NORWICH City Council

MINUTES

**Council**

**19:30 to 22:45** **20 June 2023**

Present: Councillors Wright (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Calvert, Carrington, Catt, Champion, Driver, Fox, Francis, Fulton-McAlister, Galvin, Giles, Hampton, Hoechner, Huntley, Jones, Kendrick, Kidman, Lubbock, Maguire, Oliver, Osborn, Packer, Padda, Peek, Prinsley, Sands (M), Sands (S), Schmierer, Stonard, Thomas (Va), Thomas (Vi), and Worley

Apologies: Councillors Davis, Everett, Stutely and Young.

## 1. Lord Mayor's Announcements

The Lord Mayor announced that he had attended several arts events, including a thought-provoking piece commissioned by The Hospital Rooms, an arts and mental health charity.

He had also attended the launch of Norwich Refugee Week and encouraged members to attend as many events as they were able to.

Finally, he had visited Rouen, one of Norwich's twinned cities, to sign a memorandum of understanding between the two cities which would strengthen the strong relationship already in place.

Members held a minute's silence in remembrance of Sarah Grenville, a former city councillor.

## 2. Declarations of interests

Councillor Vaughan Thomas and Councillor Fulton-McAlister declared an other interest in item 8(d) as directors of Norwich City Services Ltd.

Councillor Stonard declared an other interest in item 8(d) as an outgoing director of Lion Homes (Norwich) Ltd.

Councillor Galvin declared an other interest in item 8(f) as a private landlord.

## 3. Public questions/petitions

The Lord Mayor announced that three public questions had been received.

**Public question 1**

Nick O'Brien asked the leader of the council the following question:

> "Next month the annual Norwich Pride event will take place in the city and be enjoyed by thousands of people. This will take place against a national and international political agenda of increasing hostility towards LGBT+ rights which cause alarm to all decent citizens of this city. Given the change of leadership in this city council, can the new leader reaffirm his support for Norwich Pride, on behalf of the city council, and comment on whether he will give his personal support to those working to protect and enhance our city's reputation as being one that always welcomes and celebrates diversity and equality?"

Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development gave the following response:

"As a former chair of Norwich Pride, and as someone who has held voluntary leadership positions in the LGBT+ communities in Norfolk and Suffolk for almost 40 years, it's very easy for me to confirm my support for it and I am looking forward to taking part in this year's event on 29 July, not least as it will be the first year that the council itself will be represented through its own group taking part in the March. The council supports the annual event in a wide range of ways, by enabling road closures, providing safety advice and event logistic support, staffing and opening up City Hall as an Event Control Centre, allowing access to the balcony to start the march, flying the Pride flag and lighting City Hall in Pride colours. We also reduce the hire fees for the use of Chapelfield Gardens and Chantry Car Park. We are proud of our LGBT+ community and celebrate with them.

However, this is a challenging time for the LGBT+ community, not least because of the increasing hostility towards Trans people. Last year we passed a motion in this chamber, affirming the city council's belief that trans rights are human rights and affirming the legal rights of all protected groups under the 2010 Equality Act. This council believes all council services must be equipped to welcome and provide appropriate service and good customer care to suit transgender and non-binary people.

I would also like to take this opportunity restate the policy of Norwich Labour Party – relevant because this is a Labour-controlled council – which was passed a full seven years ago, in support of Trans rights. This policy states that Norwich Labour party stands united against discrimination of any kind and aims to create a just society. It believes that Trans men are men and Trans women are women and non-binary people are non-binary, and it further states that we stand opposed to transphobic discrimination. Trans rights are Human Rights. We stand with our trans friends and against transphobia of all kinds. As I say, this has been Norwich Labour Party policy since 2016 and we remain 100% committed to it.

I am proud that Norwich has a long history of being a radical, innovative city; rich in cultural and ethnic diversity which I, and the council, both celebrate and promote. I want the city to be a fair, welcoming, safe, accessible and inclusive

> place for everyone. As a council, we work closely with partners and communities as part of our continued commitment to tackling inequality and promoting diversity to make Norwich the best it can be for everyone, recognising that different people and communities have different needs, so it's a city where everyone feels they belong, is respected, has a voice, and has the chance to succeed and thrive.
>
> And, finally, if it's not too soon, may I wish everyone a happy pride."

By way of a supplementary question, Nick O'Brien said that Norwich had always been a welcoming city with progressive roots and asked what the priority was of the cabinet in terms of inclusion. Councillor Stonard replied that there were still areas where there was a need for greater support in the current political climate and these were the Trans community and asylum seekers and refugees.

**Public question 2**

Jane Overhill asked the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:

> "Living in Thorpe Hamlet, the presence and work of the SOS bus to ensure those who run into difficulties, while enjoying the Norwich late night economy, return safely to their homes has been acknowledged for many years. News that this service could be cut due to pressures on NHS budgets, has worried residents who live near Prince of Wales Road who have, if they encounter a person in distress, been able to assist and direct them to the SOS bus service. Can the Leader comment on whether this council will support the campaign to save this important service and advocate for its continuation?"

Councillor Stonard, the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development gave the following response:

> "The SOS bus in Norwich city centre has for 20 years been a vital source of assistance for people using the night time economy at weekends. We have come to take for granted the excellent work it does, made all the more remarkable by the fact that most of those working on the bus are volunteers.
>
> For those who aren't familiar with the work of the SOS bus, their own website states that the service provides assistance to anyone in Norwich city centre on Friday and Saturday nights whose wellbeing is threatened by illness or injury, emotional distress or other vulnerability.
>
> When large groups of people congregate there will always be people who get separated from their friends, lose their wallet or purse, have no charge in their phone, miss their bus or train home, or become injured in some way, all of which makes them incredibly vulnerable. The SOS bus is a safe haven for people in such vulnerable circumstances, in the middle of the night and often a long way from home. The volunteers are supported by a paramedic and a first aider. I went to see it some years ago when I was the portfolio holder and was very impressed by the quality of the service and the dedication and commitment of the staff and volunteers.

In case anyone doubts the need or importance of the service, I would remind them of the circumstances that led to it being set up. There were in the 1990's several deaths of young people in and around the nighttime economy. The one I remember most clearly, and this is my recollection, was a young man aged about eighteen who had been out with his friends celebrating the end of their exams. This young man was refused entry to a night club because, as I recall, he wasn't wearing the right shoes. Unfortunately, his group had already gone into the club and so none of them knew what had happened or where he was. He was left alone and vulnerable in Norwich in the small hours, separated from his friends and with time to waste. I don't know exactly what happened next, but it seems he walked down to the river where he was found drowned some hours later. Following this tragedy, Norwich realised that something had to be done, to protect young people like him, and the SOS bus was born. It was unique in this country at the time and has since been copied by other towns and cities.

The bus also provides the benefit for the NHS of helping prevent unnecessary A&E visits and ambulance call outs, both of which are expensive and add pressure to already-stretched health services and frees up police officers time.

It is part-funded by Norfolk County Council public health and the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board. The NHS is considering ending its funding in March. Recently, the local NHS also considered closing our much-loved walk-in centre. We all know that the NHS is under enormous financial pressure following fourteen years of Tory austerity and then having to respond to a global pandemic when it was already struggling from a lack of funds and staff shortages. My concern is that this wanton neglect of our superb NHS by the heartless Tories is the real reason why much-loved and moreover vital local services which we all take for granted are being considered for closure. It's all about money but in reality, both these services actually save the NHS money. Overwhelming public and political pressure saved our walk-in centre and the same must happen with the SOS bus. Therefore, I am very pleased to confirm that this council will support the campaign to save the SOS bus and will advocate for its continuation."

There was no supplementary question.

**Public question 3**

Jason Bill asked the cabinet member for resources the following question:

"How does the council ensure probity in procurement by council officers?"

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources gave the following response:

"Thank you, Mr Bill. As I understand you have been made aware, the council's constitution includes our procurement rules, the purpose of which is not just to obtain value for money but as they state "to ensure probity, transparency and equality" when we are buying goods and services. These rules must be followed when the council undertakes its purchasing activity. They set out, for example, that there must be segregation of duties within purchasing

processes to minimise the risk of error and fraud and other inappropriate activity.

All council staff are bound by a code of conduct, as are all councillors, which require them to declare such conflicts and take appropriate action to manage the risk of conflict. If you want to know further details, there is extensive information on the procurement section of our website you are very welcome to review."

By way of a supplementary question, Mr Bill commented that several years ago, he had met with a council officer and asked what he could do to tender to create social housing for the council. A few weeks later, he was defamed by that officer and successfully sued the council. Recently, he had submitted a tender to the council and the officer that had previously defamed him had taken part in the consideration of the award of that tender. He asked if the council procedure adhered to the standards of the Nolan principles if the council failed to declare that it had acted unlawfully against him.

Councillor Kendrick responded that this was not a suitable forum for the question and Mr Bill was welcome to contact the Council's Monitoring Officer regarding the matter.

## 4. Minutes

**RESOLVED** to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 14 March 2023, 28 April 2023, and 23 May 2023.

## 5. Questions to Cabinet Members

(Full details of the questions and responses were available on the council's website prior to the meeting. A revised version is attached to these minutes at Appendix A and includes a minute of any supplementary questions and responses.)

The Lord Mayor announced that 22 questions had been received from members of the council to cabinet members, for which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of the council's constitution.

The questions are summarised as follows:

Question 1 Councillor Maguire to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on the Non-domestic Rating Bill

Question 2 Councillor Mike Sands to the cabinet member for resources on Voter ID

Question 3 Councillor Packer to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the leasehold system.

Question 4 Councillor Sue Sands to the leader of the council on local government funding

Question 5 Councillor Fulton-McAlister to deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Renters Reform Bill

Question 6 Councillor Kidman to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative

Question 7 Councillor Huntley to deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the Mile Cross depot site

Question 8 Councillor Prinsley to the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture on accessible toilets

Question 9 Councillor Padda to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on the decoration allowance scheme

Question 10 Councillor Driver to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on tennis facilities

Question 11 Councillor Peek to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on compulsory purchase orders

Question 12 Councillor Lubbock to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on Eaton Park parking charges

Question 13 Councillor Osborn to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on City College strikes

Question 14 Councillor Price to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on telephone wait times

Question 15 Councillor Champion to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on veteran trees in Chapelfield Gardens

Question 16 Councillor Galvin to the cabinet member for resources on interim staff

Question 17 Councillor Hoechner to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on an update to the advertising motion

Question 18 Councillor Fox to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on public access to City Hall

Question 19 Councillor Haynes to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on repairs at St Leonards Road

Question 20 Councillor Calvert to the cabinet member for climate change on an insulation scheme

Question 21 Councillor Francis to the leader of the council and the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on bins on pavements

Question 22 Councillor Schmierer to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on loneliness metrics

## 6. Gambling statement of principles (Gambling Policy)

Councillor Jones moved and Councillor Huntley seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate, it was:

**RESOLVED,** unanimously to approve the Gambling Statement of Principles (Gambling Policy).

## 7. Appointments of representatives to outside bodies 2023-24

(An updated appendix to the report was circulated prior to the meeting.)

Councillor Kendrick moved and Councillor Driver seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate, it was:

**RESOLVED,** with a majority voting in favour, to:

(1) Make appointments to non-executive outside bodies for 2023-24 as set out in appendix A to this report,

(2) Note that Councillor Schmierer is appointed to the vacancy on the Norwich Preservation Trust Ltd; and

(3) Delegate to the head of legal and procurement, in consultation with the leaders of the political groups to make any changes to the appointments arising during the year.

## 8. Motions

(Councillor Stonard indicated that he wished to withdraw item 8(g) Motion on Norwich Bus Fares and this was noted.)

### Motion 8(a) – Rights of the River Wensum

Councillor Galvin moved and Councillor Osborn seconded the following motion:

> "In April 2022 a celebration of the rights of the river Wensum took place in Wensum Park. Many hundreds of people attended and heard the informal but powerful declaration of its rights.
>
> Our freshwater environments and waterways are facing numerous pressures from pollution, climate change, land management practices, development and amenity use. It is clear that our environmental laws and regulations are failing to prevent the destruction of nature, often simply regulating the rate of destruction. The United Nations has called for the human race to rethink its

relationship with the natural world in order that we might enable the recovery of nature upon which humans and all species are dependant: ('Solutions for a Planet in Crisis' speech from Inger Anderson in January 2021).

At the same time there is an emerging global movement of governments recognising the Rights of Nature and in particular the rights of rivers. Rights of Nature is a way of re-thinking our relationship with nature - from one of dominance to one of interdependency requiring a respectful, holistic and empathic approach.

It can also act as a catalyst to shift our thinking from an extractive economy towards a regenerative economy. The idea of nature having rights is not new. Nature has rights. What is new is how we can intervene using a rights of nature lens to protect nature and to give the river a voice as a single entity, from source to sea. We have extended rights to corporations globally – a company which is a wholly fictional entity has gained legal rights and is recognised as a legal entity distinct from its individual decision makers.

If we can define a corporation as having the rights of personhood, then we can imagine a River having these personhood rights?

The Universal Declaration of River Rights establishes that all rivers shall possess, at minimum, the following fundamental rights: (1) The right to flow, (2) The right perform essential functions within the river's ecosystem, (3) The right to be free from pollution, (4) The right to feed and be fed by sustainable aquifers, (5) The right to native biodiversity, and (6) The right to regeneration and restoration.

This approach is supported by many local wildlife bodies. It offers an enormous opportunity to help develop a River Wensum Charter over the next 2 years which establishes the rights listed above.

Council **RESOLVES**:

1) to acknowledge the growing global movement of 'rights of nature' as a framework for rethinking its relationship with the environment.

2) that there is a case to be made for considering our interactions with our local waterways in the context of 'Rights of Rivers' and through which the health and wellbeing of the River Wensum can be addressed.

3) to explore with local communities and relevant stakeholders the implementation of Rights of Rivers along the River Wensum. This will involve working towards the production of a 'Declaration on the Rights of the River Wensum' by relevant stakeholders for possible endorsement by the council within 2 years."

Following debate, it was:

**RESOLVED,** with a majority voting against**,** to reject the motion.

**Motion 8(b) – Local traffic schemes**

Councillor Stonard moved, and Councillor Hampton seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Following debate, it was:

**RESOLVED**, unanimously that:

> "Council welcomes the proposals from Norfolk County Labour councillors to devolve local traffic schemes and road maintenance to joint bodies consisting of district and county councillors. Council believes this will give our communities a greater say, enable this council to involve more local people and integrate local traffic schemes into other local initiatives and neighbourhood plans.
>
> Council **RESOLVES**:
>
> To engage with the county council to discuss the best way of setting up a joint body, governance and budgeting arrangements and all associated matters with a view to including considering any financial consequences as part of our 2024 budget and starting such joint arrangements from April 2024 or soon thereafter as possible."

(As two hours had passed since the beginning of the meeting, the Lord Mayor asked if the remaining items could be taken as unopposed business. Councillor Sue Sands opposed item 8(c). Items 8(d) and8(e) had unaccepted amendments so these would be debated. Subsequently, during debate, the proposer of motion 8(e), Councillor Schmierer, withdrew his opposition to the amendments and this was taken as unopposed business).

**Motion 8(c) – Sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters**

Councillor Mike Sands moved, and Councillor Hampton seconded the motion as set out on the agenda.

Following debate, it was:

**RESOLVED**, unanimously that:

> "Council believes sewage discharges in rivers and coastal waters is unacceptable. There is a direct and indirect adverse impact on water quality, the environment, human health, amenity, and businesses. It also damages the reputation of our beautiful city and county. Council regrets the lack of urgency and meaningful sanctions for sewage discharges and recognises increased development in Norwich and Norfolk will add to the problem in future unless action is taken at source.
>
> Council **RESOLVES** to:
>
> (1) Welcome the government's intention to consult on the introduction of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water management Act 2010 and urges

government to expedite the process. Council believes water companies should be held automatically liable for any sewage discharge. In addition to fines levied upon them, water companies should automatically be liable for compensation for direct and indirect impacts on those, particularly businesses, near to or affected by the discharge assessed by an independent body funded by water companies but not appointed by or accountable to them.

(2) Support all options to bring water companies back into public, municipal or co-operative ownership whereby profits can be put towards much needed infrastructural improvements rather than going to shareholders as dividend payments, and to ensure greater adherence to regulation as well as opportunity to enhance environmental protection."

**Motion 8(d) – Protection and recovery of the swift population**

The Lord Mayor said that the following amendment had been received from Councillor Giles:

"Replacing the words "Norwich Regeneration Limited" with the words "Lion Homes" in resolution 1), and,

Inserting the words "in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan" at the end of resolution 6)."

Councillor Champion indicated that he was willing to accept the amendment and as no other member objected, it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Champion moved and Councillor Fox seconded the motion as amended.

The Lord Mayor said that notice had been received of a further amendment to the motion from Councillor Giles which had been circulated:

"Replacing the word "require" with the word "request" in resolution 1)

Replacing the word "include" with the words "to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model" in resolution 1)

Replace resolution 3) with the following "Commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings."

Councillor Champion indicated that he was not willing to accept these amendments, and these were debated in the usual way.

On being put to the vote, with a majority voting in favour, the amendment was passed and became part of the substantive motion.

The Lord Mayor said that he had received a request to take the vote in part on the motion.

Discussion ensued.

On being moved to the vote, members voted on the resolutions as set out in the motion as amended 1), 3, 5) and 6) and then resolutions 2) and 4) together, and it was:

**RESOLVED**,

(1) unanimously to agree the following resolutions, which became part of the substantive motion:

1) request its wholly-owned company, Lion Homes Ltd, to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model, swift bricks or swift boxes as standard on all its new properties, and to, where practicable;

3) commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings.

5) use Citizen magazine and the council's social media accounts to raise awareness about swifts, inform residents how to install their own swift boxes, and publicise other appropriate actions members of the public can take; and,

6) work with the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the caretakers of other tall buildings in the city to find appropriate ways church towers and other high places can be used to support swift colonies in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan.

(2) with a majority voting against, to reject the following resolutions, which were removed from the substantive motion:

2) require Norwich City Services Limited to install swift boxes onto current council-owned properties when roof repairs or similar at-height works are carried out;

4) as part of the Love Norwich scheme, arrange for the council's at-height working equipment and staff trained in the use of it to be available to help put swift boxes onto private properties at intervals through the year;

(3) therefore the substantive motion is:

**RESOLVED** unanimously that:

> "Swift populations are rapidly declining across the UK. Between 1995 and 2016, numbers of the birds declined by 53%, with first-year survival of the fledgling birds being similarly in decline. In 2021, they were added to the Red list on the UK Conservation Status report.
>
> A simple action that can be taken to support swift populations is the addition of swift boxes or swift bricks across urban areas, providing homes for the birds when they arrive back in the UK in the spring to nest. Without homes they can return to each year, swifts will not nest, as they return each year to the same locations.
>
> Local projects such as Wild King Street and the Norwich Swift Network have been working to make sure that homes exist for returning swifts; multiple swift boxes have gone up on sites across the city. Norwich City Council owns residential and commercial property across Norwich that would be suitable for aiding in this endeavour, and with local planning policies, can influence the provision of swift homes on many more buildings in our city.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

1) request its wholly-owned company, Lion Homes Ltd, to consider including, where practicable and in conjunction with the agreed priorities of its business plan and model, swift bricks or swift boxes as standard on all its new properties, and to, where practicable;

2) commit to reviewing the findings of the Biodiversity Baseline and Opportunities Study to ascertain the species and habitats under threat in Norwich, and how we go about conserving and enhancing them most effectively in accordance with our Biodiversity Strategy and Development Plan. This will include considering updating planning policies to include a requirement for swift bricks to be used in all new buildings.

3) use Citizen magazine and the council's social media accounts to raise awareness about swifts, inform residents how to install their own swift boxes, and publicise other appropriate actions members of the public can take; and,

4) work with the Norwich Historic Churches Trust and the caretakers of other tall buildings in the city to find appropriate ways church towers and other high places can be used to support swift colonies in conjunction with the priorities of the Environmental and Biodiversity Action Plan.

**Motion 8(e) – Worker representation on boards**

During debate, Councillor Schmierer indicated that he was willing to accept the following amendment from Councillor Stonard:

> "Replacing the words "restructure the NCSL Board of Directors to include direct worker representation on the board" with the words "as part of its review of the governance of its wholly owned companies, as recommended by the

recent Peer Review, to consider whether there should be direct worker representation on the Board."

(This item was therefore taken as unopposed business.)

**RESOLVED** that:

"Worker representation on boards has a long tradition in many European countries. A number of studies have highlighted beneficial outcomes for both companies and workers associated with worker representation on boards. These benefits include increased firm market value and capital formation, more effective governance due to the valuable operational knowledge workers hold, higher engagement and motivation of workers and more career opportunities. It is rightfully argued that *'Employees are key stakeholders whose contribution is necessary for the success of innovative enterprises'* and that '*Workforce relationships are central to company success, and worker board representation would help boards to manage these key stakeholder relationships more effectively.'*

Council notes that:

1) as part of the recent LGA Corporate Peer Challenge peers have recommended a further review of the governance arrangements in line with best practice.

2) The council has committed to addressing peer recommendations in the coming months.

Council **RESOLVES** to ask cabinet to as part of its review of the governance of its wholly owned companies, as recommended by the recent peer review, to consider whether there should be direct worker representation on the Board."

**Motion 8(f) – National Housing Crisis**

It was noted that Councillor Beth Jones had made the following amendment to her own motion, and therefore it would become part of the substantive motion without further debate:

"Inserting the words "and to write to ask all Leaders of all Parliamentary groups to commit, if called upon to form a government," after the words "this Council RESOLVES to call upon Government."

(This item, as amended, was taken as unopposed business).

**RESOLVED** that:

"The worst cost of living crisis since the 1950s is coinciding with a national housing crisis. The result of this will be an increasing number of our residents deprived of one of the most fundamental pillars to a healthy and happy life – a secure, stable, and affordable home.

Homeownership is in decline following a period of rising house prices that has made buying a home unaffordable for too many. This combined with a drastic depletion in social housing stock has forced an increasing number of Norwich residents into the private rented sector and at the mercy of rising rents and under-regulated tenancies. Worse still, many are left without a permanent residence at all, as levels of homelessness remain high.

Whilst this council has welcomed the Norwich Council Housing Strategy 2020-26 it is now calling for the acceleration of its delivery to increase the provision of affordable, secure, high-quality, and energy-efficient housing across the city to tackle the root of the housing crisis locally.

However, in the face of a worsening national economic crisis, urgent action is needed to protect our residents, especially those in the most precarious living circumstances, from its severest impacts.

To support residents through the immediate and acute period of the cost-of-living crisis this council **RESOLVES** to call upon government and to write to ask all Leaders of all Parliamentary groups to commit, if called upon to form a government, to:

1) Increase Local Housing Allowance rates in line with rising private market rents - making these more affordable and reducing the proportion of income spent on rent at a time when household budgets are increasingly squeezed.

2) Introduce rent reforms and delegate powers to local authorities to set rent caps to protect private tenants from further rental increases or exploitative charges at a time of crisis.

3) Legislate a no winter evictions guarantee to protect private tenants from homelessness through the most challenging period of the cost-of-living crisis.

4) Abolish the Right to Buy in favour of expanding the provision of high-quality, energy-efficient, and environmentally sustainable social housing stock providing homes for residents and their families.

5) Expand pathways to homeownership so that owning a home can still be a realistic aspiration for any residents.

6) Prioritise the passing of the Renters' Reform Bill that seeks to improve standards and regulations across the private rented sector to better protect tenants."

**Motion 8(g) – Norwich Bus Fares**

(Councillor Stonard, the mover of the motion, had withdrawn this motion earlier in the meeting.)

The meeting was closed.

LORD MAYOR

**Appendix A**

**Council**

**20 June 2023**

**Questions to cabinet members**

**Question 1**

**Councillor Maguire to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:**

> "Last month the previous portfolio holder for sustainable growth, now the new Leader, commented on the resilience of the Norwich high street and the resilience of the retail offer this city can still offer. Given the critical importance of small and medium enterprises to the local economy and retail in general, will he share my concerns that the Non-Domestic Rating Bill will do little, and indeed possibly hinder, protecting our city shops from increasing business rates at a time when the economy is still particularly vulnerable?"

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

> "Currently businesses can have a number of reductions in their Business Rates, notably:
>
> - Retail, Hospitality and Leisure premises have been awarded a 75% reduction in their Business Rates for the 23/24 financial year, capped at Rateable Values up to £110,000.
>
> - Small Business Rate Relief if a property's rateable value is less than £15,000 and the business only uses one property. A business will not pay rates on a property with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, if that's the only property the business uses. For properties with a rateable value of £12,001 to £15,000, the rate of relief will go down gradually from 100% to 0%.
>
> - In April 2023 rateable hereditaments were subject to a revaluation. Where there is a large increase in the rateable value the rates payable are subject to Transitional Relief.
>
> - Some properties may be eligible for Supporting Small Business Relief which restricts their increase to £600 this financial year.
>
> - Properties with a Rateable Value of less than £51,000 pay the small business multiplier.
>
> - Some businesses are exempt from rates completely. Others may be eligible for charitable or discretionary rate relief and more details of reliefs available can be found on our website.

The Non-Domestic Rating Bill is currently at its second reading in the House of Lords and is a government bill that would make changes to business rates. The Bill will support businesses by modernising the business rates system to incentivise property improvements and support more frequent revaluations. It would reduce the time between property revaluations (proposed from 5 years to 3 years, meaning those with falling values will see their bills drop sooner).
The Bill will impose a duty on businesses to notify the Valuation Office Agency of changes that could affect a property's rateable value.
It will also provide new business rates improvement relief, so businesses making qualifying building improvements will not face higher business rates bills for 12 months. This will make it easier for businesses to invest with new reliefs for property improvements, providing tax breaks for businesses who are extending or upgrading their property.
The aim of the measures being put forward is to review and reform business rates in England, making them fairer and more responsive to changes in the market."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Maguire asked if the leader of the council agreed that there was a need to radically transform business rates and how this should be done. Councillor Stonard replied that he agreed and there was a need for central government to be willing to make the changes.)

**Question 2**

**Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet for resources the following question:**

"Last month the introduction of Voter ID in Norwich, a measure which Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, who was in government when the measure was introduced, recently admitted as being an attempt at gerrymander the rules to gain electoral advantage, saw 68 Norwich citizens refused their right to vote.
Voters without an accepted form of ID - estimated at around 2 million - were able to apply for a free certificate allowing them to vote but only 85,000 people - around 4% of the estimate - applied for one online ahead of May's polls. The Electoral Commission studies into the impact of Voter ID confirmed that unemployed people, council housing tenants, and those with lower educational qualifications were more severely affected by the changes. Can the cabinet member for resources comment on this and advise council on what steps this council will take to make voting easier for those without ID?"

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:**

"We are of course aware that Voter ID was brought in by the government alongside a highly publicised campaign by the Electoral Commission. Despite their campaign and the additional extensive communication plan put in place by the council, it was disappointing to see that some residents were not able to vote because they did not have an acceptable form of photo ID. The autumn canvass is coming up and I know that we will communicating the need for photo ID at a polling station with every property in Norwich. This will

include information about the free Voter Authority Certificate. The communication and outreach work which started before the elections last May is still ongoing, so we will continue ensure that we are reaching as may residents as possible. I am pleased to see that the scrutiny committee intends to look at the impact of voter ID at their meeting in July and I will very much look forward to attending to understanding their thoughts on what can be done to ensure no-one in Norwich is disenfranchised."

(In response to Councillor Sand's supplementary question, Councillor Kendrick gave assurance that he would carefully consider recommendations from the scrutiny committee's July meeting.)

**Question 3**

**Councillor Packer to ask deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

"Representing a ward with many leaseholders, I was concerned that plans to abolish the 'feudal' leasehold system in England and Wales were dropped last month by this Tory government. After announcing that leasehold would be previously abolished, many leaseholders cancelled their plans to undertake statutory lease extension and the U-turn has placed many now in limbo. As a Labour and Co-operative councillor, I have long supported and campaigned for leasehold reform and believe we need to strengthen and promote 'commonhold' alongside co-operative housing tenure, to protect homeowners and renters from unreasonable costs. Commonhold, widely used internationally and which has been available in the UK for nearly two decades, would be a better system to give people a say over their homes. Can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she would support this?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

"Until detailed legislation comes forward setting out the nature of a "commonhold lease" and a plan to move from existing tenures to the new tenure type it would not be appropriate to commit the council. That being said there is a clear need to simplify and standardise all tenure types and we would engage and support that process."

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she was very interested in the proposals around commonholds and all options should be 'on the table' and fully explored.)

**Question 4**

**Councillor Sue Sands to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:**

"Representing a ward which contains some of the highest level of poverty in the city and the greatest need for strong public services to respond to it, I was

concerned by research from the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA) that revealed between 2010/11 and 2023/24, the 10% of local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 28.3% - while the 10% of councils with the lowest levels of deprivation faced funding cuts averaging 10.1%. Councillor Sir Steve Houghton, leader of Barnsley Council and chair of SIGOMA, warns that the "gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider", while the Government has reneged on a promise to reallocate business rates. Would the Leader agree with Councillor Houghton and commit to making the case, at every opportunity, for this council to receive the funding needed to meet the challenges this city faces?"

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

"It is quite clear that the Tories have manipulated the local government funding formulae and processes to benefit more affluent areas at the expense of the poorest areas as the statistics you have quoted demonstrate. This has meant that the authorities facing the greatest economic and social needs have faced the biggest cuts and are struggling the most to meet those needs.
In Norwich, we have faced particular challenges. The Tories have delivered a real term reduction in funding to this council of over 21% since 2015 alone, and before that year-on-year cuts of more than 8% were seen from the start of the Tory led coalition in 2010. While we have managed this relatively well, have made savings and have protected front line services, but there are more cuts to follow over the next few years which will be incredibly challenging for us. This comes on top of the cost of living crisis, which was of course exacerbated by the disastrous Truss budget last Autumn which crashed the economy. Some of our wards in Norwich are very deprived. We know that poverty, low pay and deprivation in general results in a much greater need for economic and social support, but the Tories are more interested in passing money to areas populated by their affluent supporters than in supporting those who are suffering hardship and most in need. Therefore, I do agree with Councillor Sir Steve Houghton and will indeed make the case at every opportunity for this council to receive the funding to meet the challenges this city faces."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Sands asked if the council would commit to working closely with the Local Government Association to make the strongest case possible for Norwich to get the resources is needs. Councillor Stonard replied that a Labour government would empower regions to build strong local economies to support strong communities, with greater powers given to local leaders.)

**Question 5**

**Councillor Fulton-McAlister to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

"Representing University Ward which contains a significant, and growing, number of private renters, the issue of poor-quality housing, exorbitant rents and lack of security of tenure are repeatedly raised by my constituents and remain a very real problem. We, as councillors, have debated and discussed this issue many times before. Now that the Renters Reform Bill has finally been published and will proceed through the House of Commons, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she feels this will solve the problems of the private rented sector in this city?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

"After more than four years of delays and broken promises the Renter Reform Bill has begun its journey through parliament, although it is important to note that it is still a long way from Royal assent and entering law. In this time nearly 65 000 households in the country have been made homeless because of section 21 of the 1998 Housing Act which the government promised this Bill will abolish, but for those households this is too late.
Whilst I welcome any legislation that increases protections for private renters, this bill should be viewed cautiously and as only the beginning of introducing a fairer system for private renters rather than the end point as there are areas where it presently does not go far enough.
It is important to acknowledge some of the protections it will potentially offer:

- A new landlord registry will support tenants being better informed prior to entering a tenancy

- Abolition of section 21, so called "no fault evictions"

- Increased powers for tenants to challenge rent increases

But there are clear loopholes which are very worrying.

- If a landlord evicts with the intent to sell, a ban on reletting for only three months is unlikely to be much of a disincentive to a landlord who evicts for the purposes of increasing rents.

- Lack of adequate safeguards to prevent retaliatory evictions when tenants challenge unsafe conditions.

There is much more to be added to this legislation to ensure that it provides real protections to those living in the private rented sector. I fully support the campaigns by Generation Rent and the Renters Reform Coalition to strengthen this legislation as it passes through parliament, so it provides robust protections in the future."

(In response to Councillor Fulton-McAlister's supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she felt that the Renter's Reform Bill fell short, especially in relation to section 21 eviction noticed. Norwich City Council was committed to protecting private renters.)

**Question 6**

**Councillor Kidman to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

> "Community safety remains a top concern for my constituents and despite the cuts to this council I was pleased that our budget in February protected services such as the Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative and expanded CCTV. Given a recent rise in burglary in the city can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on the latest batch of alley-gates installed and the locations across the city?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

> "Since January 2023 Norwich City Council's Safer Neighbourhood Initiative – Community Fund has funded and installed new alley gates at 7 locations across the city in the following wards – Lakenham, Crome, Thorpe Hamlet, Town Close, University and Nelson. These gates are providing additional security and peace of mind for 36 homes. To date the scheme has benefitted a total of 162 homes."

(Councillor Kidman had no supplementary question.)

**Question 7**

**Councillor Huntley to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

> "I am proud to represent Mile Cross which has benefitted substantially from the city council's political agenda of building council homes. Pointer's Field, Hansard Close, the Kings Arms site, and now the former Mile Cross depot are just a few to mention. Now that work to build on the Mile Cross depot site is well underway, can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on progress towards when this important project should be completed and the significant benefits it will bring our community?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

> "Colleagues across the council are working hard to bring forward housing development on the Mile Cross Former Depot Site. Indeed it is pleasing to see that work is proceeding well to deliver the land remediation contract that was approved by cabinet in December 2022.
> The land remediation contract is ensuring the site is prepared to allow development to begin. This contract in itself is bringing forward innovation and ensuring much of the material on site is being reused. Through providing certainty of land conditions, it will considerably de risk the build of the final development so should save the council money. The remediation is expected to be completed by October this year and is on track to be delivered with budget.

Whilst the groundworks are underway, work is continuing to design the first phase of designing the housing development. The emerging design proposes 67 new council homes, and it is expected that the planning application will be submitted in July.
The new homes are being designed again to ensure the council leads the way in developing a sense of place, providing residents with a great living environment and cost effective homes to run. Although design details have yet to be confirmed, there is an expectation that there will be a continued commitment to a fabric first efficient approach to build with the introduction of renewable energy generation incorporated within the scheme.
It is planned that the start of the construction contract should be mobilised by the early summer in 2024 with new homes being delivered in late 2025. I look forward to handing the keys over to new residents in due course."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Huntley asked if the deputy leader could comment on the features of the housing being proposed for the Mile Cros Depot site. Councillor Jones replied that she could not comment on design specifics, but the council had a commitment to high quality housing, building homes for residents.)

**Question 8**

**Councillor Prinsley to ask the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:**

"Supporting constituents with disabilities in my ward is always a priority, particularly given the impact of the oppressive and increasingly severe sanctions regime this current government has instigated. I know that access to public facilities, including the Forum and all it has to offer, is particularly important to my residents and I was therefore particularly pleased that efforts by this Labour led city council to attain new funding for modern, accessible toilet facilities were successful. Can the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture comment on progress to install these new facilities and promote the benefits of them?"

**Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture's response:**

"I am delighted to say that the new Changing Places toilet at The Forum opened a couple of weeks ago following the city council securing £65,000 from the government's Changing Places toilets fund. This facility will help remove the stress, discomfort and indignity that many people with multiple and complex disabilities and their carers experience when trying to use conventional accessible toilets. The Forum is a brilliant place to have one, being so central and containing the Millennium Library. Our communications team has produced a video with The Forum that is being promoted across our four social media channels to maximise awareness of the facility."

(In response to the supplementary question, Councillor Oliver replied that Changing Places toilets were about inclusion and allowing everyone to access the city. The council had worked closely in partnership with The Forum to secure funding for the Changing Places toilet.)

**Question 9**

**Councillor Padda to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

> "I was pleased to see that the new contract to assist tenants to decorate their homes was approved by cabinet in March. This will increase the amount payable to each tenant, reflecting the escalating costs due to the cost-of-living crisis. Will the cabinet member comment on this initiative and whether it might be adapted further to meet the needs of residents who begin their tenancy with the city council?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

> "This was agreed as part of the cabinet paper in March for new tenants in mind and had been in place for some time. There was an uplift to account for the increase in the costs of materials and this was factored into the renewal of the contract. We know from the latest May update of new tenant's satisfaction survey – when asked the following question from those who received a decoration allowance –
> "Did you find the system easy to choose and select materials?" – 77% responded yes, 12% had not used it yet, 8% did not use, and only 3% responded no."
>
> (Councillor Padda did not have a supplementary question.)

**Question 10**

**Councillor Driver to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

> "Representing a ward which has benefitted from the investment in our parks and particularly tennis court facilities I was pleased to learn that a new partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the city council will see £222,447 from the government and the LTA Tennis Foundation invested in courts in Harford Park, Alderman Walker Park and Bowthorpe Park. This will substantially improve these areas and make them more accessible for the sport to be played. Can the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion comment on the success of the partnership created with the LTA and the improvements delivered so far to enhancing our tennis facilities across the city?"

**Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:**

> "The council has been working with the LTA since 2011 to provide accessible, sustainable and high quality tennis facilities at the heart of the community. The first project delivered four hard court tennis courts complete with floodlighting in Eaton Park. The LTA funded 50% of the project costs and in 2012 the service contract was awarded to the National Tennis Association

(formerly known as EA Tennis). Comparison with similar facilities throughout the UK has demonstrated use at Eaton Park is two-and-a-half times greater than LTA expectations
In order to meet this level of demand, in 2016 a further three courts were created at Eaton Park, three at Waterloo Park and two at Harford Park.
In 2017, the council identified further expansion opportunities at Lakenham and Heigham Park as the next phase of the Norwich Tennis Expansion programme, and the new courts were opened to the public last year.
The current project to redevelop the courts at Harford, Alderman Walker and Bowthorpe is a further example of the excellent partnership working between the LTA, Norwich Parks Tennis and the council.
Working in partnership with the LTA and the Greater Norwich Growth Board the Council has delivered almost £1m of investment in Norwich Parks Tennis in the past 12 years."

(In response to Councillor Driver's supplementary question, Councillor Giles said that he was pleased to highlight that investments in resurfacing of courts at both Eaton and Waterloo parks were being made to ensure that the hight standards of the facilities were maintained.)

**Question 11**

**Councillor Peek to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:**

"I note with interest that a new planning application has been submitted for the former Earl of Leicester site on Dereham Road, following the work this council took to pursue the opportunity of a compulsory purchase order. Despite this progress on the development would the Leader agree that it would be much easier if government would enable councils like Norwich to buy up land at a fraction of its potential cost if they plan to build on it and do this through compulsory purchase orders at a price that does not reflect the value of potential planning permissions – the so-called "hope value"? Given that land worth £22,520 per hectare as agricultural land can on average be worth £6.2m per hectare with permission –such a proposal would represent a bold shake-up of the planning system and enable us to build the thousands of new council homes this city needs."

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

"Following cabinet's approval to seek a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on the site of the former Earl of Leicester site there has been some planning progress. This has proven to be common and welcome side effect of the council considering this action. Officers are continuing to monitor this progress of the site and a decision should be made shortly. Should planning be secured, we will seek to ensure that delivery follows shortly after or will continue towards CPO.

As members are aware we were successful in securing £5.5m in our Towns Deal revolving fund to support such schemes. So, we are resourced to purchase the site should it stall.
I'm pleased to say we have recently successfully completed the acquisition of our first site through the fund on Windmill Road. We will now proceed with seeking a developer for the site and ensuring we enter into an agreement for a quick timetable for delivery.
Under the current legislation there is a fundamental principle, within the compulsory purchase compensation guidance, that land is valued at its current market value, based upon its existing use or planning approval, and not at 'hope value' on a theoretical development scheme. However, current legislation is time consuming and expensive for local authorities to use, even in cases where sites have lain idle for some time.
I certainly do agree that revisions to the CPO process to simplify it, speed it up and allow authorities to purchase derelict or other problems sites at a lower cost would be most welcome."

(In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Peek, Councillor Stonard replied that he wanted to rebalance the power between landowners and local communities and in doing so, would have the ability to force the development of some sites.)

**Question 12**

**Councillor Lubbock to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

"Since the introduction of parking charges into the Eaton Park there has been displaced parking causing various problems in the area around the park. The council did promise a review to look into the consequences of imposing the charges. Please will the Portfolio Holder give details of the review?"

**Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:**

"The review is ongoing and will be completed shortly.
The project is on target to meet the objectives that were set. Illegal parking within the park was a significant issue prior to introduction of the new charges. This meant that spaces were unavailable to park users during particularly busy times. There is now little illegal parking in the park, which has increased the number of available of spaces to park users. The take of up of season tickets from regular park users has been good.
The project is on target to exceed the financial target set in the budget for 2023/24. This will increase our ability to maintain the park to a high standard and invest in improved facilities.
With regards to displaced parking on surrounding streets, there have been very few complaints received by the council about this. Any complaints received have been investigated and appropriate action taken.
Finally, we continue to liaise with the county council about whether any further action may be required in the streets surrounding the park."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Lubbock commented that there had been problems with parking on the grass verges which was dangerous and that no action had been taken despite raising the issues as a Councillor enquiry. Councillor Giles replied that if Councillor Lubbock forwarded her concerns directly to him, he would be happy to look into these for her.)

**Question 13**

**Councillor Osborn to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

> "One of the achievements of the city council has been to work to make Norwich a Living Wage City, including through the Living Wage City Action Group of major employers. City College was one of the key institutions in that Action Group.
> So it has been very disappointing and shocking that City College is imposing real terms pay cuts on staff that mean that the college is no longer a living wage employer, and this particularly affects Learning Support Assistants who work with disabled students.
> As a result, UCU members at City College have been taking strike action as the pay cuts are unsustainable. Does the cabinet member agree that the proposals for below-inflation pay that City College managers have made are unacceptable, and will he join me in publicly supporting the strikers?"

**Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:**

> "The Labour Group supports the UCU's work to get the Living Wage reinstalled at City College. The Labour Party support the right of all workers to strike. However industrial action is always a last resort, and we hope that for staff and students alike, negotiations can avoid further disruption.
> We have been meeting with both City College and the UCU. Through the Norwich Real Living Wage Action Group, we will work to facilitate further negotiations, and explore what support City College needs to get them re-accredited.
> As is often the case with the Green Party, there is a reluctance to upset their local Green, national Tory voter base by highlighting the role 13 years of Tory Government real-term cuts have played in this. Further education institutions have seen the largest fall in per-pupil funding in any part of the education system. IFS forecasts suggest per-pupil funding in 2024-25 will be 10% down on 13 years ago.
> Thus, following further discussions, I propose to write to both Chloe Smith and the relevant minister to call for an improved funding settlement to City College to reflect the vital role it plays in educating and training local residents, and driving sustainable and inclusive economic growth"

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Osborn asked whether Councillor Giles supported the strike action by the staff of City College. Councillor Giles replied that he supported the rights of all workers to take strike action. The council had undertaken a lot of work to support businesses in paying the Real Living Wage, including helping small businesses with accreditation fess).

**Question 14**

**Councillor Price to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

> "On busy days, people who phone the council can wait over an hour on the line, or up to ten minutes before being offered a call back. Does the cabinet member find this acceptable?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

> "To support customer contact, we have implemented a number of positive changes, an example of this is the call back scheme which enables customers to request a call back from our staff without having to wait in a queue. The phone service wait times however can vary according to demand at a particular given time and the phone system is set to offer a call back after intervals from one minute and occasionally up to ten, when demand has been unpredictable and is exceptionally high.
> To support this, we are also piloting a new and additional service which provides automation of some of our more straightforward and frequent service requests which allow our advisers to focus on calls that require our support and assistance for example those who don't have access to online or need specialist support. In addition to this, we are also in the process of recruiting additional staff to support the peak periods where we have become aware that demand has recently increased.
> Also, in line with our digital strategy, we are working on a number of new initiatives to meet the needs of a large proportion of our customers whose preference is to access services online and this will also reduce the demand on the phone service. For example, we have recently added an online service that enables customers to arrange for the payment of council tax without the need to call us. With many customers opting to access services online, we are continually improving, reviewing, and developing additional online services to meet our customer's needs."

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she did not believe that digital was the only was to engage and it was important that residents had the ability to raise issues in the format that was most convenient for them. This was a new area to her portfolio and work would be done on this particular issue.)

**Question 15**

**Councillor Champion to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

> "When the Easter Fair came to Chapelfield Gardens in April, many of the heavy fairground rides were parked on the grass under mature trees. I was particularly concerned about a veteran London Plane where a heavy fairground ride was parked on the grass and the tree roots, and a corner of the ride extended into the lower branches. This is no way for the City Council to treat its trees, let alone a veteran tree. The problem has been reported to the council. While it would be preferable for heavy machinery and vehicles to

be banned from the park, will the cabinet member agree to at least create exclusion areas around the veteran trees in particular?"

**Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion's response:**

"Thank you for raising the issue of the damage that is being caused to trees in the council's parks by poorly parked vehicles during events.
Events in our parks make a significant contribution to the city and its cultural offering and these do require large vehicles to enter our parks. This needs to be balanced with protecting the built and natural environment in our parks, and ensuring that the events are managed sustainably.
An issue has been identified with how certain events have been handled and staff are liaising to ensure that the risk of any long-term damage to our tree stock is minimised. Staff will be working closely with event promoters to ensure that measures are taken to protect the trees in all of our parks during events."

(In response to the supplementary question, Councillor Giles said that he would need to look into the concept of exclusion areas around veteran trees in more detail.)

**Question 16**

**Councillor Galvin to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:**

"The council has at least 10 interim personnel delivering various important roles. Having interim managers is hugely costly. Senior interim positions currently include: head of building safety and compliance; executive director housing and community; head of asset management; chief finance officer; asbestos compliance manager; fire safety manager. This is not about questioning the effectiveness of these roles and the individuals, but the costs go out of the council's revenue budget and as we know there is not enough of this to begin with. Can the cabinet member for resources tell me how we measure that these contracts provide best value to the council?"

**Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:**

"Thank you, Councillor Galvin, for giving me the opportunity to talk about the excellent work being undertaken by the interim staff we have in place as a council.
All interim and consultant contracts are subject to our procurement rules. Contracts are made through specialist agencies and assessed against the IR35 rules to make sure that all tax matters are appropriately treated. Each contractor is subject to line management in the same way that permanent members of staff are managed.
It is clear to me that all have made a significant difference to the way that the organisation operates. I want to particularly highlight the work of several of the staff you mention who have been instrumental in supporting our housing compliance work. A recent independent review of that work, the outcomes of which were reported to cabinet last week and the report specifically stated that

> "the pace and amount of progress against the action plan is impressive'. It went on to confirm that the interim staff that we have brought in have made a "fundamental contribution" to achieving this progress, as you acknowledged in cabinet last week.
> The recent peer review also positively noted that there is a clear knowledge transfer from interim staff to our permanent staff, meaning that we are able to learn from the expertise we are commissioning which is an external view from the team of Peer Reviewers that attended Norwich only some months ago. The peer review also recognised that fundamentally, recruitment has been challenging across local government. Rather than leave gaps in key roles, putting existing staff under pressure, we have brought in specialist expertise to help drive improvement in services. Workforces are changing, and the use of temporary and interim staff to give expertise and capacity to short term enable us to deliver is something we should embrace. Their value lies in the excellent contributions they have made to the running of this authority."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Galvin commented that a survey had found that only 11% of interims charged less than £500 per day and asked what processes were in place to increase retention to permanent posts. Councillor Kendrick responded that he was disappointed that Councillor Galvin was only looking at costs and not value obtained. As an employer, the use of interims allowed for particular skills to be brought into the organisation to deal with issues which was value for money.)

**Question 17**

**Councillor Hoechner to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:**

> "In June 2021, this council agreed to take several measures to address the potentially damaging impacts of advertising on people's health and the environment. This included 'develop[ing] and enhanc[ing] an advertising strategy for Norwich City Council which recognises the harmful effects that junk food, environmentally polluting products and activities, payday lenders, gambling and alcohol can have on local residents.' The Council also agreed to 'review and update' its planning policy to regulate the installation of advertising hoardings near schools, and to 'work with partners to phase out [potentially harmful] advertising' as much as possible across the city. Can the Cabinet member please clarify what steps have been taken over the past two years to ensure the timely implementation of these measures?"

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

> "Following the motion to council, a review of how we take forward the proposed measures was carried out. The council currently has a single advertising contract relating to the provision of bus shelters which runs to 2026, and the supplier self regulates content in line with the Control of Advertisement Regulations. An advertising policy is being considered alongside looking at options around future advertising opportunities for the

council, including advertising at bus shelters. This is currently progressing through the Future Shape Norwich Program.
The Council has the ability to control the content of advertisements on its own property and/or land in accordance with contracts; however as a local planning authority, we are not able to control the content of advertisements generally. As part of any future review of our Development Management Policies we may be able to introduce a policy which would manage the location of new hoardings i.e. prevent advertisement hoarding within a certain distance of schools or ensure that they do not impact upon heritage assets or highway safety but where new advertisement hoardings are permitted, the content of any advert could not be regulated.
In view of the current position with the emerging Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the forthcoming review of the National Planning Policy Framework there is insufficient clarity on what any review of development management policies will be able to address to commence this review."

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Stonard referred to the answer to the question and emphasised that advertising that took place on non-council owned land could not be controlled.)

**Question 18**

**Councillor Fox to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth the following question:**

"Following the closure and relocation of the NHS vaccination centre, the council decided to maintain only the side entrance to City Hall, as this provides a ramped entrance and ensures access for anyone with mobility issues. However, this entrance is now shut at lunchtime, and I have met many people who are frustrated by that. And even worse, the front doors are of late permanently shut. For many years the front doors have stood open to this important civic building, yet now I often meet people standing perplexed outside, and have had to escort many in and out. The salary of a concierge seems like something worth spending money on when you compare it to the cost of having people feel welcome versus being excluded from democratic spaces. Will the leader commit to opening the front doors to City Hall and making the building accessible throughout the day?"

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

"Following the vacation of the NHS vaccination centre we have reviewed the customer access of city hall and the front doors will be open from Monday 19 June 2023, 9am to 5pm. In the next couple of weeks, as soon as full arrangements are in place, City Hall will no longer be closed at lunch time. The Bethel Street entrance will continue to be open as well and this includes disabled access. Our focus has been to open City Hall up to provide support to our residents."

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Fox asked what other measures were being taken to ensure the building felt like one that the public could come into.

Councillor Stonard replied that the opening of the main doors made the reception area much more welcoming and bright and a greeter was being considered for this area as well.)

**Question 19**

**Councillor Haynes to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

> "Flats in the St Leonards Road area have suffered from poor maintenance from the council for many years, a fact which the council themselves acknowledge in an email from May 2023 "exacerbated by the lack of maintenance, water ingress and general state of repair." The same email also acknowledges that "repairs are long overdue." Although some repairs have been carried out after significant pushing from myself and from residents, many remain outstanding, and the council haven't answered my questions about when many other outstanding issues including holes in the fabric of the buildings will be fixed. Can the council commit to answering my multiple enquiries, including an explanation of why the situation was allowed to develop, as well as to making the repairs an urgent priority?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety's response:**

> "Whilst we have carried out some initial repairs and will continue to undertake essential works, we are undertaking a full condition survey of the affected blocks and will be seeking to undertake an estate-based approach to block improvements including the works to the entrance porches, as the required repairs will be extensive and will require leaseholder consultation to be undertaken.
> We are looking to avoid undertaking these works in isolation and take a "whole block approach" such as external decorations, high level flat roof repairs, communal decorations, lighting etc and will be looking to carry out resident engagement and leaseholder consultation. The buildings also have a local listing so we will be engaging with the conservation officers at Norwich City Council to discuss our proposals. We are planning to commence engagement by September 2023.
> Outstanding enquiries from Councillor Haynes will receive a response."

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Jones said that she could not comment on historical issues but would like to arrange a time to join Councillor Haynes for a visit to the property in question.)

**Question 20**

**Councillor Calvert to ask the cabinet member for climate change the following question:**

> "External wall insulation saves on bills, keeps homes cosy and cuts carbon, and the council has benefited from a government scheme to provide it to some homes in the city. However, some who wanted it missed out, including

one pensioner who lives in a cold end of terrace home and has had to move bedrooms to stay warm at night.
They are left in the cold partly because there is not enough capacity within the relevant team to get sign ups from residents in need, in time for booking the work in with contractors. Will the cabinet member commit to urgently increasing capacity within the council so this kind of measure can be delivered to those who need it most?"

**Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change's response:**

"Thank you for this question about our Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund project which is improving living conditions for our tenants who live in homes of a 'Wimpey no-fines construction' – a type of uninsulated concrete used in the years after the war.
I can assure Councillor Calvert that the case referred to has not been brought about by any lack of capacity within internal teams. The scheme funding was limited to 43 social housing properties and, having highlighted properties most at need from the perspective of their type of construction, the allocations were made on a first come, first served basis. GDPR rules prevented the identification of individuals tenants, and so letters were sent to addresses which met the criteria. Once our tenants had verified the authenticity of the scheme, sign up was rapid.
I would appreciate Councillor Calvert providing the detail of the case he refers to, to the Environmental Strategy Team as there may be other schemes and funding sources that can be applied in this particular case."

(In response to Councillor Calvert's supplementary question, Councillor Hampton said that the grant in question had specific criteria attached and spending of the money was not to do with internal capacity. There would always be reviews of capacity and this would be taken forward through the Climate Action Plan.)

**Question 21**

**Councillor Francis to ask the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development the following question:**

"Residents regularly report to me problems of bins being left on pavements after refuse collections. On the narrow pavements of my ward, this causes significant accessibility issues for people with disabilities and those with pushchairs. When residents report this, little action seems to be taken, and there seems to be low awareness amongst residents that bins need to be brought in. What action is the council taking to ensure residents bring their bins in off pavements and that the streets remain accessible to all?"

**Councillor Stonard, the leader and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development's response:**

"The issue of wheelie bins left out on streets by residents is a challenge in a city such as Norwich with its historic network of terraced houses. We recognise that the design of these streets and houses can make it difficult to

store wheelie bins off-street between collection days, and the high turnover of residents in certain areas can make this worse.
The council provides clear guidance for residents in our waste and recycling communications about their responsibilities when presenting bins for collection. We ask residents to make sure that their bin is out by 6am on their collection day, but no earlier than 6pm the evening before. We also request that bins are taken back inside of a property boundary by 9am the next morning.
We investigate all reports of bins obstructing footways and engage with residents to ensure wherever that pavements are kept clear."

(In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Stonard said that he was unsure whether the rationale for putting bins out and bringing them in at certain times were included on the leaflet but agreed it would be useful if it was not already.)

**Question 22**

**Councillor Schmierer to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety the following question:**

"Figures from Sports England show that over 1 in 4 Norfolk adults feel lonely always, often or some of the time. These are the highest figures for any county council area in the East of England. The negative impact of loneliness on lives has been gaining greater attention in recent years. Last month, in the United States, the Surgeon General labelled loneliness, isolation and the lack of connection between people a public health crisis in the country. Recent studies around the world have shown that loneliness is linked to premature mortality, dementia and even heart disease. I note that North Yorkshire is working to tackle loneliness given the impact it has on the livelihoods of its residents. Can the cabinet member ensure that tackling loneliness is added as one of the metrics by which the success of the council's housing teams are assessed?"

**Councillor Jones, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety response:**

"North Yorkshire Council is a unitary authority responsible for adult and social care which provides them a wider remit with regard to addressing issues of isolation, in particular of vulnerable households.
That being said all Norwich's housing staff support tenants to remain living independently as far as they are able. When we are aware that loneliness is impacting on the wellbeing of a council tenant, an officer will signpost and support them to access a range of community resources.
The Integrated Anticipatory Care Team (INTERACT) based at City Hall includes a care coordinator, Social Prescribers from Age UK, Norwich CAB, Voluntary Norfolk and One Norwich Practices and support from a clinical pharmacist. The team works in partnership with the Home Improvement Team and provides a range of measures to assist residents whose housing is having a negative impact on their health. In many cases this includes developing, expanding and maintaining social networks.

Referrals can be made via Healthy homes referral form - Norwich City Council"

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Schmierer asked whether the council could ensure that tackling loneliness was a metric for assessing the housing team. Councillor Jones replied that health and wellbeing work was being done, including suicide prevention work but tackling loneliness was also an important issue. She would look into this.)