



Council

24 September 2024

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Davis to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“Age UK strongly opposes the means-testing of Winter Fuel Payments. They estimate 2 million pensioners who need the money will not receive it.

The House of Commons library figures for pensioners missing out on the payments in the Norwich area are Norwich North (16,956) Norwich South (13,686).

Will the cabinet write to both Norwich MPs, tomorrow, asking them to commit public support to the reinstatement of the payments?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“The Labour-led Government is seeking to tackle a £22 billion in-year Budget gap not disclosed by the then Conservative-led Government to opposition parties during the General Election. In this context and the broader economic inheritance, we reluctantly support in-principle the means-testing of Winter Fuel Payment.

The retention of the Winter Fuel Payment for those in receipt of Pension Credit will see a large number of those in poverty retain the Winter Fuel Payment. Those on the State Pension will see their pensions increase by £460 in line with average earnings, reflecting the Labour-led Government's commitment to retaining the triple lock. The six month extension of the Household Support Fund will enable our Community Partnerships Team to issue grants to households this winter, including pensioners who need support with their energy costs this winter. We are confident that the Government's investment in renewable energy and domestic energy security through GB Energy will reduce energy bills by the end of the Parliament.

However, this Labour-led City Council is concerned about the number of pensioners entitled to Pension Credit who are not claiming. We would encourage the Government to review the eligibility criteria threshold to ensure all pensioners who rely on the Winter Fuel Payment to meet their heating costs continue to receive it. Extending entitlement to all Housing Benefit claimants would go a significant way towards addressing this.

The Council has already secured over £3 million in funding to install energy efficiency measures. We have also procured Groundworks East to deliver their Green Doctors scheme in Norwich. The scheme will tackle fuel poverty by providing advice on low-cost, practical energy efficiency measures, provide

support on managing energy bill debts, and refer within the NCAN to other partner agencies for advice and support. We will continue to fund our Financial Inclusion Consortium of advice/advocacy VCSE partners.

This Labour-led City Council has produced a communications plan to promote and support sign-up rates for Pension Credit, and communications have already started. We are exploring other measures to alleviate concerns of fuel poverty among pensioners this winter”

Question 2

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:

“What would the benefits be to this council of three year financial settlements from Central Government compared to the previous Government’s policy of one year settlements?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:

“The benefits are fundamentally in terms of the certainty provided for financial planning. Three year time frames confirm income streams, in terms of grants, alongside clarity around Government’s assumptions and expectations in broader terms around local authorities’ financial management options, future funding and decisions, for example in relation to Core Spending Power which is directly linked to assumptions around service needs and associated funding.

This certainty allows local authorities to plan across the whole of the time frame, which supports a more strategic approach towards managing and transitioning to any changes and developments arising. Local government services are invariably complex and delivery benefits residents best by being planned strategically rather than reactively.”

Question 3

Councillor Maguire to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:

“Much has been said of an over £22 billion black hole in Central Government budgets left by the previous government. The Trade Union UNISON have said that there is a more than £4 billion gap in the budgets of local government, required just to maintain the current level of service. How would you respond?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:

“I agree that the shortfall left by the previous Government in the budgets of the Local Government sector, is as stated by UNISON. A survey carried out by the Local Government Association found that a fifth of all Councils fear that in the near future they may have to issue a Section 114 notice, which results in cuts to services and higher Council Tax bills. Norwich City Council is not in that position, but other Councils are.”

Question 4

Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“In April a tenant showed me two holes in her walls blocked with plastic bags where extractor fans had been taken out by NCSL months before that had not been replaced, with the job being closed in February. I followed up and these are now thankfully in place. However, I also asked about the pervasive damp and mould in her flat, despite efforts over the years to correct the problem. She runs two dehumidifiers, in separate rooms, which she must empty every day of several litres of water, which contributes to her energy costs. She had reported the damp many times, with little success, while I also received no reply. On 12 September, after me asking again, she is finally getting a damp survey. More than a year of dangerous damp and mould. What measures are in place to check flats where councillors and tenants are not so persistent?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“Fortnightly meetings take place to review the progress of damp cases. In addition, a damp prevention group was created in July 2024 which takes place monthly with a multiservice area approach (includes property services, tenancy management, communities and health) to look at ways of preventing damp and mould, how to reach out to residents struggling and educational pieces which can be developed to support resident and partners.

Norwich City Council has set up a dedicated damp and mould telephone line for residents, our contractors have been instructed to report any signs of damp and mould directly to our dedicated damp and mould telephone or mailbox, our gas servicing contractor has reported cases.

Further development works are taking place to improve our resident's customer journey in relation to damp and mould, such as a new policy, value customer mapping sessions, damp and mould leaflets and videos which show how we undertake mould washes and so on.”

Question 5

Councillor Young to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“New council 'Metrostor' bin stores costing tens of thousands are leading to smelly, vermin infested areas which residents in the West Pottergate area warned of. This is because the council, seemingly without realising, ordered stores where the bins themselves have had to have their lids removed in order to fit inside, so are sitting permanently open, often with tons of rubbish in, for weeks. Residents have not been asked what they think of this 'trial'. Why was it not considered that these bins need securely closeable lids like all other communal bins?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“The impact that Metrostor bin enclosures could potentially have with regards to bad smell and vermin were fully researched prior to their installation. We have no evidence (for example complaints from residents) that they have caused these issues at any of the locations where they have been installed.

With regards to the removal of their lids to allow their use, the Council were fully aware that having these bin stores means that lids are removed. By not having the lids on the bins inside the enclosures it makes it easier to dispose of waste for residents, as it can be done by passing it through the aperture rather than having to lift the lid.

The bin stores themselves are fully enclosed, except for the aperture that allows waste to be deposited. We have investigated the use of these bin stores in other council areas, which has identified that the bins do not cause vermin problems. In addition, they help minimise smell due to the fact that they enclose the bins that are stored within.

The investment in these bin stores represents the Council's commitment to improving facilities and the aesthetic of our estates, and to help promote correct waste and recycling in the city. We will shortly be seeking residents feedback on the bin stores now that they have been installed for a reasonable period.”

Question 6

Councillor Hoechner to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“There have been recurrent problems with uncollected waste at Earlham House, with overflowing bins presenting both a health and a fire hazard. I understand the issue has been escalated to a Head of Service level now. I would like to know what options are being considered for dealing with this issue once and for all, and within what timeframe residents can expect a durable solution to be implemented?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“The collection issues that we have recently experienced at Earlham House are sporadic in nature, and we have been working closely with our waste collection contractor to provide a speedy resolution.

The capacity for all of our flatted properties in the city is continuously reviewed, and we believe that the number and type of bins at Earlham House is sufficient, as is the collection frequency. As such, we are not considering further action at this time.”

Question 7

Councillor Catt to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“In December 2023, the Housing Ombudsman found severe maladministration in Norwich City Council's handling of a case regarding damp and mould where a resident was hospitalised after inaction from the council. What learnings has the cabinet member for housing taken from this case?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“I am sincerely sorry for the incidents which occurred during this case. Following the ombudsman findings work is underway in both Norwich City Council's Property Services Team and Norwich City Services Ltd. to improve the customer experience, particularly where failings have already occurred and resulted in formal complaints being submitted. The Director of Property Services and NCSL's Operations Director jointly own the action plan in relation to this case and ensure tasks are completed within timescales proposed.

A number of actions were identified within this report which include redesign of repair priorities, improved communication with resident and internal departments, additional training for staff awareness, dedicated contact line for residents and greater visibility. In addition, further steps and monitoring have been put in place as mentioned within response to question four.”

Question 8

Councillor Worley to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“As per home options policy, a direct let will be considered by the council where a property is deemed 'not occupiable so that they need to be moved from the property on a temporary or permanent basis'. I have struggled to get a specific criteria for when a direct let would be considered. Can the cabinet member please tell me the number of cases in the last year that a direct let was carried out and for what reasons?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“In certain circumstances the council will allocate properties directly to applicants, outside of the usual process and illustrative examples are set out in our allocations policy.

In the past year, the council has enabled 101 direct lets this compares with 91 the previous year.

These related to allocation of tenancies to residents who had been living in a property for a long period but were unable to succeed to it when a tenant died or left; ensuring safeguarding or public protection; making permanent a temporary decant where the tenant could not return home; and a small number issued as a new tenancy to tenants who had served notice to quit and then changed their minds.

In addition, and in accordance with our allocations policy, of the 101 direct lets, 28 properties were direct let to homeless households in priority need to whom the council owed a housing duty, and 16 properties were allocated to clients as part of the 'hostel move-on' protocol with supported accommodation providers.”

Question 9

Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“Sheltered housing tenants have received a letter stating that two Sheltered Housing Support Officers have been off long-term sick, and that a third would be off for four weeks. What protocols are in place for managing staff workloads in the Sheltered Housing team to reduce the chances of long-term sickness, and to reduce the impact on tenants when staff are sick?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“Officers in the sheltered housing team receive regular supervision and support. The council also provides a range of services to help staff manage their wellbeing.

Tenants were informed about the reduced staffing capacity at the earliest opportunity and reminded how to contact the team. The team ensure that new tenants receive a welcome visit, prioritise other tenants who need support and continue to provide visits and telephone support as required. All tenants have 24/7 access to the community alarm provided by Apello should they need emergency assistance.”

Question 10

Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“Can the cabinet member tell me how many privately rented properties in the city have an EPC rating of F or G?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“The Council does not hold records on the number of privately rented properties in the city that are rated F or G under their EPC rating. We are seeking to undertake a stock condition survey of private rented accommodation across the city which could include compiling data on the EPC ratings of properties to inform any decision on additional licensing regimes.

Issues which are reported to the Council by tenants, for example, around excessive cold or poor heating, are investigated and action taken where there are failings against statutory requirements.

Officers are currently preparing a new private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy which will include a specific enforcement section under The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015, which will give us complementary powers to the Housing and Health Safety Rating Systems legislation, being applied currently.”

Question 11

Councillor Francis to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“Last year, the council unanimously passed a motion on improving standards in the private rented sector. The motion committed the council to take action on many points, but one simple request was the establishment of a clear online form for tenants to report rogue landlords to the council. Why has this not happened after nearly 10 months?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“Planning and Regulatory Services are undergoing a service digitisation programme which will consider all aspects of improving the service we offer to our customers. The first area for consideration has a focus on private sector housing and HMO licensing. As part of the digitisation of our services, we are undertaking a full review of relevant web pages, all communications, and all forms available on our website which customers use to apply for our services or report issues. The reporting of issues by tenants is to be looked at as part of that programme.

It will be important for us to engage with both tenants and landlords with any proposed changes to how we operate our services as part of the digitisation programme ahead of any change to how they engage with our service.

In addition, it is important to understand that tenants can report issues with landlords but cannot establish whether they are ‘rogue’ landlords. The tests for consideration of a ‘fit and proper person’ depend on several checks being undertaken, and these are not available to tenants, for example, DBS checks. If a tenant reports issues with a landlord, the Council will undergo the due diligence required to establish if they should be added to any such national rogue landlords register and this would be considered as part of any complaint investigation.

There is an existing form for tenants to use to report issues with landlords and this can be found under the Healthy Homes Referral Form on the Council’s website. This form is currently linked with wider housing referrals and so any new form specific for private rented tenants would require amendments to the form for wider housing referrals also. It will be considered if production of an improved/ new form to report issues tenants in the private rented sector are experiencing can be brought forward in advance of wider changes.”

Question 12

Councillor Price to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“Last year, the council unanimously passed a motion to licence all landlords including those that fall outside of mandatory HMO licencing and to introduce a code of conduct for landlords. When can we expect to see a plan and timeframe for the introduction of this scheme?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“Local councils have discretion to introduce additional licensing of other types of HMOs and private rented accommodation which are not subject to mandatory licensing. This may be in a defined geographical area or across the whole of a council's area, but these schemes should be aimed at dealing with situations that cannot be improved by any other means.

We can only introduce an additional licensing regime if we are satisfied that a significant proportion of the HMOs within Norwich are being poorly managed and are giving rise, or likely to give rise, to problems affecting the occupiers or members of the public. We must also be satisfied that there are no other courses of action that might provide an effective remedy and that the introduction of a licensing scheme will significantly assist in dealing with the problem. We therefore need evidence to support our decision making to introduce such a licensing regime.

We have already carried out a survey of all existing licenced HMOs to understand their spread across the city to determine whether specific geographical areas are impacted in terms of number of whether there are any hot spots of issues. A second piece of evidence that is required is a stock condition survey so we can understand the conditions in the private rented sector homes across the city. The stock condition would take approximately 12 months to complete, funding will be considered as part of budget setting for 2025/26.

Once we have the necessary evidence to support any decision on whether to introduce such a licensing regime or not, we can move forward through the required consultation and cabinet processes if we wish to introduce this.

As already mentioned, this is not the only route to seeking improvements in our private rented sector and we must be assured this is the right thing for the residents of the private rented sector in making any decision and ultimately the adoption of any such licensing regime would be a decision for the Secretary of State.

The Council already has Code of Conduct for landlords which can be found on the Council's website. This will be reviewed as part of wider improvements to the website information around private rented accommodation and HMOs as part of the service digitisation project.

As it develops, I would be happy to share the emerging plan and timescales on this important piece of work, but our first focus must be seeking the evidence to support our decision making and this necessarily takes time.”

Question 13

Councillor Schmierer to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Residents of Norwich have been (rightfully) complaining about the poor public transport connections to London. For many months earlier this year, the train service from Norwich to London has been adversely affected by rail works on both the Norwich to London and Cambridge to London line, meaning that journeys which should take under two hours often takes over three. Given that for many years we have been promised "Norwich in 90", can the Leader of the Council write to the relevant parties at the Department of Transport, Network Rail and Abellio Greater Anglia to voice Norwich City Council's concerns that the decision to do work on both lines concurrently (Cambridge to London and Norwich to London)? This disruption can lead to a modal shift that sees passengers stopping using the trains and become more car reliant, which is gravely concerning in the midst of a climate emergency.”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Schmierer.

I agree that I would welcome improvements in the rail service between Norwich and London and would not wish to see anything happening that would lead to modal shift away from trains to private cars. I am very happy to write to relevant parties at the Department for Transport to express our desire that this should not happen.”

Question 14

Councillor Calvert to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“The Evening News recently reported that "council bosses" were calling for civil parking fines to be raised to deter the high numbers of repeat offenders including some receiving over 100 tickets per year. Has the council written to government to request such a rise?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“The city council provides on street parking enforcement services on behalf of the county council, and they have the statutory responsibility for setting policy with regards to drivers who receive multiple Parking Control Notices (PCNs).

The city council is a member of the Norfolk Parking Partnership, along with the county council and the six other district and borough councils. At the Parking Partnership meeting in June, it was agreed that the Partnership would write to the Department for Transport (DfT) requesting a review of parking fines. The partnership is awaiting the DfT's response.”

Question 15

Councillor Bolton to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“Residents and collection staff regularly report that bin lorries are prevented from accessing streets and properties due to antisocial parking with Biffa issuing a large number of parking notices in 2023. What is being done to address this problem?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“Anti-social parking, by its very nature, tends to be short in duration. It also tends to involve isolated incidents, and as such is difficult to enforce. By the time enforcement teams receive a notification of anti-social parking and attend any reported incident, it will usually have ended.

With regards to Biffa being unable to access streets, they will return to inaccessible streets on a number of occasions until they can gain access. By way of clarification, Biffa do not issue parking notices.”

Question 16

Councillor Fox to ask the cabinet member for planning and regulatory services the following question:

“The Orbit Homes site at St Anne's quarter has been stalled for many years now, creating a 'dead zone' in King St fronted by ugly grey hoardings which just attract graffiti and leave residents feeling that their area is unloved. Would the council ask the government to change planning laws to ensure that developers must complete approved plans within a reasonable time frame?”

Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for planning and regulatory services' response:

“I understand the frustration of those affected by schemes that appear to have stalled. I want to see developments of vitally needed housing completed as quickly as possible.

There are a couple of aspects to your question which I will focus on.

Firstly, in terms of ‘a reasonable time frame’, a definition of what ‘reasonable’ is required before considering approaching government. I imagine that the definition would have to be developed to reflect many different aspects of many different types of build, circumstances and sites in which the developments were taking place and aspects of funding involved. Secondly, requiring developers to complete schemes within a specified timescale may not achieve the desired outcome. There are also potential implications related to a set timeframe. Taking this approach may, instead, lead to sites being left vacant, perhaps without the benefit of any planning permission and could actually put further barriers in the way of completion.

Whether or not a development is completed is the outcome of a range of factors and pressures, including developing sites in a challenging economic climate. A wider solution is required rather than applying an arbitrary time limit for completion imposed through the planning system.”

Question 17

Councillor Caine to ask the cabinet member for housing the following question:

“The Norwich City Council website states that the Mile Cross depot site is due to be developed for 100% socially rented housing. Previous statements from the Cabinet Member for Housing and from the former Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services have seemed to imply that delivering 100% socially rented housing at the site is in question. These statements have implied that the mix of tenure will have to be considered as the site progresses. Can you confirm whether you are sticking to the promise of 100% socially rented housing and confirm that that will not change?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for housing's response:

“A planning application has been submitted for 67 new council homes as the first phase of the development of the former city works depot on Mile Cross Road and this high-quality scheme has been designed to meet the identified housing need from our housing register.

When the site was first considered some years ago officers looked at the opportunity for a mixed tenure development to provide a mixed, balanced, sustainable community. Due to market conditions at the time, the scheme was not viable and so an alternative strategy of developing the site for all council housing was promoted and budget provision for the entire development of approximately 170 homes was made within the HRA capital programme.

As market conditions have changed, options for the tenure of the future phases of development on the site are being considered, Any decision would be subject to a business case, and considered in the future by Cabinet.”

Question 18

Councillor Haynes to ask the cabinet member for an open and modern council the following question:

“Why are there no recycling bins for paper in City Hall?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for an open and modern council's response:

“Thank you for your question, I’m please to inform the elected member that non-confidential paper can be recycled using the mixed recycling containers located in all kitchen areas of the building. In addition, confidential wastepaper shredding and recycling bins are contained in all printing areas in City Hall. I am confident that one of our officers would happily show the elected member the location of these facilities next time you are in the building.”

Question 19

Councillor Oliver to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“Back in July, Child Poverty Action Group called on Government to abolish the two-child benefit cap this year. DWP statistics show that 1 in 9, or 1.6 million children are now being harmed. Half the families describe a struggle to pay rent or mortgage and a shocking 93% report it has affected their ability to buy food.

Years of austerity policies won't be rolled back overnight, but we cannot afford to delay when 'Children are losing their life chances...now – they can't wait for the new government to align every star before the policy is scrapped'. The urgency should be no surprise to anyone; back in 2017 experts described the cap as 'the worst social security policy ever'. Worse, then, than the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 1934 Unemployment Board household means-test.

Will the cabinet member join me in condemning the government's decision to keep the two-child benefit cap?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“The Norwich City Council Labour Group voted in favour of the motion tabled by the Liberal Democrats Group in January calling for the two child benefit cap to be abolished. This is reflected in the motion we are bringing later in the agenda. More importantly this Labour-led City Council has historically disregarded the two child benefit cap when calculating net income for the purpose of CTRS for legacy HB-based claimants.

As per our motion later in the agenda, we welcome the new Labour-led Government's fifth mission to “to break down the barriers to opportunity, for every child at every stage and shatter the class ceiling...and make Britain one of the fairest countries in the OECD”, and the new Labour Government's Mission Plan including a commitment to reduce child poverty.

We welcome the first steps the new Labour Government has set out in the King's Speech towards tackling child poverty. Free breakfast clubs in every primary school. Raising family incomes by introducing a Real Living Wage reflecting the cost-of-living. Enhancing families' financial security through a New Deal for Working People and protecting families privately renting from arbitrary Section 21 evictions. We also welcome the decision as a short-term measure to extend the Household Support Fund for a further six months.

The creation and scope of a cross-departmental Government Child Poverty Taskforce to produce a national Child Poverty Strategy is a positive measure. In light of the negative impacts of the two child benefit cap on child poverty, as researched by the Child Poverty Action Group among other thinktanks, we strongly encourage the Government to follow the resolution of the TUC and examine abolishing this measure.

The King's Speech is where the Government sets out its legislative programme for the following parliamentary session. The correct time to make material budgetary changes, such as abolishing the two child benefit cap, is at a national fiscal moment. The Office for Budget Responsibility requires ten weeks' notice to provide an independent forecast ahead of a Budget. An Emergency Budget, as Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng pursued, would have been fiscally reckless, potentially increasing poverty, particularly in light of the £22 billion in-year Budget gap not disclosed to opposition parties by the then Conservative-led Government in the General Election."

Question 20

Councillor Carrington to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“The wave of racist riots and aggression across Britain in July and August saw groups mounting attacks on mosques, refugee accommodation and ethnic minority homes and businesses. These groups were mobilised by online influencers and far right political figures. Growing support for the far right in this country is becoming increasingly evident. A recent You Gov poll in early August reported that 42% believed the riots to be ‘justified’. The new Labour government acted swiftly and decisively in putting a stop to the recent disorder by arresting significant numbers of those involved. Yet concerns remain that further outbreaks may follow. In Norwich counter protests far outnumbered bigots. What is this council doing to combat such hatred and promote inclusiveness, and will you join me in condemning the outbreaks and declaring that all ethnic minorities and faith groups form part of the very fabric of UK society and are welcome here?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“The deplorable and shameful scenes we saw across the country in July and August were horrific. It is staggering that we are still seeing such violent abuse targeted at communities because of their faith, ethnicity and background. There is never any justification for these actions and behaviours. I wholeheartedly stand with you and in solidarity with Norwich’s diverse communities, as I’m sure all members here do, in condemning in the strongest terms any abuse targeted at ethnic minorities, faith groups and refugee and asylum seeker communities.

As a council we are working towards becoming a Council of Sanctuary, with a view to submitting an application coinciding with 2025 Refugee Week. This is a key workstream within the aegis of our broader EDI Action Plan to sit under our already published EDI strategy. We are already doing a lot to support these communities, combat this awful hatred and promote inclusiveness.

The council supports a range of organisations through its grants for events in Norfolk Black History Month and Norwich Refugee Week. This year a small culture grant has also been awarded to The Nest to support their work with people from abroad now living in Norwich. This project explores stories of food, sharing food and growing food together.

In addition to this we used a portion of our Asylum Dispersal Grant funding to fund 11 organisations across the city supporting refugee and asylum seeker communities, providing services which support their integration and bring the broader community together through food and stories to promote understanding, social cohesion and inclusiveness.

As part of Refugee Week 2024 the Council invited in Sanctuary Ambassadors, a group of inspiring individuals with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, to speak in the Council Chamber. It is through giving a platform to these voices that we can raise awareness of experiences, combat hatred and promote inclusiveness.

The council is working with a range of local charities and organisations to provide Go4Less cards to refugees and asylum seekers. This enables people to participate in low cost sport, fitness and cultural activities helping to promote inclusion and reduce isolation, alongside improving health outcomes. In collaboration with Active Norfolk, the council has established a football group for refugees and asylum seekers at the Football Development Centre in Bowthorpe, and Riverside Leisure Centre offer three months of free membership to asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees.

The events team work with religious groups to facilitate festivals, such as Eid prayers at end of Hajj in Earlham Park, and to engage groups in council-led events such as the Lord Mayor's Weekend. This year, Norwich City of Sanctuary won first prize for the Lord Mayor's Procession.

We will continue to support these valued communities, to raise awareness and promote understanding. They are an essential part of what makes Norwich the fine, vibrant and diverse city that is it and we will use our voice and platform to make sure everyone knows we stand in solidarity with them."

Question 21

Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“Could the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich please inform me how Norwich City Council makes effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“The council has a statutory duty to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants, known as DFGs. DFGs are used to help non-City Council tenant residents with disabilities remain living safely and independently within their own home. Someone who receives a DFG can expect to stay out of a care home setting for four years longer than people who don't have adaptations.

DFG funding comes via a grant from the County Council passported from the Better Care Fund, with the allocation for this year being just over £1.4m. This funding, as well as delivering disabled adaptations, is also used to fund home repairs for low-income families where their homes are unsafe, tackle fuel poverty via our Affordable Warmth Grants, secure people's homes who are experiencing domestic abuse, and aid discharge from hospital.

As a landlord we also provide these same grants for our tenants, with the budget for adaptations to council homes this year being set at £2.3m.

This workstream is delivered by our highly commended Home Improvement Team who in 2023-2024 delivered over 690 grants, 486 of which were DFGs. This equates to over £3.5m being awarded in grants with the average grant being £5,940.”

Question 22

Councillor Huntley to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“Could the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich comment on usage and income at the Norman Centre year-to-date is comparing to recent years?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“The overall usage at the Norman Centre for the year-to-date has steadily increased since reopening after Covid-19. There were 13,301 users in 2021-2022, the first full year of operation, compared with 27,049 so far in 2024-2025. Gym usage has increased which may be attributable to members returning to the Norman Centre having initially moved their membership to other local discount gyms. Usage of the Sports Hub, Appleyard and Bignold Rooms and other hire spaces, have all also increased over the last few years.

Overall, income at the Norman Centre in the first two quarters of 2024-2025 has increased by 14% compared with the first two quarters of 2023-2024. We are committed to creating a Fairer Norwich for all our residents, and I'm delighted that the Norman Centre is enabling people who live in the Mile Cross area to access sport and physical activity, supporting better health outcomes for them.

We continue to collaborate with Active Norfolk and local residents across the city to offer free and accessible opportunities for physical activity and fitness.”

Question 23

Councillor Padda to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“I was pleased to hear that a team of Neighbourhood Energy Champions will soon be available to engage with residents, as part of a project run by Norwich Climate Commission and funded by Norwich City Council. Could the cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich comment further on the benefits this will bring?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“Norwich City Council is committed to delivering a Climate Responsive Norwich, reducing emissions and adapting our city for the future. The Neighbourhood Energy Champions initiative is a very exciting part of the jigsaw of projects that make up the city’s response.

This initiative is being delivered by ‘Our Power’, a community-led project part-funded by Norwich City Council and operating under the oversight of Norwich Climate Commission. Our Power aims to work with communities to reduce energy usage and decarbonise homes; helping to bring down bills and support our planet.

The Champions will be volunteers recruited to Our Power and will work as trusted members of the community to share information and resources to accelerate energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives. It is vital that residents have access to reliable information, and having trusted voices in the local community to engage and empower people has been identified as key to promoting uptake of available energy opportunities.

Energy champions will be there for everyone, whether it’s to help access funding and schemes or to offer impartial advice on reducing energy bills and carbon footprints. They will lead grassroots actions and encourage their communities to unite on collective schemes such as the group-buying of materials, helping residents to save money as well as reduce their carbon emissions.

Norwich Climate Commission will be holding an introductory workshop for Our Power at Norwich Arts Centre on Saturday 22 October, and this will be free to attend. I’d encourage colleagues to share news of this event with your communities to ensure as many people as possible are aware of this opportunity.”

Question 24

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich the following question:

“Could the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich please comment on the formation and work of the Inclusive Norwich Partnership?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for a fairer Norwich's response:

“In December 2023, the council awarded Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding to Age UK Norwich, to establish the Inclusive Norwich Partnership (INP). The INP is a partnership of organisations who provide services and support for members of our community with disabilities and those with additional needs relating to accessibility or age-related challenges.

The partnership seeks to enable the council and partners to hear and collect the views from those facing these challenges, so that they may be better able to influence local policies.

Through the INP, Norwich City Council aims to establish better working relationships, through involving the partnership's members and other stakeholders when new strategies or proposals are being developed.

The INP project has three phases:

- Collating a body of accessibility focused best-practice guidance to produce a condensed reference guide to promote equality standards and a library of supporting material pertinent to developers.
- Secondly, the INP will highlight the best-practice material and engage lived experience groups, organisations, and residents to understand their views and how positive and negative experiences impact.
- Finally, as an output of the previous phases, the INP have begun developing a business case for a multi-purpose re-enablement space in Norwich. One which may look to promote better health, equality, access, rehabilitation and training.

Engagement so far across the council has been excellent and we look forward to embedding this practice into our work.”

Question 25

Councillor Smith to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“I was delighted with the news that six Norwich City Council parks and green spaces were awarded the prestigious Green Flag Award this year. I’m especially pleased that Jenny Lind Park, in my ward, was one of three parks to receive this for the first time. Can you elaborate on the importance of Green Flag Awards and what they signify?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“Winning a Green Flag Award brings with it a wealth of benefits. They range from the status of being affiliated with a prestigious awards programme through to tangible benefits such as boosting tourism and opening up revenue opportunities. Research shows that people will make special trips to award-winning sites.

Green Flag is an internationally recognised standard for parks and green spaces. Any park that receives a Green Flag award also gains a vast amount of prestige and provides communities with a great sense of civic pride. It also demonstrates high levels of partnership working with communities.

From a more practical point of view, Green Flag demonstrates measurable improvements that have been made to our parks, and that in turn can support regeneration work in our neighbourhoods where this is taking place.

Upgrading a site to achieve Green Flag status can bring about improvements to health and education, reduce crime and improve the general cleanliness of an area, whilst at the same time providing a boost to its profile.

Having a Green Flag Award is an excellent lever for obtaining external funding through improvement grants and is a means of maximising revenue opportunities from within the site. An example of a national funding scheme to which winners can apply is the Heritage Lottery Fund.”

Question 26

Councillor Harper to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“The Devolution Deal, negotiated between the County Council and the previous Conservative government will now not proceed. Would the Leader like to comment on the implications of this for Norwich and Norfolk?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Harper.

The new government decided not to proceed with the former County Deal, negotiated between the county council and the previous government, because it was insufficiently ambitious. I agree with that assessment. For example, the previous deal made provision for the county to receive £20m a year for thirty years but with no annual uplift for inflation, meaning that in real terms that £20m would already have been worth only about £16m and, by the end of the thirty years, it would have been worth next to nothing. The former deal included a fund of only £7m for the entire county to support infrastructure investment such as the regeneration of Anglia Square, which was recently on the market for £8.5m. So, you can see that this fund, when spread across the county, would be totally inadequate in meeting the significant financial challenges of regeneration in the City of Norwich. We also now know that the previous government had put no money aside to pay for any of this, so the whole offer was “pie in the sky”.

The County Council have said that the loss of the deal puts in jeopardy infrastructure projects in Norwich, such as Anglia Square, East Norwich and the Norwich Dental School. I want to be absolutely clear that none of these projects is dependent on a devolution deal. For example, the council's ambition to bring Anglia Square into public ownership, in partnership with Homes England, is proceeding quite independently of the devolution process.

I believe there is now an opportunity for all councils in Norfolk to work together in partnership to secure a truly ambitious deal for Norfolk which will drive economic growth for the benefit of the whole county. Norwich must play a key role in this: the urban area includes 25% of the county population, 35% of the county's jobs, 23% of the county's businesses, 38% of the county's Gross Value Added and it contributes £1.6 bn to UK p.l.c. It is inconceivable that a successful devolution deal would not involve Norwich as a core partner with a seat at the decision-making table. However, all councils, both district and county, must be part of any new deal and part of the decision-making process. This was not the case with the previous deal where the Directly Elected Leader and the County Council's cabinet had all the power and the districts had none.

Please be assured that I am working tirelessly to promote a better and more ambitious deal for the county, with real powers and much improved funding so that we can drive investment in skills, jobs and homes for the people of Norfolk and more besides.”

Question 27

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“The council successfully bid for £3.2m from the Government through the Towns Fund scheme to redevelop Hay Hill.

Two years after the work started Hay Hill remains unfinished and closed off by metal barriers.

For such a focal point in the city centre to be left as a building site for this length of time has caused much dismay and comment, not only on the length of time taken for this relatively straightforward redevelopment but also the costs incurred.

Several residents in my ward of Eaton have asked questions about Hay Hill on a range of topics including, the time taken, the additional works and communication with the public on how the money is being spent. In short, they are asking has this project delivered value for money and whether it will be seen as a huge disappointment in terms of improvements on what was there before?”

Councillor Stonard, the leader's response:

“The works started on Hay Hill 17 months ago in April 23, and although programmed to be completed in Spring 2024, have unfortunately extended past this predicted end date due to unforeseen circumstances. Norwich City Council officers are working with the contractor to resolve those issues and finalise some outstanding Health and Safety works prior to completing handover, and but as is evident from the site these works are nearing completion.

Hay Hill is one of the few remaining large city centre spaces in Norwich, however reports of trips and falls, and general deterioration in the fabric since the last remodel in the 1980s, had resulted in the space looking tired and not being used effectively.

The project has created a reimagined, vibrant and accessible open space within the city centre. The space has been transformed so that it can be used for events and cultural activities for the people of Norwich and visitors, and the outcomes of this project justify the delivery costs.

The improved walking links between Norwich Market, Millennium Plain, Gentleman’s Walk and Chantry Place, will enhance the accessibility within the city centre, attract investment and boost the visitor economy by improving the quality and look of the area as a whole.

Whilst the area is currently fenced off to the public, we are sure that your constituents can see that the significant remodelling works have renewed the area and improved the environment for the people of Norwich substantially, both through the extensive accessibility improvements throughout the site, and the ambiance of the environment that has been created.”

Question 28

Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for a prosperous Norwich the following question:

“Visitors to Norwich are vitally important to the City and County, generating millions to the local economy each year.

An important visitor group are day visitors who chose to come by coach to explore Norwich's fantastic heritage and visitor attractions.

Has the City Council explored the benefits of obtaining 'Coach Friendly Status' for Norwich to further encourage greater numbers arriving by coach?”

Councillor Kidman, the cabinet member for a prosperous Norwich's response:

“As we all know, Norwich is a wonderful place in which to work, live and visit. We have an incredible mix of the medieval and the modern. We have culture and the arts bursting from every corner, made here in the city by an array of cultural organisations and makers. We have quirky independent shops and beautiful green flag parks. And with major work completing over the next months on the Castle and the Halls, we'll have even more to boast about.

We set out in “We Are Norwich”, our community led plan, that we are committed to making Norwich a great place to live, work, learn and visit, under our Prosperous Norwich priority. This includes an ambition to maximise our tourism offer for the benefit of all who live here, working with partners including VisitNorwich.

To deliver that ambition we are always happy to look at new ways in which we can boost visitor numbers. While we must be mindful about encouraging more traffic into the city, coaches can help to reduce congestion and carbon emissions by providing an accessible alternative to private cars for our visitors. And so, we would be very happy to look into the opportunities provided by obtaining “Coach Friendly Status”.

Please note that the following questions are second questions from members and will only be taken if the time taken by questions has not exceeded thirty minutes. This is in line with paragraph 53 of Part 3 of the council's constitution.

Question 29

Councillor Calvert to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“Communal bins at both Knowland Grove and Gristock Place have had issues with waste going uncollected for long periods, causing the area to become unsightly and unsanitary. What is the cause of this seemingly recurrent issue and what is being done to prevent a repeat of this situation?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“There are no known issues of waste being uncollected at Knowland Grove for long periods. There was a recent issue with construction waste being irresponsibly deposited in communal bins, which had prevented householders using these bins responsibly.

We would acknowledge that there are unacceptable levels of fly tipping in the area, and this is regularly cleared to ensure that the bins can be accessed for emptying. In order to tackle this problem, we have reinstalled the CCTV cameras to allow us to deter fly tippers, identify any that do deposit waste illegally and take enforcement action against them.”

Question 30

Councillor Fox to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich the following question:

“In the summer edition of Citizen magazine, the back page was entirely dedicated to highlighting where people could park in our city centre. As a council serious about reducing our carbon emissions, will the council commit to dedicating more space in the citizen magazine to promoting alternative modes of transport into the city centre, and to strongly encourage people to leave the car at home, with clear explanations of why this behaviour change is necessary?”

Councillor Hampton, the deputy leader and cabinet member for a climate responsive Norwich's response:

“Citizen magazine features content throughout the year and covers the vast array of services provided by the city council as well as the fantastic work we do in partnership with many other organisations. That includes partners and initiatives working to support residents and communities to transition away from fossil fuels in their homes or travel choices.

Our previous issues have, and will continue to include, environmental related topics ranging from articles on biodiversity, energy efficiency measures and green travel. This included an article in the winter edition promoting the new pedestrian wayfinding system in the city centre. This messaging is reflected across all our communications channels.”