



Cabinet

17:30 to 18:30

12 July 2023

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair), Jones (vice chair), Giles, Hampton, Kenrick and Oliver.

Also present: Councillor Galvin, Green group leader

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public questions/ petitions

One public question had been received from Mr James Hawketts.

Mr Hawketts asked the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture the following question:

“The council’s ability to communicate with members of the public appears to be under significant strain. At a full council meeting in March, a motion from Councillors Bogelein and Lubbock stated that of the 8096 calls made to the council in December last year, 3488 didn’t manage to get through at all and had to be rung back. This would represent a failure rate of 43%, which is staggering.

I’m worried that getting the help that residents need is becoming a two-tiered system between the IT literate and those not-so. The elderly in particular are disproportionately reliant on traditional methods of communication, which appear shunned. The motion points to face-to-face appointments; personally, I haven’t come across anyone who has received a response to a written letter whatsoever. So I ask the cabinet member, how many letters have been received in the past six months, and how many have had responses?”

Councillor Oliver responded:

“We need to be clear here because I think there may be a misconception about the call back service we offer and what it is. When a customer makes a call to us, they can either wait for their call to be answered or chose an option where they can request a call back from our customer service team if that suits them better. In requesting a call back, it means that the caller retains their place in the queue, instead of waiting and receives a call from us without

having to wait in a call queue. In December 2022 there were 14,610 calls, 3,488 of these answered calls were those who requested the call back option and the total success rate for answering calls was 79.29%. The calls that were not answered are where a customer has chosen not to wait or request a call back from us, where they have decided to choose another contact channel, their requirements to contact the council may have changed, they chose not to wait, or chose not to continue with their enquiry.

Traditional methods of communication are available to customers accessing our services including face to face at our customer contact centre and via written communication. The comment in your question that states 'I haven't come across anyone who has received a response to a written letter whatsoever' feels a little misleading, as across the council numerous written communications are sent each day whether via letter or email and to suggest otherwise feels like it paints an inaccurate picture. We are unable to provide the total volume of written letters received and responded to across the whole organisation, however if you would please provide the details of anyone who has not yet received a reply to their written communications then we will investigate this fully."

In response to Mr Hawketts' supplementary question, Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for wellbeing and culture emphasised that digital exclusion was a high priority for the council.

3. Questions to cabinet members

Councillor Stonard, the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development advised that 12 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.

(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 questions are summarised as follows:

- Question 1 Councillor Worley to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on the Graffiti Strategy.
- Question 2 Councillor Osborn to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on empty retail units.
- Question 3 Councillor Schmierer to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on street cleaning.
- Question 4 Councillor Galvin to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on mitigation site allocation for Nutrient Neutrality.
- Question 5 Councillor Champion to the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion on the grass cutting programme.

- Question 6 Councillor Calvert to the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety on shed repairs.
- Question 7 Councillor Hoechner to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on an air quality communication campaign.
- Question 8 Councillor Catt to the cabinet member for resources on the cancellation of July's council meeting.
- Question 9 Councillor Fox to the cabinet member for resources on the use of city hall rooms for community groups.
- Question 10 Councillor Young to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on development policies and solar panels.
- Question 11 Councillor Haynes to the leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development on communal bins.
- Question 12 Councillor Price to the cabinet member for resources on the Audit Commission.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2023.

5. Q4 2022/23 Assurance Report

Councillor Stonard, leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development presented the report and highlighted areas of good performance and noted areas which were below target.

Councillor Kendrick, cabinet member for resources, referred to the excellent Treasury Management performance detailed in the report, the proactive management of cash flow resulting in £3.8m in income being achieved and the council's overall debt being reduced. Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety referred to the progress which had been made on managing void turnarounds to relet council properties. The figures were reflective of several long term void properties which had now been brought back into use. In terms of Private Sector Housing enforcement, the impact of the government's decision to reduce planning red tape and allow permitted development had led to some poor quality office to residential conversions. This created large projects and led to peaks and troughs in performance as these were complex cases to tackle and took a lot of staff resource. Councillor Giles cabinet member for communities and social inclusion highlighted the effective housing benefit and council tax support processing achieved.

In response to Councillor Galvin's question Councillor Jones advised that work was underway to recruit to the Private Sector Housing Team, she noted that there was a

shortage of trained staff in the field and the council were looking to grow talent from within the council too.

RESOLVED to review progress on the key performance indicators for this quarter and the corporate risk register.

6. Vehicle anti- social behaviour Public Space Protection Order

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety presented the report. She emphasised that the introduction of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) was not a decision to take lightly. However, she stressed that there had been issues with vehicles congregating in certain areas of the city. Residents in the Britannia Road area of the city had raised concerns but other areas had been highlighted as part of the consultation exercise which had taken place. It was important that the PSPO was city wide in order to avoid just moving the problem on to a different area. The PSPO would provide an additional tool which would enable the police to take a robust approach across the city with vehicles gathering and causing anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Giles, cabinet member for communities and social inclusion expressed his thanks to officers on behalf of residents and asked for more information in relation to the consultation. Councillor Jones advised that over 150 responses had been received flagging up issues in different areas of the city which was why a city-wide approach was needed.

Councillor Galvin considered the PSPO to be a good example of partnership working with residents, the council and police working together and wondered if a similar approach could be taken with the use of CCTV in areas. Councillor Jones advised that there was CCTV resource available and the council were looking at new cameras and options for their use. Councillor Giles commented that for the last few months CCTV cameras had been located at Britannia Road.

RESOLVED to agree:

- 1) to the making of the Public Space Protection Order for the management of vehicle-related anti-social behaviour associated with car meets in public spaces within the Norwich City district boundary for a period of three years; and
- 2) the Public Space Protection Order, once made, be advertised in local media and on the Council website.

7. Whole House Improvements to void properties

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety presented the report. If the contract were agreed it would enable 40 large scale complex voids to be brought up to the standard for relet. The funding for the contract was already accounted for in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. Gasways were the selected contractor that met requirements and the contract would be closely monitored.

The interim head of asset management noted that the contract represented an interim arrangement to move forward a number of complex voids whilst procurement for a whole house approach and the property team restructure were taking place.

Councillor Galvin commented that with the properties empty it was a perfect time to install renewables and replace gas boilers and questioned why the opportunity had not been taken. Councillor Jones emphasised that the award of the contract would enable 40 voids to get back into use and whilst renewables were a priority they were secondary to meeting housing need. The interim head of building safety and compliance noted that where there were opportunities to install heat pumps this would be considered and he would keep Councillor Galvin updated.

RESOLVED to award the contract for whole house improvements works to void properties to Gasway Services Limited at a total cost of £625,000, subject to satisfactory performance and quality being met for the period of one year from 01 September 2023 to 31 August 2024.

8. Award of Stock Condition Survey Contract

Councillor Jones, deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and community safety, presented the report. She noted that in order to maintain the council's housing stock in good condition regular stock condition surveys were needed to use to develop a stock condition programme. To keep current stock at the best possible standard it was necessary to know its condition to understand the investment needed going forward. The survey would also provide an opportunity to identify damp and mold in properties.

Councillor Galvin asked what the process was to identify properties and in which order would they be tackled, was there a decision model used and was this model ready and could she view it. Councillor Jones advised that she would come back to Councillor Galvin with more detail outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED to approve:

- 1) The award of the contract for stock condition surveys of housing properties to Fairthorn Farrell Timms LLP at a total cost of £599,250.00 for the period of one-year from 29 September 2023; and
- 2) The proposed virement of 2023/24 HRA revenue budget to fund the proposed works, as set out within the financial implications of the report.

9. An update on financial planning and the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumption

(The chair referred to the supplementary agenda which had been circulated).

Councillor Kendrick cabinet member for resources presented the report. He noted that since the budget had been set inflation had continued to rise and financial turbulence was ongoing. He emphasised that it was essential to plan for an uncertain financial future with the best information available and the report extended medium term financial planning up to 2028/29.

Councillor Kendrick highlighted the strong financial planning which had taken place last year and noted that whilst the estimated budget gap was initially set at £8.2m. Once savings already agreed were taken account of, this reduced to approximately £3m. Councillor Stonard, leader of the council and cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable development referred to the recent peer review which had commended the council's financial planning.

Councillor Giles cabinet member for communities and social inclusion asked how much Section 31 windfall funding had been received and had the funding been allocated. The interim chief finance officer and S151 officer advised it was £2.8m and no decision had been made as yet, it would be considered as part of the first quarterly budget monitoring report.

Councillor Galvin referred to the initial assumption of £1m savings coming from city hall and asked why this had not been developed and when it would be. The interim chief finance officer advised that the initial proposals from last year were going through the validation process and he considered the risk of including the assumption too great at this time. Work had been commissioned to develop the proposal and when he was confident with projected costs and income it would be fed into the budget during the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the current indicative MTFS projections;
- 2) Note the financial risks;
- 3) Endorse an approach to review the council's financial plans to support strong alignment with its corporate priorities; and
- 4) Endorse an approach to the early identification of on-going actions to close the estimated budget gap of £2.9m over the medium-term financial planning period.

10. Exclusion of the public

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of items *11 and *12 (below) on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

***11. Q4 2022-23 assurance report – exempt appendix (para 3)**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the exempt appendix.

***12. An update on financial planning and the Medium Term Financial Strategy assumption – exempt appendix (para 3)**

(The chair referred to the supplementary agenda which had been circulated).

An exempt minute exists for this item.

CHAIR



Cabinet

20 June 2023

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

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

“In response to a question asked by Councillor Champion in September 2021 asking about a graffiti strategy for the city, the Cabinet Member said, “We do recognise the requirement for a joined-up approach and are examining the options for prevention, cleaning and enforcement in order to develop an effective long-term response to graffiti. Officers will be benchmarking performance at other councils, researching best-practice and working with NCSL to find the most efficient application of our resources in order to manage and reduce graffiti city-wide.” Can the Cabinet Member please tell us what progress has been made in the intervening two years, including stating when councillors and the public will be consulted on the graffiti strategy?”

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

“Officers have almost completed the tasks required to allow preparation of a draft strategy. Once complete, the draft will then be consulted on internally, prior to consulting with the council’s stakeholders by the end of September. We aim to have this process complete by the end of this year.”

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Worley was not present at the meeting.)

Question 2

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

“The closure of the Lakenham post office is the latest loss of vital in-person services for the city, following the closure of banks such as the TSB branch on Magdalen Street and other post offices in Bowthorpe and – soon – Eaton. Can the Cabinet member explain how the council’s economic strategy for the city will respond to the loss of these services, for example by implementing a “meanwhile use” policy to ensure that high street units are kept in use and not left abandoned?”

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

“I share your concern about the closure of valued community services in our communities and am aware that members from across all parties have been active in campaigning for retention of such facilities.

It is disappointing to see that notwithstanding these efforts that the closure of banks and post offices is continuing. Unfortunately, the council does not have the power to prevent such local facilities leaving our high streets. Fortunately, Norwich is performing well compared to the national average when it comes to vacant units on the high street. The latest retail floorspace monitor shows that vacancy rates in Norwich are at 12.6% in the City Centre and 12.1% in district centres compared to the national average of 15.4%. Vacancy rates in Norwich have been decreasing since the pandemic. Our economic development team have in the past worked with organisations such as the Business Improvement District to encourage landlords to implement meanwhile uses and will keep this under review should vacancy rates worsen.”

(In response to Councillor Osborn’s supplementary question Councillor Stonard confirmed that a “meanwhile use” policy was part of a range of measures the council could use to keep the city centre vibrant. He emphasised that Norwich City Centre was faring well when compared to vacancy rates in other cities and this was because there was a strategy to promote the city centre in place which cut across everything the council did.)

Question 3

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

“The council has said that its reporting shows a 92.33% pass rate for street cleaning inspections in Mancroft Ward. However, many streets and estates in the ward, such as Cowgate, Canterbury Place, King Street, Lothian Street and others, are often filthy due to rubbish being left strewn across the street, and often broken glass or excrement as well. As Mancroft councillors, we have repeatedly encouraged residents to report this, however there seems to have been little improvement. Will the Cabinet Member review the frequency and quality of street cleaning in the city?”

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

“The council uses a nationally recognised measurement system to measure the effectiveness of our street cleaning operations. Approximately 700 random inspections are carried out a year across the city, and the results are independently audited by the Association for Public Service Excellence. They also administer the inspection system on behalf of participating councils.

We are aware of the particular challenges at the locations identified, and we are working across the council and with Norwich City Services Limited to address these. In the meantime, we continually review our street cleaning schedules and are investing in new equipment to ensure the delivery of the quality of street cleaning expected by our residents.”

(In response to Councillor Schmierer’s supplementary question Councillor Stonard assured him that street cleaning was a council priority.)

Question 4

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

“As you know, the River Wensum is one of 27 catchments that are subject to Natural England's Nutrient Neutrality policy which has restricted developers building new homes within its catchment. This is meant to prevent increases in levels of problem chemicals like phosphates and put measures in place to mitigate the impact of new development. However, I have heard concerns shared among experts and a range of stakeholders that the process of deciding the best sites for mitigation projects means they are not being determined in the light of existing evidence for where they would make the best impact on the health of the river. Please could you explain what work is being done to identify solutions to avoid the danger of commodity brokerage trading rather than actually reducing the pollution in the river?”

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

“Since the announcement of Natural England's (NE) nutrient neutrality restrictions for the Rivers Wensum and Yare last March there has been close cooperation between the affected Norfolk authorities to address nutrient neutrality to enable planning consents to be issued.

Royal Haskoning DHV were commissioned to prepare a Nitrate/Phosphate Mitigation Strategy for the catchment areas of the River Wensum and the Broads in Norfolk.. The study sets out a range of potential mitigation measures over the short, medium and longer term.

A Joint Venture (JV) has been established (Norfolk Environmental Credits Ltd) between four Norfolk authorities and Anglian Water. Norwich is not yet a member but is closely involved in its work with a view to joining once the business case is established. The JV is liaising closely with Natural England on its work.

Natural England is developing a Nutrient Mitigation scheme to enable developers to purchase 'nutrient credits' which will discharge the requirements to provide mitigation.

For the Wensum catchment the mitigation needs to be in place upstream/in the catchment of the point of impact of the development on the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), in particular the discharge point into the River Wensum of the wastewater treatment works that the development will connect to.

The work being undertaken to address nutrient neutrality in the Wensum and Broads catchments is based on specially commissioned evidence and mitigation will be locationally restricted for the Wensum. The JV takes a strategic approach to delivery of mitigation across a number of local authority boundaries and is not a commodity broker. Operation of the JV will be guided by the need to secure a trajectory of phosphorus and nitrogen reductions in line with projected development and its approach is consistent with NE's

advice on nutrient neutrality requirements for these catchments published in March 2022.”

(Councillor Galvin asked by way of supplementary question for detail of the council's support, with timescales, of the work that was being done on how actual in-river measures of Phosphate could be linked and apportioned to clearly defined and measured upstream point sources. Councillor Stonard agreed that all were extremely concerned by the abuse of waterways and he would set out how the council were working with partners to mitigate this outside of the meeting.)

Question 5

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

“The council has confirmed that it has no plans for a “No Mow May” policy. In June 2022, the Cabinet Member stated that the council is “looking to ensure that the NCSL grass cutting programme is aligned with our emerging Biodiversity Strategy.” Considering the very severe loss of wildlife being faced in the ecological emergency, can the Cabinet Member please detail the council’s goals for grass-cutting programmes and how the impact on biodiversity will be monitored?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s safety’s response:

“The council, further to the publication of its biodiversity strategy last autumn is currently undertaking a biodiversity baseline and opportunities study, which is due to be completed over the summer. This will provide up to date information of the species and habitats that are under pressure in the city and how we may best go about conserving and enhancing them. It will also identify the opportunities we have for improvement of biodiversity so we can target our resources effectively.

In the meantime, there are many areas across the city that we do not cut at various times of the year in accordance with best horticultural practice. These include naturalised bulb areas, and areas that have previously been identified as being able to promote biodiversity in other ways.

Not all grassed areas are suitable for this type of maintenance. Much of our amenity grass contains species that are fast growing and have low biodiversity value. Stopping cutting for extended periods can be counter-productive, as more resources are required to tidy up the grass after it is eventually cut. In addition, if this tidy up work is carried out incorrectly, it can result in longer term damage to these areas.”

(In response to Councillor Champion’s supplementary question Councillor Giles advised that trials were ongoing but evidence was not totally clear on the benefit of letting grass grow without wildflowers.)

Question 6

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

“Many tenants and leaseholders have reported that council sheds have fallen into disrepair, and when they have reported the need for repairs, these have not been carried out in a timely or an effective way. For example, sheds at Bargate Court have not been repaired after a fire several years ago. The council does not track how many requests for repair result in repairs being carried out or not, and is unable to provide the number of repair orders that are outstanding for repairs to sheds. What action is the Cabinet Member taking to get on top of the lack of tracking of repairs, so that tenants can get their sheds repaired and use them at last?”

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

“Historically repairs to sheds were reported using a generic communal block reference code and so we are unable to extract detailed data to answer this question. All works are raised using NEC and the individual orders can be tracked until it is completed, with customers able to do this independently by using their account on the website, monitoring the work through to completion.

Sheds are not classed as habitable spaces, therefore, most repair work will fall within either our 60 working day time frame or into future programme of works. The exception to this is where the issue presents an immediate health and safety risk, which are then actioned accordingly.

A Senior Building Surveyor will be attending Bargate Court to inspect the sheds to assess condition and review current plans to repair.”

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Calvert was not present at the meeting.)

Question 7

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

“In 2021, Scrutiny heard evidence from air quality experts demonstrating that, as has become very apparent through many scientific studies recently, burning wood of any kind, even in a so-called “eco stove”, causes toxic air pollution. The scrutiny committee recommended that the council undertake a communications campaign on this issue. A recent tweet for Clean Air Day stated that “if you have a wood-burning fire or stove in your home, this #CleanAirDay learn how to ease the #AirPollution impact: only burn dry, well-seasoned or “Ready-to-Burn” labelled wood; or use smokeless fuel.” It did not recommend not burning wood at all. While the council’s communication has warned that burning wood in any form causes toxic pollution, it has never recommended not burning wood. Does the Cabinet Member agree that people should be encouraged not to burn wood wherever possible?”

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

“While the price of electricity and gas remains so expensive, an increasing number of our residents are unable to heat their homes through the winter.. For those that already have a log burner or an open fire, the more affordable price of burning wood can be a lifeline.

In this context, the council has highlighted the risks of burning wood in the home, but we recognise that the choice to not burn wood isn’t available to everyone trying to heat their home during a cost-of-living crisis. By providing the guidance from Defra on compliant fuels we can limit the health impacts when people do burn wood at home.

In terms of enforcement, we can only use the legislation available to us and have no power to ban people using log burners or open fires. The Environment Act 2021 relates to what can be burned and defines smoke control areas, while the Environmental Protection Act 1990 relates to nuisance from smoke.”

(In response to Councillor Hoechner’s supplementary question Councillor Stonard advised that the council were encouraging people to not use wood burners but if they had no alternative form of heating they shouldn’t be prevented from keeping warm.)

Question 8

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

“For the second year in a row, we have seen the cancellation of the July full council meeting. Shortly after hearing this news, I had to respond to a resident who had asked for support to ask a question of the council, to tell them that their opportunity had been taken away from them, and that even their representatives would not be able to ask questions of the council until September, making it three months where the council will have no public scrutiny. While questions can be asked at Cabinet, this does not meet what the public expect in terms of the accountability offered by Full Council. I understand there is no official business to be discussed, but surely this means that we have more time to scrutinise and hold the council to account. How can the cancellation of this public meeting be squared with basic democratic principles?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for communities and social inclusion’s response:

“I would like to think that whilst the public rightly expect accountability from elected Councillors, they also expect efficiency and not to incur inefficient time and resources involved in meeting when there is no formal business to conduct, it was in this context that the Lord Mayor made the decision to cancel Council in July. It is perhaps a shame that you didn’t highlight to the member of the public that you refer to in your question, the opportunity to ask a question here, in an open public meeting that is being broadcast on YouTube, the very same opportunity you have taken in asking your question. If any members of the public have questions, they are also very welcome to contact myself, other members of Cabinet or any other elected Councillor directly, whether by phone or e-mail, where I’m sure they would happily respond, which is all part of the open and efficient democratic system we operate in.”

(In response to Councillor Catt’s supplementary question Councillor Kendrick emphasised that if there was no formal business to hear then it was reasonable and appropriate to cancel the meeting of council.)

Question 9

Councillor Fox to ask the cabinet member for resources the following question:

“In my work as a community connector in Mancroft, one of the things that people frequently raised was the lack of free or affordable meeting space for community groups. Since being elected I have noticed that much of the space in City Hall is unused for some of the time. Does this council agree that allowing community groups, who are often supporting the work of the council, to use these rooms would be a better use of resource than having them stand empty?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“Whilst we would want to maximise every opportunity to support local groups, offering meeting room space requires a significant resource commitment, from organising access to managing health and safety and compliance requirements. We are currently able to support and manage specific City Hall events but are unable to provide wider access for meeting room space. The use of meeting room space at City Hall, for community groups or local charities, is something that we will incorporate into considerations for the future, sustainable use of the building.

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Fox was not present at the meeting.)

Question 10

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

“I note that the council’s Development Management policies state: “Appropriate consideration should be given to orienting development in order to optimise energy efficiency and maximise solar gain”. However, some architects I have spoken to seem to suggest that council officers have objected to solar panels going onto roofs in conservation areas. I am very sympathetic to the desire to cherish and enhance Norwich’s historic buildings, but this cannot be done at the expense of the environment and in my opinion the fitting of solar panels on buildings should be actively encouraged wherever possible to indeed optimise energy efficiency and maximise solar gain. Does the cabinet member agree to ensure that new developments in particular have as many solar panels as possible to provide occupants with greener energy?”

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

“There are no examples from the past five years where the Council has refused consent for solar panels in the Conservation Area. As with most planning matters, assessing proposals for renewable energy that affect heritage assets is about striking the balance between the benefits of renewable energy and any harm that may be caused to the asset. The Council’s Design and Conservation Officers will always work constructively with those who are willing to engage with them to come up with solutions to the adaptation of heritage assets to meet the challenges of modern times.”

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Young was not present at the meeting.)

Question 11

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

“Across the city there is a problem with fly-tipping. This is not something new sadly, but it seems to be particularly prevalent in areas where there are communal bins. However, if these communal bins are locked away so that only local residents have access to them, the problem seems to dissipate. Where they are open and can be used by everyone they seem to attract bulky items and are often overflowing. Can the cabinet member commit to ensuring that any future council houses that are built with communal bins are ones that are locked away and can only be accessed by the residents for whom they are intended and similarly can they commit to investigating how practical it would be to have locked storage facilities built in existing communal bin sites?”

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

“Norwich City Council is committed to building social housing, as can be seen from our ongoing development at Mile Cross and Threescore. All developments are subject to viability tests, and we always seek to ensure communal spaces are well managed and maintained, however, in both terms of cost and planning requirements we cannot make this an absolutely commitment but will add this to our design principles.”

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Haynes was not present at the meeting.)

Question 12

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

“Since the abolition of the Audit Commission, up and down the country we have seen increased delays to the completion of the external auditing of Local Authorities, and an increase in the fees charged. Norwich has not been immune to the situation. This is resulting in unnecessary resource pressures on our finance team, who continue to deliver on time and to high standards. Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that the selling of auditing contracts to the big four auditors has failed, and will he write to the Leader of the Labour Party of the United Kingdom to ascertain if he will re-establish a publicly owned independent auditing body if elected to govern?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“I agree that the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition Government’s decision to abolish the Audit Committee in 2015 was a mistake and that the present external audit regime for Local Government is not fit for purpose. As to its replacement, I prefer to work within the LGA Labour Group which is working closely with frontbench shadow ministers on this and other issues dealing with Local Government, including that relating to future audit arrangements. This will have more impact, in my opinion than indulging in the gesture politics of just writing a letter to the leader of opposition.”

(There was no supplementary question, as Councillor Price was not present at the meeting.)