



NORWICH
City Council

Council
24 July 2018

Questions to cabinet members or chairs of committees

Question 1

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for safe city environment the following question:

“In view of the hot dry weather that the UK has experienced over the past weeks, would the cabinet member agree that the council should ban sky lanterns given the potential fire risk they pose to open spaces in Norwich such as Mousehold Heath and to the Norfolk countryside?”

Councillor Maguire, cabinet member for safe city environment’s reply:

“Councillor Carlo will be pleased to hear that this has already been put in motion with a report to be considered at cabinet on the 19 September recommending the prohibition of releasing sky lanterns on council owned land. Councillor Carlo may be aware of this as the report it is listed in the published forward plan which is available to members.

The recommendations in the report will not only seek approval to ban sky lanterns but also the mass release of balloons into the outdoor environment. Sky lanterns and balloons not only pose a fire risk but are also a significant threat to wildlife and livestock from ingestion and entanglement through the panic they cause. They are also a potential source of litter and waste in our environment.

I am sure Councillor Carlo will welcome the approach taken by the administration in ensuring our local environment is protected from such issues.”

Question 2

Councillor Raby to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

“Over the last decade or so, councils have faced massive cuts to their funding from central government and a greater emphasis has been placed on the ability of local authorities to raise their own money. The hotel and guest

house sector is separately concerned about the impact of unregulated on-line operators such as Airbnb.

One of the ways local authorities deal with these concerns elsewhere in Europe is through levying a small charge on visitors. In the Balearic Islands for instance, those staying in luxury hotels pay €4 per person per day; €3 for mid-range hotels; €2 for apartments and cruise ship visitors and €1 for campers and hostels. A charge paid by visitors staying in visitor accommodation would help to guarantee adequate standards, maintain a level playing field in the sector and safeguard the cultural and social offering of historic cities such as Norwich. Would the cabinet member agree that lobbying the government to allow councils to introduce such a levy would be a positive move?"

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

"Thank you for your question, which has several aspects.

You will not be surprised to hear that I think local government really needs to lobby central government for proper funding for services. The idea that councils and the rest of the public sector can, after years of austerity, valiantly soldier on in the face of what is swift becoming an impossible funding climate really needs to be addressed.

On tourism taxes, it's quite a complex picture. What we need to be mindful of in Norwich is that we already have a levy, which is raised through Norwich BID, which contributes to animating the city and publicising Norwich as a visitor and commercial destination. I am not sure another levy on top of this one would be helpful to local businesses. However, there is some national research and discussion at the moment looking at the pros and cons of tourism taxes and we will watch that with interest.

But ultimately I fear more local taxes just absolve and distract the government from tacking proper central funding of public services."

Question 3

Councillor VaughanThomas to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

"I was impressed by the front page Evening News coverage last month, entitled "Stunning new council housing", of the ongoing progress to develop and finish the Goldsmith Street site. The Times newspaper indeed hailed it amongst the best in the world which is a sentiment shared by residents living near to the development. Given the significance and importance of this site, can the cabinet member for social housing comment on ongoing progress for this new community?"

Councillor Harris, deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing's response:

"Thank you for your question. We welcome Goldsmith Street being recognised as the Best New (World) Architecture of 2018 by The Times, and I am particularly pleased that the local community is recognising the positive contribution this will make to the area.

Development is continuing to progress well on site, with internal fit out of the units moving at pace and utilities to the site starting to be connected. It is anticipated that the first dwellings will be complete in September and we will be having a phased handover of new homes a terrace at a time. We have a current anticipated completion of all the dwellings in late October / early November.

In order to ensure a smooth handover process for the new tenants we will also be setting up a porta-cabin close to the site for staff from lettings to be based. Other departments such as the income team, customer contact, NPS Norwich, community engagement, revenues and benefits will also offer services at times within the porta-cabin to make sure settling into their new homes is as easy as possible for tenants and to make sure they have all the information they need.

We will be providing a home user guide for tenants that will provide details of local services, amenities and local groups alongside hints and tips about getting the most from their new Passivhaus home which will help them quickly feel part of the community.

Following on from the completion of our first Passivhaus scheme at Hansard Close last year this will be a fantastic addition to our housing stock."

Question 4

Councillor Stutely to ask the cabinet member for social inclusion the following question:

"Like many residents in Norwich I was pleased to receive a targeted letter encouraging me to join in the new Solar Panel Energy auction, building on the model of success achieved by Big Switch and Save. Can the cabinet member for social inclusion comment on this latest initiative and potential benefits for residents who join it?"

Councillor Davis, cabinet member for social inclusion's reply:

"It is wonderful news to see "Solar Together" return. It is also great news to see other councils around the UK adopting this innovative approach to solar purchasing which was piloted here in 2015 (A UK first).

As you will know solar panels are a great way to access clean renewable energy and make a difference to the sustainability of our communities. In fact year on year solar is increasing as part of the UK's energy mix, helping to reduce the carbon intensity of our electricity consumption and lower UK carbon emissions.

The price of solar panels has been falling every year making prices far more affordable than ever before. So now is the perfect opportunity to buy high-quality solar panels with the Feed In Tariff before this regrettably ends on 31 March 2019.

Solar Together will guide households through every step in the process of buying solar panels. The scheme ensures that they receive high-quality solar systems with extended guarantees. The scheme works by bringing people together to drive prices down. Just like the Switch and Save!

On the 22 August, Solar Together will hold an auction where suppliers will compete to offer the best price possible for high-quality solar panels. In 2015 over 3,500 households signed up for the scheme. This gave households an average saving of 16% on market prices.

This time round other counties such as Suffolk are joining in. So the deals will hopefully be very competitive and appealing.

I hope we can all pass on the word about this wonderful scheme.

You can register via the Solar Together Website:
www.solartogethernorfolk.co.uk

Question 5

Councillor Malik to ask the cabinet member for social inclusion the following question:

"I note that the Labour Party moved a motion of censure of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt Hon Member for Tatton, for her handling of the roll out of Universal Credit and her response to the National Audit Office (NAO) report, Rolling Out Universal Credit; which noted that the DWP's own survey of claimants published on 8 June showed that 40 per cent of claimants are experiencing financial hardship even nine months into a claim and that 20 per cent of claimants are unable to make a claim online. Will the cabinet member for social inclusion join me in once again calling on the government to pause the roll out of universal credit and further request the government to reduce her ministerial salary to zero for four weeks?"

Councillor Davis, cabinet member for social inclusion's reply:

"Thank you for your question, Councillor Malik. Yes, I will join you in calling on the government to pause the rollout of Universal Credit and reduce the Rt Hon Member for Tatton's ministerial salary for four weeks, with some slight changes – which mirror real-life for our Universal Credit claimants. In addition to reducing her ministerial salary for one calendar month (plus another 7 days for the payment to reach her bank account), I would also suggest no access to savings, £5 worth of gas and electricity (on a pre-payment meter), removal of all credit/ debit cards, no ministerial expenses for rent/ travel/ subsistence and perhaps an eviction notice from her private sector landlord? As a consolation, she may approach her local authority for a food bank voucher."

On Thursday 19 July, 2018, Esther McVey admitted there are continuing problems with Universal Credit. This came within hours of the publications of a critical report by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) that savaged the DWP for its six-year failure to fix system errors in the transfer of claimants from incapacity benefit to ESA. Tens of thousands of ESA claimants will receive back-payments of £5,000 -£20,000 as a result of what MPs have called a series of "avoidable" mistakes. The DWP was warned of the error as early as 2014, but failed to take action until 2017." This is the same person who, on 21 June, 2018 hailed Universal Credit as "a great British innovation."

Question 6

Councillor Stewart to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

"Representing the beautiful Thorpe Hamlet ward I have actively supported the campaign to keep Unilever and Britvic on the Colman's site and regret, like all councillors, the news that they are closing. I am also acutely aware of the Grade 1 listed remains of the Carrow Abbey, (listed with the help of the city council in 1954) together with the Colman's family mansion and other notable historic assets which will need careful preservation. Indeed, significant preservation of the wider site and home was actively supported by the city council during the 1980s. As the future of the site is considered, can the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth ensure that all efforts are made to ensure the owners protect this valuable historic asset for the benefit of our shared city?"

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

"Thank you for the question and I share your sentiments about both the sad news of the closure of Carrow works and the remarkable heritage of the site. The council and its partners are doing everything possible to support those who are risk of redundancy, for redundancy arrangements of this scale Jobcentre Plus is the lead partner."

With regard to the reuse of the site, this is something we are in discussions with Britvic and Unilever, and their representatives, about. This process is early days so there is not a lot I can say at the moment. However, you are right to draw attention to the importance of Carrow Abbey which is the site of a Benedictine Priory, built in 1146 on the site of an earlier religious hospital following a gift of land from King Stephen and the adjacent house built in the 16th century as the Prioress's lodgings but which was extensively remodelled in the 19th Century for members of the Colman family. In addition to these nationally significant features there are a wealth of archaeological remains, important gardens and trees and other listed buildings which are important in their own right but which also sit alongside other features such as Victorian industrial buildings, the school building for the children of Colman's employees, the pet cemetery and air raid shelters which collectively tell a remarkable story about the social history of Norwich.

Please be assured that preserving the unique heritage of the site will be a priority not only because of the remarkable intrinsic value of the heritage assets themselves but also because of the value that the retention of such assets can bring to any place should it stop being used for food production.

If you are interested in understanding the heritage of the area can I draw to your attention the Conservation Area Appraisal for the Bracondale Area that was published by the City Council in March 2011 and which remains available on the website."

Question 7

Councillor Hampton to ask the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods the following question:

"Like many residents in Norwich, I privately rent and am aware of the appalling lack of protection and support for those who do. I note that the government is consulting on bringing in 3 year tenancies but agree with John Healey MP that this promise is meaningless if landlords can still force tenants out by hiking up the rent.

Would the cabinet member for safer stronger neighbourhoods comment on the excellent work this council undertakes, despite rapidly diminishing resources to protect private tenants, but also join me in calling for the government to go further and give England's 11 million tenants even greater security by abolishing Section 21, the law that allows landlords to evict without giving a reason."

Councillor Jones, cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods' response:

"In common with the rest of England, private renting in Norwich has increased significantly and many private tenants can now expect to rent for many years

before being in a position to become a home owner, if indeed, they will ever be able to. A particular concern is households with children in the private rented sector whose numbers have increased faster than other household types.

People, particularly families with children, need more than a roof over their heads: They need a settled and secure home from which they can establish long-term connections with schools, health services and the community. The current system of providing that security for only six months falls a long way short of this ideal with private tenants constantly facing the possibility of having to move with only two months' notice.

The other concern for the council is poor living conditions in the privately rented sector, particularly hazards to health. Privately-rented family homes are actually no more likely to be hazardous than owner-occupied ones. The obvious difference, however, is that an owner occupier is generally in a position to deal those problems.

Private tenants have to weigh up the consequences of raising disrepair and poor conditions with their landlord which could include the loss of their home through 'no fault' eviction. This means that poor conditions are often not challenged and continue from one tenancy to the next.

This council carries out excellent work to force landlords to tackle poor conditions but that work can be hampered by the current lack of security. Whilst the government's proposals are a welcome move in the right direction, they do not, in my opinion, go far enough. I understand that landlords need to be able to repossess their properties where, for example, a tenant fails to pay the rent or damages the property but this should be decided by a court examining all the circumstances rather than the current system where the landlord holds all the cards.

I would therefore agree that no-fault eviction, through the use of Section 21 powers, should be abolished."

Question 8

Councillor Erin Fulton-McAlister to ask the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth the following question:

"Thanks to the hard work of Labour councillors additional funding has been actively sourced to improve the physical infrastructure across Norwich to bolster safer cycling and walking. Earlham Road has remained a significant problem for many years, so I was particularly pleased to learn that two projects have been developed to change this, following a consultation which closed on 24 July. Can the cabinet member for sustainable and inclusive growth comment on this new proposed scheme and the widespread benefits that it will offer the communities around Earlham Road?"

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

"I would be pleased to.

For a third consecutive time, Norwich City Council has been successful in securing cycle ambition funding from national government, to fund improvements for walking and cycling in the city. As many of you know Norwich is one of only 8 cities nationwide that has been awarded cycle ambition status and, as such, that entitles us to bid for funding pots that aren't open to the majority of towns and cities across the UK. Building on the significant improvements to cycling that have been achieved with the £12M previously awarded to us, we have been granted a further £1.7M of cycle ambition money to fund much needed safety improvements along Earlham Road.

We actually have 2 separate schemes on Earlham Road; the first is at the Earlham Fiveways Roundabout where Earlham Road meets Bluebell Road, Earlham Green Lane and Gypsy Lane. For a long time there has been a troubling history of accidents involving cyclists at this roundabout. The low cost solutions that have been introduced over the years through the local safety scheme budget have only gone so far in addressing the problems. The cycle ambition funding has finally given us the opportunity to completely redesign the roundabout to make it safer for everyone, but especially cyclists and pedestrians. The scheme involves converting existing crossings to Toucan crossings, a reshaping of the roundabout with improved splitter islands to add those who wish to cross directly at the roundabout and relocating the street lighting to avoid it being obscured by the tree cover. We have based the design on a scheme in Cambridge which saw 15 accidents involving cyclists at a roundabout prior to the scheme being implemented, and in the 2 years since it was remodelled there have been none.

The second scheme involves creating better crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists at the Earlham Road / Outer ring road junction, which also has a history of pedestrian and cycle accidents. These new crossings lead into carriageway cycle lanes on Earlham Road between the roundabout and Christchurch Road. Then, as Earlham Road narrows past Christchurch Road, we are looking to create a highway space that can be comfortably shared by all road users. The speed limit will be reduced to 20mph, additionally zebra crossings will be provided and the footpath will be given priority across all side roads. The final element of the scheme, which is actually funded by CIL, is the complete remodelling of the Earlham Road Mill / Hill Road again to make it safer for everyone to use.

Consultation on these 2 schemes closed today and I am pleased to hear from officers that we have received a large number of positive comments about the proposals. Officers will now be working through the full detail of the consultation responses and will be reporting the results to the highways

agency committee in September, where I very much hope we can give agreement for the schemes to be implemented next year.

I am sure you will agree that these long overdue safety improvements will offer benefits not only to the local community in the Earlham Road area but for everyone who uses Earlham Road either regularly or occasionally. I would like to congratulate the officers, who have been aware for many years what improvements are needed to Earlham Road, for their efforts in securing this very welcome funding.”

Question 9

Councillor Lubbock to ask the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing the following question:

“An elderly couple who are tenants of the city council need a 7 inch step removed. The step is between the footpath and their shared access leading to their front door and side passageway.

It would appear that the council are unwilling to reduce this step to a slope which would enable better mobility for the couple. Instead the council are offering a half step – two smaller steps instead of one big step. This solution would be of little use to somebody who has or will have a mobility scooter, a mother with a pram etc.

Surely common sense would dictate that a slope which in this case could be accommodated would be preferable to 2 steps.

Could the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing comment on why the city council has not offered a slope?”

Councillor Harris, the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing’s response:

“I would like to thanks Cllr Lubbock for bringing this to my attention.

Without going into the detail of the case which would be inappropriate, I would like to refer Cllr Lubbock to the council’s aids and adaptations policy. This says that works such as this are not carried out unless there has been a referral from Norfolk County Council Social services that a tenant requires aids and/or adaptations to their property to help them live independently. Once a referral has been made one of our occupational therapists will visit and make an assessment of the requirements and specify the necessary works.

Tenants usually work with us so that we can assess whether and what adaptations are needed taking into account a whole person and whole house approach. This means that we would not do some works if it meant that that the house required other adaptations for the property to be accessible as a

whole. There would be little point in installing a ramp if the front door was inaccessible or the passageways and living quarters too narrow for wheelchair access.

In the example highlighted, officers may work with the tenant to see if there are other ways to support independent living for example removing other obstacles such as fences. For the council to fund these works it would require a clear medical or social care need to do so.

It does not appear that a referral has been made by Norfolk county council in this case. Therefore, I would suggest that Cllr Lubbock advises the tenant of this or perhaps she could contact her County Councillor to help expedite an assessment being carried out".