allotted speaking slot at the end of the debate. David Heath, Liberal Democrat MP and sponsor of the Bill attempted to stop the Minister from being able to do this by using a 'closure motion' to bring debate to a conclusion. However closure motion required 100 MPs to support it and only 91 MPs were present.

The Bill could receive further consideration on 12 June but the reality is there's little chance without Government support. The Liberal Democrats are looking to apply as much pressure as possible to the Government to support the Bill.

Please can the Portfolio Holder join the Liberal Democrats in lobbying our MPs for their support through letters from this council?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'I am happy to confirm that a letter has already been sent signed by the Leader of the Council asking the two Norwich MPs to support the Bill if it is considered again on the 12 June.'

Question 9

Councillor Brian Watkins to the Leader of the Council:-

'The Boundary Committee recently announced that the Greater Norwich 'doughnut' option meets all of the five government criteria for local government reorganisation. Alongside the county unitary proposal, it will now be one of the two options that will form part of the eight week consultation process which will culminate in a final recommendation to the Secretary of State in July.

Whilst this is welcome news for the city bid, opposition remains strong and reservations continue to exist regarding its overall affordability. Can the Leader please inform Council how the transition team hope to address these concerns over the coming weeks?'

Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'We are delighted that the boundary committee now recognises the 'doughnut' has the capacity to meet all the government criteria and has put it forward as a proposal for consultation.

This is a big step forward, but we are not complacent. There is a great deal at stake and we will keep working to promote our case to the boundary committee and ministers who will ultimately take the final decision.

We have always believed the best way of improving services and overseeing the massive growth planned for greater Norwich is to create a unitary authority which can focus on the distinct issues that affect the city. In a recession, national research has shown that it is vitally important to promote and support cities such as Norwich, which are so vital to the economic and social well-being of the wider area. Unitary status for the city will ensure that it gets that focus, and is not lost in a massive Norfolk super council.

We are also convinced that a second, separate unitary authority for rural Norfolk would be able to concentrate on addressing the equally important, but very different issues that exist in the market towns and rural areas across the rest of the county.

The "doughnut" is therefore clearly the best deal for all parts of the county.

During the 8 week consultation period that is now underway, the City Council will be examining the boundary committee's report, and preparing a response before the 14 May deadline. We are very clear that there is considerable stakeholder support for the "doughnut" model, and that it represents an affordable pattern that will deliver significant benefits for both the city and the rural areas of Norfolk.

We will also continue to communicate and consult with local people and stakeholders about the draft proposals. We would also strongly encourage everyone to respond to the boundary committee with their views.

Finally can I thank members of the Green and Liberal Democrat groups for their continuing support for the City Council's unitary status campaign. I think this consistent and overwhelming political support for change will be helpful in securing more efficient and effective local government in Norwich and Norfolk in the future.'

Question 10

Councillor Mary Cannell to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

'Can the portfolio holder update council on the progress of the Labour Group's motion to condemn price differences for pre-payment meters, specifically updating council on how successful our attempts to lobby Ofgem have been?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services reply:-

'Prepayment meters are used predominantly by people on low incomes who can least afford the unfair premium that is placed on their energy bills. The Labour motion to council last November asked the Executive to condemn in the strongest possible terms the unfair practice by which people on prepayment meters are paying the highest tariffs for their energy and to participate in Ofgem's consultation on the deregulation of the energy market.

The Executive participated in the consultation and welcomes the publication of the results in which Ofgem has responded to our concerns. Its Governing Authority is minded to produce a new license condition on suppliers that will ban unjustified price differences. It will require that prices reflect the costs to the companies.

This is excellent news for those people of Norwich who are unfairly disadvantaged by the practice. It will mean that energy companies can no longer unfairly disadvantage those on lower income. It is another step towards helping put more money into people's pockets people a fundamental element of our work on financial inclusion.

Although the administration is extremely pleased that we have managed to effect this change in regulation we are not complacent and will continue to pursue our strategy to ensure everyone has access to affordable energy bills.'

Question 11

Councillor Michael Banham to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'Many of my constituents are concerned that when they are issued with concessionary tickets their destination is shown to be much further than they are travelling. Can the portfolio holder assure my constituents that the Council is not being overcharged for its concessionary fares by the bus companies?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The method for repaying operators for the fares foregone under concessionary travel is complicated but the destination on tickets does not affect this.

Payments are made on the basis of:

The number of journeys made by pass holders using a bus service	The average fare charged to adult fare paying passengers using the same service
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The number of journeys is recorded by most bus companies by issuing a ticket but it has no value and the destination shown is not relevant, the tickets issued serving simply as a journey count.

Turning to the average fare paid by fare paying passengers, this reflects actual transactions and takes account of both single ticket sales and other discounted ticket sales (e.g. return tickets or 10 tickets, etc.).

Actual payment is adjusted downwards to take account of generated travel. The law places an objective on councils to ensure bus operators are no better and no worse off under the scheme compared to the situation if no scheme existed. Clearly with free travel there are a proportion of passengers who travel by bus because it is free but would be unlikely to do so if they had to pay the normal adult fare.

Question 12

Councillor David Fairbairn to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'In light of the government's decision to increase the small and standard business rate multipliers by 5% and end the 'transitional relief' scheme, will the Executive Member look at how Business Rate Relief can be promoted in Norwich and look at how the Liberal Democrat controlled London Borough of Sutton Council is successfully promoting rate relief?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'The Council publicises hardship relief provisions in the Booklet that accompanies the annual rate bill. Ratepayers are also made aware of the provisions when an organisation is known to be in financial difficulties. The Council does not have a specific budget available for this purpose due to its own financial constraints. However, we would normally encourage payment by making arrangement to settle over an extended period to help firms in this situation.

When considering the provision for hardship relief the Council is required by law to consider the impact granting the relief would have on the local council tax payers as

well as the benefit to the business. Each request is considered on an individual basis.

25% of cost of the relief is met by the council tax payers of Norwich. The remaining 75% is met by the National Pool. The receipts from non domestic rates collected by the Council is paid into the national pool each year and redistributed as a grant to each authority in accordance with the formula set by the government.

Another form of relief is the small business rate relief that applies to property with a rateable value of less than £15,000. Where the rateable value is below £10,000 additional relief will be granted. However, there are a number of qualifying conditions where the ratepayer has more than one property. The scheme is advertised in the booklet that accompanies the annual bill and is advertised on our website. An application form must be completed before relief can be granted.'

Question 13

Councillor Adrian Ramsay to the Leader of the Council:-

'Recent press reports have claimed that the Sustrans Connect 2 project, to connect Thorpe Hamlet and the City Centre to Whitlingham Country Park by cycle and pedestrian footpaths and bridges, is at risk. A reported six year delay until 2013 will be deemed unacceptable by many residents who voted to win £900,000 of Lottery money by a public phone-in in 2007. Could the Leader of the Council please detail what the situation is with funding and, as the current chair of the Greater Norwich Development Partnership, can he indicate the current prioritisation of this project compared to other projects for funding and resources?'

Councillor Steve Morphew, Leader of the Council's reply:-

'The Whitlingham Link project is estimated to cost £5 million. It was originally envisaged to be paid for via a mixture of developer, Local Transport Plan and government grant. The Connect2 funding will provide £0.9 million towards the £5 million. Since then the economic situation has changed significantly and the amount of grant funding to the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) in the short term is significantly less than bid for. Also changes in audit regulations mean it is now more difficult to capitalise project development fee costs.

These changes present challenges to the project particularly as the project is so linked to development at the Deal Ground and Utilities sites and therefore dependent on market conditions. Such risks have been understood since the project's inception however and they are not affecting the project's critical path.

The most time critical task at present is to undertake ecological surveys and funding for these has been secured (from a mixture of public and private sector sources) to allow these to be carried out.

Unfortunately no further funding can be committed through GNDP at this stage due to a lack of revenue funding. As the immediate need is to progress with surveys, design work developer negotiations etc, this is being taken forward in conjunction with the landowners. There is not necessarily a need for major capital funding during

2009 and 2010. This will change as we move through to 2011 and 2012. City Council and GNDP officers are working on a revised project funding package and I remain optimistic about delivery.'

Question 14

Councillor Tom Llewellyn to the Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services:-

'Recent events have demonstrated the need for wider scrutiny of housing decisions and services in the Council. Does the Executive member agree that introducing a Housing Scrutiny Committee, as already exists in many other local authorities, would be an important step towards this?'

Councillor Brenda Arthur, Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services' reply:-

'Greater scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that decisions are effective and that those making the decisions are accountable. It is central to the democratic process. The scrutiny function at Norwich City Council has, as I am sure Councillor Llewellyn will agree, evolved over the past 2 years such that it is not just holding the decision makers to account but is more effective and focused as non executive member scrutineers bring their own independence to the fore when looking at strategic and policy issues.

Having a specific Housing Scrutiny Committee focussing solely on one service could bring to bear an uneven approach as any development of the scrutiny function needs to take into account the Council's wider activities. It is up to the Scrutiny Committee to decide if it wishes to scrutinise any aspect of the Housing Service and I aware, for example, that it has recently been looking at Choice Based Lettings. Clearly any growth in the work of the Scrutiny committee will also have an impact on resources.

However a key pressing priority of this administration is developing tenant participation so that our tenants can properly scrutinise and be influential in matters affecting their tenancies with the council. They are, I believe, our best scrutineers and we are already working with tenant representatives and the Citywide Board to look at how we enable that to happen more in the future. Therefore if there were a proposal to establish a Housing Scrutiny Committee I would want to test this with tenants in the first instance.'

Question 15

Councillor Claire Stephenson to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'The front car park at Earlham House is in a dangerous condition, pitted with holes and having severe drainage problems. The property company responsible for the maintenance of the car park has so far ignored requests from ward councillors to carry out the work necessary to make the area safe. As the City Council is aware of

these problems, when will an improvement notice be served on the company to bring the property up to a safe and acceptable standard?’

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development’s reply:-

‘The safety of private property is normally a matter for the private owner concerned. However, the Council can take action under S.215 of the Town and Country Planning Act in cases where the amenities of the area are adversely harmed by the condition of land. This involves serving notice on the owner and, if the specified improvement works are not completed in a specified time, then prosecution or works in default can be initiated.

This site was last inspected by the Council’s planning staff in autumn 2008 and it was not considered that the condition of the land merited action at that time. Following this question being raised the site has again been inspected and the matter was discussed at the appropriate officer working group on 25th March. It was agreed to take appropriate action to improve the car park so that the amenities of the area are not adversely harmed. This could involve potential action under s.215 and, if the owners fail to complete specified works then the Council’s Direct Action Fund will be utilised and payment recovered from the owner.

The process involves the owner(s) being identified, a specification of works being drawn up, the formal service of the notice, a reasonable period for the works to be completed and, if not done, the Council arranging for a contractor to do the works specified. Therefore it could be some months before the car park is improved.

Question 16

Councillor Bob Gledhill to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Services:-

‘I understand that, due to an error on the part of The Phone Book, the main Council number is not listed in the latest edition. Has the Council taken any action to minimise inconvenience caused by this mistake?’

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Services’ reply:-

‘The correct and updated advert was submitted to BT with plenty of time to spare, but they did not update the listing correctly before publication. We made a formal complaint at the time, and received an apology from BT. The advert is correctly listed in the classified section of the phone book under "C" for Councils, and on BT’s website for directory enquiries. We spoke to Richard Balls in communications at the time, but he felt that a press release would not be useful, and would more than likely draw attention to the error. Other than councillor enquiries, we have no record of any complaint from the public about the number being incorrect in the phone book.’

Question 17

Councillor Adrian Holmes to the Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance:-

'Earlier this month, an investigation by the Information Commissioner highlighted that 40 companies were buying information on trade unionists to vet potential employees. Does the Council have contracts with any of the companies implicated in this investigation? If so, does this constitute a breach of contract?'

Councillor Alan Waters, Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance's reply:-

'The Council does not have any contracts with those companies identified by the Information Commissioner following their investigation into the "Consulting Organisation" earlier this month and consequently there cannot be a breach of contract. Some of those companies named in the investigation are part of wider contract groups that we do have a contractual relationship with and we are writing to these companies to ensure that no discrimination has taken place.'

Question 18

Councillor Tom Dylan to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

'The Matrix Project is one of the organisations in the city that carries out crucial work helping women working in the sex industry. For example, it helps women get out of prostitution and into work or college and its work has also reduced the anti-social behaviour and crime associated with street based sex work in Norwich. However, the organisation currently has a funding gap of £16,000 per year and may have to reduce its services if this gap is not plugged. What help can the Council give in helping Matrix explore all funding options?'

Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion's reply:-

'The Matrix Project does indeed play an important role in supporting some of the most vulnerable women in the City as well as also reducing the impact of the sex industry on the local neighbourhood.

When I was made aware of the original proposal to stop the funding to the Matrix Project the Leader wrote to the Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership raising our concerns that the valuable work the of the Project would stop. I am particularly pleased that this had a positive effect and that interim funding has been put in place to maintain the service and that a number of other agencies have made a financial commitment to them.

I am aware that there is still a gap in the Matrix Project budget and officers have been working with their staff to identify any opportunities to resolve this.

Unfortunately the Council does not have commissioning or project budgets to contribute to the Matrix budget gap. However, officers have offered to continue to explore funding opportunities and to support any grant applications that are developed so that the valued work can continue.'

Question 19

Councillor Samir Jeraj to the Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care -

'Someone has contacted me on behalf of a resident who speaks very limited English and had difficulty in being able to express details of a housing issue to the Council. What support can the Council give in such cases, and how is this available support publicised to those who may need it?'

Councillor Julie Brociek-Coulton, Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care's reply:-

'Translation services to the council are provided by Intran. This service is advertised on all public counters, on the back or front of every publication, and on the internet. The service is used frequently by all front-facing teams as needs are identified. In addition, where identified, these needs are recorded in the councils various computer systems, allowing officers to identify language needs before a contact is initiated.'

Question 20

Councillor Stephen Little to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'The state of the road surface on Unthank Road near the shops is poor. Are there any plans to resurface this?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'Officers acknowledge the relatively poor surface condition of Unthank Road near to the shops. However there are other roads in the City which are in a worse condition and are likely to be a greater priority for treatment. One example is Unthank Road towards Convent Road where some dips have formed.

Given limited budgets and given it's relative priority it is unlikely that any resurfacing will take place on Unthank Road near to the shops in the coming financial year. The County Council as the Highway Authority allocate funds to the City Council to do works that they can afford. The budget is limited so any additional works that are not deemed serious enough have to wait for funds. It is one of the problems of two tier Local Government because the Highway Authority will always do what it considers best for all of Norfolk. Whereas, if we had control over the funds for Norwich we could look at ways of improving the service by prioritising certain elements if it was warranted.

The road is regularly inspected however and any potholes or other defects will be repaired accordingly. Also if members of the public have specific concerns they are encouraged to contact the Council and one of the highway inspectors will investigate the situation and order repairs as required.'

Question 21

Councillor Rupert Read to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'What is the average occupancy of cars coming into Norwich, and does the Executive member think enough is done to increase this?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'The County Council collect data on car occupancy which indicates average car occupancy of 1.8 per car rising from 1.67 in 2003. The figures contrast with an UK average for all trips of 1.6 and 1.2 for commuter trips.

The above data is encouraging but there is always more that could be done. The Council is not the transport authority but I would commend the County Council to take any steps in this direction, an area which I know they are prioritising. For the City Council there are three areas; setting suitable parking tariffs, encouraging car sharing as an ingredient of travel plans associated with new development and encouraging our own staff to car share.

Car sharing was promoted and encouraged as one of the measures forming the recent EU funded CIVITAS sustainable transport project in Norwich. Evaluation of the measure as the EU project draws to a close shows that the initiative generated 2167 new members and has saved in the region of 1.4 million vehicle miles, 371 tonnes of carbon dioxide and £320,000 in fuel costs.'

Question 22

Councillor Ruth Makoff to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'In March 2008, I submitted a petition to the Norwich Highways Agency Committee about the footpath between Bowthorpe School Community Park and Tollhouse Road, which is in need of maintenance. I have recently been told by officers that the path is not registered, and as a result the Council has no way of getting involved in maintaining neither the path nor taking action to ensure it is maintained. I understood that recent legislation has made it easier for Councils to get involved in such situations. Please could the Executive member investigate all possible routes for the Council to help?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'I suspect Councillor Makoff may be referring to section 215 of the Town Planning Act 1990 (as amended) which gives various powers to Councils over the owners of untidy or derelict land. However, to exercise such powers it is necessary to establish the owner of the land in question and, as in this particular case the land is not registered, this is very difficult.

I understand that Councillor Makoff is in continuing discussion with officers and whilst adoption also appears to be impossible it may be possible to take action to maintain the path providing it can be established that members of the public have enjoyed unfettered access along the path for at least 20 years. Officers are also taking to steps to confirm whether highway authority funding would be available to pay for any maintenance.'

Question 23

Councillor Janet Bearman to the Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion:-

'In view of the proposals that have been put forward by the police for establishing 'priority setting meetings', how does the Council see the future for the Safer Neighbourhood Action Panels (SNAPs) given that these were originally set up as a partnership between the police and the Council?'

Councillor Bert Bremner, Executive Member for Community Safety and Community Cohesion reply:-

'The establishment of SNAP panels has provided a valuable opportunity for residents to be able to have an influence over the services in their local neighbourhood and to improve their quality of life.

The Council and partners are also aware that SNAP's are one of a number of mechanisms that residents can use to engage with service providers.

Cllr Bearman is quite correct in saying that SNAP Panels were established in Norwich in conjunction with the Council. However, whilst there has been a strong partnership ethos to this work, it is a Home Office – Police led programme and in Norfolk is therefore led by the Police at a force or county level.

The Police are currently reviewing how partners can contribute to the proposals on a more structured basis and once the Council have been informed of the process this will be circulated to members and SNAP Chairs so SNAP panels can contribute to the debate.

The Community safety team will continue to update and involve members and officers as far as is possible in discussion with the Police on these future plans.'

Question 24

Councillor Peter Offord to the Executive Member for Sustainable City Development:-

'The halt in the development of Hopkins Homes on the former Bertrams Books site on Rosary Road means a delay in the proposed crossing over Rosary Road that was going to happen at the same time. Residents have been expressing concern to me about this. It is especially dangerous for those approaching the city from the St. Leonards Road and Hill House Road side. Would the Executive member look into providing a crossing on this road ahead of the proposed development?'

Councillor Brian Morrey, Executive Member for Sustainable City Development's reply:-

'I am afraid that Councillor Offord has been misinformed; the Hopkins Home development is not required to provide a crossing on Rosary Road. However it is required to make a sustainable transport contribution of £31,883. At present the intention is to use that money for public transport improvements in the area.

Last year the City Council introduced a traffic management scheme on Rosary Road, which involved changes to the road markings and the introduction of interactive signs on the approach to the bends by Chalk Hill Road. Officers at the time did not consider that the numbers of pedestrians crossing Rosary Road warranted a formal crossing point and nor did there appear to be an obvious desire line for pedestrians.

If Councillor Offord could let the officers know direct exactly where he thinks a crossing should be provided they will carry out an assessment of the numbers of pedestrians in the area and the delays they experience when they cross the road. This will then inform where Rosary Road comes in the pedestrian crossing priority list, and whether it would be appropriate to bid for funding for a crossing in 2010/11.'