



## **Council**

**28 November 2023**

### **Questions to cabinet members**

#### **Question 1**

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

“Given the recent rise in burglary and crime in general can the cabinet member discuss the benefits of the Norwich Community Safety Partnership approach to tackle this?”

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

“The Safer Norwich Partnership Board provides an important link to the Norfolk County Community Safety Partnership by focussing on issues that are pertinent to residents including issues like burglary and neighbourhood crime. The core membership of the board is from a spectrum of community safety leaders including myself as chair, senior officer leads from within the council and wider partners such as the Police, Norfolk Police, Probation and the Police and Crime Commissioner Office representatives; to name but a few. This ensures that we can tackle issues at a local level realising that these challenges cannot be solved in isolation but by collaborating. The work of the board will be to look at the following priorities during the life of the strategy:

- To reduce neighbourhood crime and ASB and increase residents’ feelings of safety.
- To reduce the incidence and impact of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
- To reduce harm, vulnerability and violence related to substance and alcohol misuse.”

## Question 2

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

“Last month the immigration minister Robert Jenrick announced that fifty hotels will be closed to asylum seekers by January next year. Representing a ward where the Home Office has used a hotel for this purpose, I am also aware that here in Norwich we have already seen funding support from government collapse by 67% since 2010 and runaway inflation after the Conservatives crashed the economy which has hit us hard. I am also aware of the huge demand for housing across the country – including here in Norwich. While shifting asylum seekers out of expensive hotels is long overdue, will the Leader agree that there needs to be a joint and funded approach nationally, regionally, and locally to manage the move to ensure areas like Norwich don't bear an unfair burden?”

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

“Currently there are no plans to close any of the hotels in Norwich following the immigration minister's announcement. Officers within the Council are working with representatives from the Home Office, the regional strategic migration partnership and locally with other district and county colleagues to understand, highlight and problem solve issues caused by increased pressures on our services including housing.

Our own housing options team using government funding has recently funded a specialist housing adviser to help bridge the gap when people are given refugee status helping them access practical support, and housing. We are collaborating with our partners at the national, regional, and local levels to balance the responsibilities and resources of our city, while also providing a safe haven for people fleeing conflict. We have also reached out to our partners in the voluntary and charitable sector to see what gaps we can fill locally together.”

### Question 3

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

“Rising poverty in my ward and in our city due to over a decade of stagnant growth and wages not rising with inflation has left ever more working people living in significant hardship. With prices continuing to rise, the Real Living Wage has never been more important in ensure that workers have enough to get by. Earlier this month, Norwich City Council as a Real Living Wage employer, celebrated Living Wage week. Can the cabinet member comment on the work this council does to lead the local Real Living Wage campaign and the benefits secured through this?”

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

“The city council has been a strong advocate of the Real Living Wage for many years. We are proud to be working for low paid workers in the city and can trace this back over the years from the Anti-Poverty Strategy in the early 90s, the Financial Inclusion work from 2008 and work completed to become a Living Wage employer in 2012.

In 2022, the Norwich Living Wage Action Group was recognised by the Living Wage Foundation for its plan to make Norwich a Living Wage City. The Action Group leading the campaign includes Aviva, Broadland Housing, Future Projects and representatives from local SMEs and the voluntary sector. The three-year plan sets out how the group will work to increase awareness and accreditation across the city. We are fortunate to have Real Living Wage employers across multiple sectors but there is much to do. The group reached the target of 80 employers accredited in year one, meaning more than 1,100 workers in the city have already received a pay rise that meets the Real Living Wage, and the aim is to reach 140 accredited organisations by year three. This is a real challenge in a time of such economic uncertainty for many businesses.

The campaign will continue to raise awareness of the blight of insecure, low paid employment and will encourage employers to become accredited and ultimately ensure employees in Norwich are paid a fair wage. The recent Living Wage Week provided an opportunity to emphasise the importance of paying a Real Living Wage and, this year, the Action Group's communications team ensured that we got our message heard by as many people as possible through radio interviews and media articles.”

#### Question 4

#### **Councillor Fulton-McAlister to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

“More than 1,000 swimming pools have closed in England since 2010, with another 1,500 at risk due to financial pressures according to Swim England. A report highlights that the most deprived areas have lost three times more pools than the richest areas. In contrast, I was pleased to see that the contract for the City Council owned Riverside Leisure Centre has been extended with the positive services it offers but also the payment of the Real Living Wage honoured too. Can the cabinet member comment on the benefits of this contract renewal will bring this city and its citizens?”

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

“I am delighted that the City Council has been able to renew our contract for Riverside with Places Leisure; it is an extremely popular destination and brings considerable health and well-being benefits to the city and its citizens.

Data from November 2023 states that, over the previous year, Riverside Leisure Centre offered social value of over £2.5m, with an average of £116 per participant. This is measured by impacts around physical and mental health, subjective wellbeing, educational attainment and reduced crime.

Riverside Leisure Centre offers a range of swimming opportunities, including group lessons for 14 local schools, swim school, family, club and open swimming. Go4Less pricing includes junior swimming for £1 which has been maintained for the last 10 years and free swimming is offered to children receiving free school meals over holiday periods as part of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme for Norwich.

The Centre also offers classes linked to Cotman Housing, exercise referral in the form of Cardiac Club and Lung Club, an Age UK class, a Dementia Café, and is part of the countywide Active NoW referral scheme to support better health. All asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees are offered a free 3-month membership to help them settle into the city.

Payment of the Real Living Wage has been in place since 2013 and has enabled Places Leisure to develop and retain an excellent team.”

## Question 5

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

“Representing a ward which contains a significant number of constituents who work in retail, I am aware of the increasing epidemic of violence against shop workers due to several factors. USDAW, the trade union for retail staff, has campaigned significantly against this through their Freedom from Fear campaign which I strongly support and regularly encourage constituents who work in retail to join. Can the cabinet member comment on the steps taken to protect both traders and visitors of the much-loved Norwich Market in light of recent increases in theft and intimidation?”

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

“We are aware of increased concerns of traders regarding theft and anti social behaviour on the market. We provide security staff during the Market's hours of operation to combat this.

We have considered the use of CCTV, but the layout of the market would make this challenging. As an alternative, we are investigating in a new reporting system which links with the police and other businesses within the city, that would allow them to notify each other if a suspected offender is in the area. We are liaising with Norwich BID to implement this system, and to also improve access to local police officers.

This Labour-led administration supports the right of all workers on the Market to safe working conditions. I would like to thank USDAW for this campaign, and encourage workers on the Market to join a trade union.”

## Question 6

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

“The issue of tackling the abuses in the private rented sector has been debated and discussed many times in the chamber. Residents in my ward, who rent privately, regularly contact me concerning their fear of revenge eviction if they complain about the conditions in which they live, together with ever increasing and unsustainable rents. I was therefore appalled to read that late last month in a letter to Conservative backbenchers, Michael Gove declared the government will “reform the courts before we abolish Section 21”. Can the cabinet member for social housing comment on the likely impact of this delay upon Norwich?”

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

“Michael Gove’s comments suggest that the protection for private renters that will come from the abolition of the Section 21 notice in the Private Renters Reform Bill will be delayed.

Last year saw a 50% rise in the number of Section 21 notices served across England. Since the Bill was introduced in parliament, our homelessness service has seen a significant increase in presentations from households who have been served notices by landlords who want their properties back to either increase rent or sell before the Bill comes into law.

If the Bill is delayed, we are likely to see this trend continue, with more Section 21 notices being served on private tenants, leading to more households in housing need and increased pressure on already stretched homelessness services. Any delay will also allow landlords to continue serving notice without justification and those who fear a retaliatory eviction will remain in fear of reporting disrepair.

Mr Gove’s comments are ill-timed and ill-conceived and will only cause further difficulty for those renting in the private sector.”

## Question 7

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

“I was pleased to read that the opportunity to refresh and develop a new City Council corporate plan, to help steer the priorities and objectives of the council, is being actively undertaken. I am aware that the previous plan, together with the City Vision Partnership and Covid-19 Recovery Plan have helped our council to importantly build and maintain relationships with critical partners to further enhance and improve Norwich. This is ever more important at a time of diminishing resources and the difficulties of a dual system of local government responsibility. Can the Leader comment on the consultation and the hoped objectives which can be achieved from this exercise?”

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

“Through the Norwich 2040 City Vision we have set out, with our partners, our ambitions for our fine city. But we know that, after the Covid 19 pandemic and given the ongoing cost of living crisis, things have got harder for many in our city.

As a city council we are determined to do all we can to enable a bright future for our city. Our corporate plan is the way in which we can set out how we will do that, and so it is critical that this is informed by listening to the needs of our residents, partners, and businesses.

The new corporate plan is being co-created through a series of citywide engagement activities with colleagues, residents, partners, voluntary groups and organisations, and our business community. Activities include a survey, on-street engagement, workshops, interviews, and focus group sessions.

Doing things this way means we create a shared understanding of our vision, aims and priorities. It allows us to better understand the opportunities and challenges for the city, and crucially, how we can work together with partners to respond to these whilst creating an organisation that will become adaptable and flexible, as the city around us changes. I would encourage everyone to get involved in sharing their views to inform this important plan.”

## Question 8

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

“Representing a ward which has felt the impacts of rising crime and anti social behaviour since particularly 2015, and the advent of County Line drug activity, I am aware of the significant importance of neighbourhood policing and strong multi-agency working to enhance community safety and peace of mind. The loss of services which work together to better respond and reduce crime has been a grievous blow to our city. As part of the enhancement, investment, and development of the council’s anti social behaviour team, would the cabinet member for social housing consider developing a new Community Warden service?”

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

“It is clear from resident surveys undertaken through our Safer Neighbourhoods Initiative and feedback to members that residents do appreciate a visible policing and community safety presence in their neighbourhoods.

I am pleased to confirm that we have been successful in securing funding through the Safer Streets Fund to pilot a Safe Streets Warden initiative comprising three full-time posts. The service will provide that visible reassuring presence, encouraging and supporting residents to report their concerns.

The project will also help strengthen links with local communities and support further collaborative activity between the council, residents, police and other partners to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and increase residents’ feelings of safety.

We look forward to final written confirmation from the Home Office of the grant allocation for 2024/25 to enable a speedy roll out of this exciting new initiative”.



## Question 9

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

“I was pleased that this council joined in the campaign to save our Norwich rail ticket office with the Leader speaking and supporting this publicly. Supporting all actions which protect and enhance public transport is vital for our city, and the proposed closure of the ticket office was always the thin edge of the wedge to reduce the rail service still further. Will the Leader congratulate the RMT union, local trade unionists and all those members of the community who responded and led the campaign to save the ticket office and comment on the importance to Norwich of better rail infrastructure to the city?”

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

“Thank you, Councillor Carrington. I would be happy to support this. It is clear to me that over the last year the RMT has been campaigning against the DfT managed train companies' plans for wholesale ticket office closures and outcome of this has been the largest ever response to a government consultation. What an amazing achievement and on 31 October 2023 the Tory government announced the plans had been dropped. This is a resounding victory for the union's campaign and a win for passengers, community groups and rail workers alike.

An effective rail network, which moves freight from our roads to rail, could play a significant role in carbon reduction but also ensure cities like Norwich gain from the economic advantages good public transport can offer. I call for there to be an urgent summit with the government, train operating companies, disabled people, community organisations and passenger groups to agree a different route for the rail network that guarantees the future of our ticket offices, like in Norwich, and stations staff jobs to delivers a safe, secure, and accessible service that puts passengers before profit. With a Labour government, which hopefully we shall have next year, I look forward to a steady renationalisation of the railways and enhancement of the Norwich services.”

## Question 10

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

“I am proud of the work of this City Council, despite the enormous impact of cuts since 2010 to still advance a cultural offer within the city. Attaining the National Centre for Writing and Norwich becoming England’s first UNESCO City of Literature in 2012 is good recognition of this. Over the summer I was pleased to see the next chapter of the City of Stories being implemented in Norwich with the introduction of a new trail of permanent book benches, made using stone, metal and wood, in eight locations which have been positively welcomed and remarked upon by my constituents. Can the cabinet member comment on how the cultural strategy of the council is helping to lead such improvements to Norwich including what residents could possibly look forward to in the months ahead?”

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

“The book benches are an excellent example of a collaborative project between Norwich City Council, Norwich BID, and the National Centre for Writing, University of East Anglia, and Norfolk County Council. Many of the 8 unique benches are inscribed with authors or stories connected to the city and the benches encourage people to take time to talk and share stories while meeting friends, reading alone or enjoying a coffee.

As part of our 2040 City Vision partnership, the Creative City Compact has a mission to champion the role of culture, attract investment, and facilitate impactful collaboration and exchange across the cultural ecosystem of Norwich. Norwich City Council, together with input from key stakeholders, has developed an Action Plan for Culture which sets out how the council and its partners will contribute to the culture and creativity in Norwich. Over the next 18 months, the plan will take in redevelopment of The Halls, continued support for events, festivals and activities in public spaces and promoting an ambition to enable everyone to have access to culture and creativity. There is much to look forward to in 2024 including the council-led Lord Mayor’s Weekend on the 6 and 7 July and something for everyone in a series of events taking place in the city centre and our parks during the Spring and Summer.”

## Question 11

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

“Earlier this month I saw that the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, propose new laws to restrict the use of tents by homeless people, arguing that many homeless individuals see it as a "lifestyle choice". As we approach winter can the cabinet member for housing and community safety comment on whether she believes this latest proposal is the most effective means of tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in our city?”

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

“Our approach to dealing with rough sleeping in Norwich is more person focused and compassionate. Our services are focused on working with the client to understand their needs and wishes and ensure that they have the right provision and support in place to help get them off the streets.

Accordingly, the council has a specialist team dedicated to assisting rough sleepers, supports the Pathways Norwich outreach service and, with church partners, delivers a winter shelter from March to November in addition to the 500+ beds available through the city’s hostel system.

We have to acknowledge that many of those sleeping on the streets have complex needs and may be entrenched in street activity, having previously experienced issues engaging with services. Accessing the winter shelter is often the first step toward building relationships with these clients and encouraging further engagement with the help and resources we have available.

Our approach is successful. The annual DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) verified rough sleeper count shows a 30 percent decrease in rough sleepers in Norwich since 2021. This is the lowest figure for seven years and is testament to the ongoing efforts that the council and its partners are making to alleviate rough sleeping the in the city.

Our efforts to reduce rough sleeping are ongoing. We continually seek to develop our services for those in the greatest need and I have confidence that this commitment will ensure that we and our valued partners are able to provide the best possible support for rough sleepers in Norwich.”

## Question 12

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

“I have received complaints from sheltered housing tenants in Eaton about the lack of care and maintenance of the green spaces around their homes.

Bushes are hacked back to the point of dying, hedges are trimmed on the sides but not the tops, left to grow even higher.

No weeding takes place so the weeds flourish and grow tall.

No new planting takes place once plants and bushes die, leaving large patches of bare earth.

The picture I paint is of an environment neglected and uncared for, giving tenants no sense of wellbeing.

Tenants wonder why the grounds maintenance around their homes is so badly managed with no ability to have any input into the process?”

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

“The grounds maintenance work is being carried out at present and is completed in line with industry horticultural practices.

Beds are maintained with weeds removed and shrubs pruned. Some shrub beds do have gaps and we will try to fill these in as and when budgets allow.

We have this week received two separate compliments about the grounds works in the Eaton and area, and also the following report via the sheltered housing support team.

‘The tenants at Ryrie Court have asked me to say a huge Thank You to you for getting the gardening done and making the scheme look really lovely again and what a fantastic job the gardeners did.

‘It really has made a huge difference and they are all so very happy and talking about it.’”

### **Question 13**

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

“Residents want to take pride in their local area, and there are many studies that show a link between the perception of how well an area is looked after and lower rates of crime, anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping etc. Myself and many of my colleagues have been inundated with concerns from residents about the state of their streets, whether that is overgrown verges, an abundance of litter or the lack of sweeping and deep street cleaning. On multiple occasions I have requested information on when specific streets will be receiving sweeps and deep cleans, but receive a holding answer that it is under review with no timescale for completion. Is the Cabinet Member able to tell me when this review will be complete and sent to ward councillors?”

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

“The council spends approximately £1.79m a year on keeping the streets of Norwich clean. This includes litter removal, emptying of litter bins, graffiti removal and clearance of fly tipping.

These services are under continuous review to ensure that they deliver quality services on behalf of the people of Norwich whilst delivering value for money in a highly challenging financial climate.

We aim to have the current review completed in spring 2024. We will be consulting with stakeholders, including councillors, on our proposals once the review has been completed to ensure that these services continue to tackle the issues that Councillor Francis has raised.”

## Question 14

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

“The £100k LOVE Norwich campaign to clean up the city started a year ago with an event on 20 November 2022. 11 months later we asked what success indicators have been collected, how has it been assessed, what elements have been successful for the long term and should be ramped up, which events have been held and what has been delivered. We did not receive answers apart from being told that ‘over the autumn’ the Council is looking to ‘ramp up’ the LOVE Norwich campaign city wide ‘but we are working through the details of the programme at the moment and no decisions have been taken on approaches at present.’ The website has not been updated since the launch. Meanwhile the city is still a mess. What metrics are in place to ensure confidence of timely, value for money outcomes for local residents from this project?”

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

“Through Love Norwich a large number of workstreams continue to address the challenges that the city experiences with environmental Anti Social Behaviour.

73 enforcement processes have been completed by officers over the last year. The issues addressed range from dog fouling, fly tipping, fly posting and business waste.

We have identified fly tipping hotspots across the city and are about to invest most of the £100K Neighbourhood Improvement Initiative funding to provide CCTV cameras at these locations to deter and detect fly tippers. We are also reviewing the frequency of waste collections at these locations and the number and type of bins that are provided there.

We have improved collaborative working across the council, and services such as Housing, Community Enablement and Environment Services are working much more closely with colleagues in NCSL. This will deliver improvements, particularly within our council-owned housing estates.”

## Question 15

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

“Norwich prides itself on its rich history of social housing in the city, giving thousands more opportunities and being one of the most important steps in getting closer to social justice in the UK. Therefore, we all want to see our social housing stock cherished and looked after so that tenants can live in affordable, safe and comfortable homes. However, we have seen a staggering 260% increase in mould complaints in our social housing stock. We have all been told that an accelerated process for damp and mould exists but for residents in my ward, who have been hospitalised or put on medication due to mouldy properties, the council seems to have turned a blind eye. What steps will the council take to resolve the level of complaints in this area?”

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

“Norwich City Council has taken significant steps to address these concerns and has devised an enhanced process aimed at promptly handling instances of damp and mould reported by residents.

Every reported case of damp or mould undergoes an immediate mould wash procedure to mitigate any health risks associated with mould spores. Following reports on mould washes, and independent damp survey is then conducted to identify underlying issues and specify necessary remedial works.

The protocol aims to expedite the identification and resolution of persistent or challenging cases, prioritising the well-being of our residents.”

## Question 16

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

“Solar energy is a growth area, which is important to meet decarbonisation targets and combat fuel poverty. I have heard from a number of residents who are keen to get panels, but have been left confused and have come away with mixed messages from their enquiries to City Hall. It is surprising that there is not an easy to find area on our website where residents can find out the rules on solar for them. Please could the cabinet member confirm that the council will review its communications processes and website regarding where solar panels are allowed on city homes and buildings, ensuring they are clear and customer friendly?”

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

“Supporting the people of Norwich to better understand how they can reduce their own environmental impact, and their energy costs, is a key element of our ambitious response to the environmental emergency and to the cost of living crisis.

Initiatives such as our Solar Together scheme, a group buying scheme for solar panels and battery storage, which guides residents through the process, helping them to secure the best possible price with trusted organisations, have been hugely positive over several years.

We have plans in place to hold more events in the coming months to provide an opportunity for residents to talk directly to council colleagues, to understand what they can do to reduce their carbon footprint and their energy bills, and receive trusted advice.

I am pleased to confirm that we will look again at the information we currently provide around solar panels to ensure it is clear for our residents, and I thank Councillor Young for her question.”



## Question 17

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

“The Island Community Group at West Pottergate/Douro Place have done excellent work setting up a community garden, creating a welcoming space that invites in neighbours as well as wildlife. The group has acquired several fruit trees, however, it has not received permission from the Council to plant these in the soil. Having been kept in pots for several months, several of the trees have declined or even died. Would the Cabinet member please commit to exploring the possibility of granting permission for planting these trees in the soil of the community garden?”

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

“We are happy to support community initiatives. Our housing estates and community enabling teams are in contact with the group about how best to manage this area on housing land. We have recently supported this group by offering raised planters and a community notice board to bring more attention to their good work. Specific individual sites need assessing and maintaining for the future which we need to ensure is both sustainable so that as many local neighbours and residents are engaged with such community initiatives. Our estate team leader has already made contact and given advice about where the trees may be planted.”

## **Question 18**

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

“In answer to a question in September full council, the cabinet member said that orders had now been raised for the initial purchase and installation of fire doors, and that the programme would commence in October. Councillor enquiries a few days later told me the programme was still on hold. Further enquiries in October told me that the programme was being put together and would be shared when complete. Meanwhile, residents across Norwich are still waiting for new fire doors, which should be seen as an essential in a property. Can the cabinet member please give me some clarity on what is happening with the fire door programme including assurances that work will commence shortly?”

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

“Fire door surveys have commenced, Winchester and Normandie towers being prioritised. Enabling works relating to the door replacement are being discussed, including asbestos coating removal to the communal areas and the transition to secured post boxes at Ground Floor lobby areas to further enhance the resilience of the new fire doorsets. We have appointed a contractor from a specialist framework to undertake initial works on Winchester and Normandie and will be tendering the main programme works in early December, to commence that programme in early February.”

## Question 19

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

“I have made multiple suggestions to the estate aesthetics programme, but have seen all but one not receive any form of response. This would give the impression of high demand on the programme. Instead, £200,000 is set to be removed from the estate aesthetics budget, which is disappointing to see given the work that many estates in my ward could do with to improve safety, accessibility, appearance and overall pride in the estate. Where is this money going?”

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

“This programme is set to run for 5 years. The current budget is £750,000, reducing to £500,000 in year 2, £250,000 in year 3 and £200,000 for each of the final two years. As part of the new procurement programme, much of this work will be picked up through validation surveys of existing assets and through consultation regarding additional works, which where affordable will be identified and undertaken to maximise efficiencies of whole estate investment works programmes.”

## **Question 20**

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

“The city council does not have a publicly available list of statues and sculptures in Norwich, which can be used as a free public art trail as in other cities. We have suggested to officers that this is rectified, and they agreed it could be part of the Action Plan for Culture and hosted on our website. Does the cabinet member agree?”

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

“The Council developed the action plan for Culture in collaboration with our partners within the Creative City Compact, as a steppingstone towards a full cultural Strategy for Norwich in 2025.

To inform that strategy work is underway to establish a cultural needs analysis. This will help identify the city’s strengths and where there are gaps in our cultural and creative offer, enabling the Council and Compact to better understand the demand for, and impact of, particular actions, and ensure we are using the creative resources available to us across the city to deliver the greatest impact for Norwich.

A decision on whether we would wish to take forward Councillor Schmierer’s suggestion will be made within that framework.”

## Question 21

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

“At the September full Council meeting, my motion to explore a trial of a four-day working week for Council staff passed with unanimous, cross-party support. Could the leader or relevant cabinet member please update council on what steps have been taken to plan and/or identify opportunities for this trial to take place including a draft timeframe for when we expect this to take place?”

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

“I think that it is important to remind ourselves of the motion that was agreed at Council in September as I don't want us to forget the broad nature of it. I note that Councillor Worley wishes to focus on the four-day week element which is disappointing considering that the motion was about so much more than this. The Green Party seem to be overly focussed on this single aspect that they put forwards in the motion – it is clearly an agenda that they wholeheartedly support despite having no evidence as to how it might impact residents. Anyhow, to remind ourselves and provide the context, it was to:

- 1) continue to provide exemplar practices regarding flexible working arrangements throughout the different levels of the organisation, including stipulating flexibility in job adverts;
- 2) extend its longstanding work with partners on the living wage to support flexible working;

and finally ...

- 3) explore the benefits of a reduced working week at full pay, if based on evidence this would ensure the performance and value of residents' services were improved, and initiate discussions within the council and with partners, including trade unions, about the potential of this future model.

Firstly, for the avoidance of doubt and to correct Councillor Worley's question, the motion that was agreed at last months council meeting does not state anywhere that 'we will explore carrying out a trial'.

And for absolute clarity and to avoid any further misrepresentation, absolutely nowhere in the motion does it state that there is an undertaking that 'we will be introducing a 4-day week'.

It very clearly states that this would need to be explored in the round and with a solid basis of evidence that ensured that performance and value for resident's services were improved.

Councillor Worley, you will also be aware from the extensive national reporting on the matter that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has been very vocal on the matter, to the extent

where they have issued non statutory guidance on this. The Secretary for State has clearly stated in this guidance their belief that a reduced working week with no reduction in pay is unlikely to meet the statutory requirement to the Best Value Duty and although the terms and conditions which apply to our workforce is a matter for the council, we are however mindful of our statutory duties and as with all such matters will need to give this due consideration.

Finally, I would like to add that Norwich City Council are already very much an exemplar in terms of the flexible working arrangements within our workforce – we have a broad range of different work patterns in place already that are designed to meet the needs of our residents and support our workforce. As just a few examples, we have compressed working arrangements, term time and job share arrangements and annualised hours. Hybrid working has also been positively received by the workforce. All of this is carried out with our drive to put residents needs at the heart of what we do and deliver excellent services to them. We have an extremely dedicated and hard-working team of officers here at Norwich City Council who deliver across the whole of our city night and day. I would like to pass on mine and Cabinet’s personal thanks to them for the tremendous job that they are doing and the significant contribution to the city that they make. Maybe colleagues from across the chamber would like to join me in that vote of thanks.”

## Question 22

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

“Can you provide details of the due diligence process the city council undertook for recipients of both phase 1 and phase 2 of the covid small businesses grants?”

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

“As has been discussed at audit committee on more than one occasion, when the government first launched the business grant scheme, the requirements and guidance from central government was to pay the grants quickly. The pressure was on Local Authorities to pay all eligible businesses without delay, and this council followed this directive. No applications or prepayment checks were initially required under central government rules. Post payment assurance checks would be supported by the government and were carried out by the council.

Norwich City Council did one payment run to qualifying businesses where bank details were held but for future payment runs pre-payment checks were introduced, to reduce the possibility of false or fraudulent bank account details being used.

An online form was created to support verification that the claimant was the liable party and that the bank account details were correct. The government monitored the payments and reported weekly as to how effective councils were in paying the grants.

Businesses did not have to apply for the grants, as they were entitled to receive the funds by virtue of being in receipt of small business rate relief and the team managing the grants had to contact them, some several times, to provide their details. The risk of erroneous details being acquired was recognised and as a result pre and post payment checks were introduced by the government on subsequent grant schemes and fraud monitoring became a requirement.

The vast majority of fraud/incorrectly paid cases stemmed from the first payment run that had not been subject to prepayment checks. The council is required to recover these payments and is currently in the process of doing so. In cases where recovery is unsuccessful by the council the cases will be passed back to central government to continue this process.”

## **Question 23**

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

“A joint statement was issued on the 23 October by OneNorwich Practices and the NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, announcing their intention to transition staff and services to other providers, and then close down the organisation due to financial difficulties. Altogether these services provide an estimated minimum of 120,000 essential patient visits a year. This announcement came as a shock to hardworking staff, as well as the many patients who rely on the services. The service looks likely to close or be transferring provider in January, potentially around one of the peak periods of illness during the year. How has the council assessed the impact of this sudden closure on its own services?”

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

“I note Councillor Galvin in addition to this question you have submitted a motion to Council which looks to the County Council as the responsible body for public health and health scrutiny to review this matter further.

I do not wish to prejudice myself in advance of the motion to be presented to Council this evening.”



## Question 24

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

“The city has a number of barriers on footways and cycleways owned by the city council (rather than highways) that prevent access or full use for people with various disabilities. Will the council introduce a policy, compliant with the public sector equality duty, for their timely removal?”

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

“The Council is committed to meets its obligations under the Equalities Act. It is sometimes necessary to install barriers at the entrance to land owned by the City Council or on paths across our land. This can be to prevent grazing animals escaping, block incursions by motorised vehicles or slow children emerging into a dangerous highway environment. When installing new barriers to our natural areas we follow good practice such as installing disabled-friendly kissing gate systems with weighted self-closing mechanisms following liaison with groups representing people with disabilities. However, there may be barriers that were installed in the past and do not meet current standards of good practice. We do not have an inventory of these but we are happy to respond to requests for their removal. For example, the barrier on Hellesdon Road on the path from Lusher Rise will soon be removed.

We are also currently auditing all our play areas with regards to accessibility. Sometimes more comprehensive interventions are required than just removing barriers. The project currently under construction at Ketts Heights that is funded by the Greater Norwich Growth Board involves rebuilding the entrance steps and providing a ramped access allowing this wonderful space to be enjoyed by people with restricted mobility. This work demonstrates that there is no need for a specific policy to be introduced.”

## **Question 25**

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

“OneNorwich Practices provides healthcare services for homeless people, refugees and asylum seekers – groups that the city council has a duty to support. The closure of OneNorwich could mean that members of these groups turn to city council for support. What assessment has been done on the impact that the closure of OneNorwich could have on staff capacity and resource within city council teams working with these groups?”

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

“Councillor Price I refer you back to the previous response to Councillor Galvin, but I would like to add some words of reassurance about our continued work to provide services to some of the most vulnerable within our communities by saying that: the city council will continue to provide vital services to individuals who present as homeless, as well as the work it does to prevent homelessness and support some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

As Norfolk County Council has responsibility for public health and health scrutiny, any questions about the impacts of this important service need to be taken up with relevant county council colleagues or those responsible for commissioning the services of OneNorwich Practices.”

## Question 26

### **Councillor Vivien Thomas to ask the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion the following question:**

“I was thrilled to hear that this Labour led city council has been successful in securing over £7m to invest in the Mile Cross Health, Wellbeing and Economic Activity bid which was submitted previously to the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities. Can the cabinet member comment further on the types of improvements this will help to deliver?”

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

“The announcement on Monday that our Norwich North Levelling Up Fund bid has been successful is excellent news. This will contribute to one of the council’s wider ambitions of supporting more residents to live active and healthier lives linked to better health, safety, wellbeing, and social mobility”.

The original bid for funding was submitted in July 2022. Following Monday’s announcement about the successful bid, details of what the money will deliver will need to be revisited with our partners to ensure that all the projects are still financially viable, deliverable and relevant. The project is set to deliver a linked set of community facilities in Sloughbottom Park including new and significantly improved sports and play areas. This will include a new 3G football pitch and changing facilities, wider recreational facilities and infrastructure improvements. The scheme represents a substantial investment in the Mile Cross area.”

**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 27**

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

“We recently had national recycling week in October 2023, with the city council putting out some nice social media posts promoting this. However, the recent corporate performance report shows that recycling rates are below target and have been stagnant for over a year. Comparable councils such as Colchester and Cambridge consistently see their recycling rates above 50%. Given that a review of the Biffa contract has taken place and that a new fleet will be commissioned for 2027, and given the ongoing review into the council's waste strategy, will the cabinet member commit to exploring schemes to recycle more materials kerbside? For example, the Podback scheme would allow residents to recycle coffee pods. Furthermore, many local governments in Wales run kerbside collections of disposable nappies to send these to be recycled, and Bristol City Council recently ran a nappy recycling trial scheme.”

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

“Norwich City Council offers a class leading range of recycling services for its residents, including weekly food waste collections, garden waste collections, and kerbside collection of material such as glass, textiles and waste electrical equipment. We are well placed to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the Environment Act 2021 and the government's proposals to deliver Simpler Recycling

The council's recycling rates have not changed over the last few years. In this, we are similar to many councils nationally and locally, and the latest published national recycling rate for 2021 is the same as it was in 2015. Compared with other local authorities in predominantly urban areas, with similar populations and levels of deprivation, our performance is in the top 25%. We are working hard to develop a new waste strategy that will help deliver the council's environmental commitments.

Although the government has delayed the introduction of new legislation to introduce extended producer responsibility for packaging, and a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, we are committed to improving our services and recycling rates over the next 12 to 18 months. This will be done through a range of interventions, from redesigned collection services to improved engagement and enforcement.

There are currently no proposals to add to the wide range of materials that we currently collect, but would encourage residents to dispose of their coffee pods and disposable nappies responsibly.”