



Council

22 November 2022

Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the cabinet member for safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods council the following question:

“Last month saw not one but two U-turns on Section 21 evictions, causing untold distress to Britain’s renters together with a failure to inform people what steps they will take to provide additional support for private renters whose rent costs have already gone up 12% on average in the last year, and face even higher rents in the coming year. These risks leave potentially thousands at risk of arrears, eviction, and homelessness. Can the cabinet member for safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods comment on whether she has confidence that this government will finally address the concerns of private renters?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods’ response:

“It is now more than three years since the proposal from the government to introduce legislation to protect private renters in the form of the renters reform bill. This has failed to progress into a parliamentary bill as yet, finally being published as a white paper in June 2022.

These protections are crucial to protect an ever expanding sector, with more than a million private renters entering the sector since the conservative government came into power. The ongoing delay continues to leave private renters vulnerable, with close a quarter of a million private tenants having been served notice since the government’s April 2019 announcement that they would bring these reforms forward.

This council continues to take its duty towards private renters with the up most seriousness and will continue to use the available legal powers to drive up standards. But it is only on a national level that the stability and protections that private renters require can be delivered. Although the proposed legislation leaves a number of loopholes and a funding commitment for its enforcement is lacking, this must be urgently progressed by the government.

There is currently no clear road map to progress this legislation or to deliver the very real reforms that this sector and most importantly the residents of Norwich require. I therefore have little confidence that the government will address the concerns of private renters with any urgency.”

Question 2

Councillor Sue Sands to ask the deputy leader and social housing of the council the following question:

“It is sometimes commented that it is often “the little things in life which all add up” and can make a real difference to the quality of life in communities. It is for this reason that I have long supported, and voted for, the estate aesthetics budget which has made a real difference to providing sometimes small, but important, enhancements. Can the cabinet member for social housing comment on how many schemes have been completed since its inception?”

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

“312 schemes have been completed since inception. The detail is set out below.

Budget Year - 2022-2023

To date, we have completed 66 Capital and Revenue projects during this budget year (from 1 April 2022).

- We have an additional 53 Capital and Revenue projects that are still to be started, but we anticipate that all of these will be completed by the end of the budget year. We receive approximately 15 new projects every month.
- We also have another additional 42 projects being developed for the future. As a consequence we confident that the budget will again be spent this year.

Budget Year – 2021-2022

We completed 94 Capital and Revenue projects during the 2021-2022 budget year.

Budget Year – 2020-2021

We completed 55 Capital and Revenue projects during the 2020-2021 budget year.

Budget Year – 2019-2020

We completed 45 Capital and Revenue projects during the 2019-2020 budget year.

Budget Year – 2018-2019

We completed 32 Capital and Revenue projects during the 2018-2019 budget year.

Budget Year – 2017-2018

We completed 27 Capital and Revenue projects during the 2017-2018 budget year.”

Question 3

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

“I know that delivering practical and positive improvements to tackle the climate crisis and save residents money is crucial given the cost-of-living crisis we now face. Earlier this year work to install an innovative heating system using water from the River Wensum was begun at Barnards Yard aiming to achieve a major reduction in carbon emissions, but also provide hot water to 85 homes. Can the cabinet member for social housing comment on progress with the scheme?”

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

“The scheme is in the commissioning stage. All of the 85 homes have had new hot water and heating systems installed and are currently operating well. Residents have become familiar with a heating system that operates using larger but lower temperature radiators. The instance of resident call outs have almost ceased completely. There are mechanical works to be completed in the plant room with the programme for the completion of this work being early January and the issuing of Practical Completion and Final Handover on 31 January 2023. The final account for the scheme is anticipated to return just below budget (circa £1.825m).”

Question 4

Councillor Erin Fulton-McAlister to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Research released earlier this month by the trade union Unison (based on data from 391 UK councils) found that almost nine in 10 are predicting a budget gap in the 2023/24 financial year - with a total shortfall of £3.2bn. In the run up to the Autumn Statement last week the Local Government Association called on the Government to ‘Save Local Services’ with a campaign to urgently provide financial sustainability and certainty for councils. Will the Leader comment on whether the autumn statement fulfils the needs of this campaign?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“We reviewed our financial planning assumptions earlier this year as part of our preparation for setting the 2023/24 budget; the cabinet received a report in July which highlighted that the impact of inflation and the uncertainty surrounding future government resources suggested a budget gap of £6.2m in 2023/24 and close to £11m over the medium-term planning timeframe. Since that time inflation has continued to rise – with the latest figure for the consumer price index standing at 11.1%. This has put still more pressure on our finances.

On Thursday we heard the government’s autumn statement where they confirmed that the country faces a budget shortfall of £55bn and where they announced around £30bn in spending cuts and £25bn in tax rises.

We still await the provisional local government finance settlement which will confirm the position for each local authority but that is unlikely to be produced much before the middle of December and we need to start to make decisions now. For this council our interpretation of the position is mixed – we heard that the total resources for public services over the remaining 2 years of the comprehensive spending review period are unchanged but we also heard that it is the NHS, Schools and Social Care that are the government’s priorities for resources. Whilst it is difficult to disagree with that it is of little comfort as we seek to set a balanced budget for Norwich

We now know that, for councils like Norwich, the maximum that the council tax can be increased by is 3% rather than the 2% in previous years’ and that social housing rent increases are to be capped at 7%. These still present us with difficult choices; both are below the current inflationary pressures we are facing and in themselves are inadequate; for example, each additional 1% rise in the council tax raises around £100,000. We also know that even a 7% increase in social rents will not bring average rents back to the level that they would have been before the decision to impose for four years a 1% per annum cash reduction to social rents.

What we do know is that we still need to make reductions to balance the budget in a way that protects those residents most affected by the cost-of-living crisis. We will bring an updated position back to cabinet in December, but it is sufficient to say that we face significant challenges in the years ahead.

In answer to your specific question, the Autumn Statement, is not a solution to the chronic underfunding of local government and the vital services it provides to residents. It compounds the problem.”

Question 5

Councillor Peek to ask the cabinet member for community wellbeing the following question:

“I was pleased to read that thanks to the investment of this city council, the small park at Douro Place, in West Pottergate, will be significantly improved. This will make a real difference to the community, some of which live in council accommodation, which surround the park. Can the cabinet member for community wellbeing, update council on the changes planned?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for community wellbeing’s response:

“This project is part of the council’s ongoing investment in play facilities in the city. We have recently awarded a contract for this work and will be investing approximately £55,000 in new play equipment and safety surfacing at the play area in Douro Place. The project is aimed at improving play facilities in the area, in particular making it accessible for children of all abilities. It is also aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour at this location, and we look forward to work starting in February 2023”

Question 6

Councillor Huntley to ask the cabinet member for safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods the following question:

“As winter deepens, the number of constituents I have spoken to regarding their acute difficulty in heating their home increases rapidly. Can the cabinet member for safe, strong, and inclusive neighbourhoods comment on the work undertaken to ensure the £150 Council Tax Energy rebate payments are made together with any discretionary payments which this Labour administration is taking?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for safe, strong and inclusive neighbourhoods’ response:

“The £150 Council Tax Energy rebate scheme was due to finish at the end of September, however a number of councils did not achieve the initial deadline. The scheme has been extended to now end on the 30 November, allowing us to still make payments for a few weeks if we need to.

The council took appropriate steps to ensure it had made the payments by the original scheme end date, directly to bank accounts wherever possible. If bank details were not already held, residents were asked to supply their details through our secure online portal using a unique code. If no response was received the payment was made to the council tax account of the household to reduce their council tax payments.

Where accounts went into credit (for example where there is no Council Tax liability due to the resident being entitled to an exemption or full discount) a new bill has been issued showing this and refunds are being issued on request once bank details are supplied.

For others with a council tax liability, their charge has been recalculated and a new bill issued.

The council has paid 60,992 residents a total of £9,148,800.00 in respect of the main scheme.

Applications for the Discretionary Council Tax Energy rebate scheme closed on 20 November, so payments will continue to be made until the scheme itself ends on 30 November. To date we have paid £214,095.00 of the total funding of £292,050.00 and have made payments direct to council tax accounts this week where we do not hold bank account details. The council is undertaking a number of social media campaigns to encourage take-up of the discretionary funding.”

Question 7

Councillor Stutely to ask the cabinet member for community wellbeing the following question:

“I was pleased that the Biodiversity Strategy was accepted at cabinet earlier this month. It contains a range of excellent, practical, and important steps this council will take as we take our part in responding socially, economically, and environmentally to the climate emergency, thus better achieving true sustainability. Given the reviews and enhancements to the strategy can the cabinet member for community wellbeing comment on the strategy and the benefits to our city?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for community wellbeing’s response:

“The Biodiversity Strategy, and the accompanying Biodiversity Development Plan, sets out an ambitious agenda with a commitment to “create a city where biodiversity can sustainably recover and thrive, halt species decline and increase species diversity and abundance by 2030 or sooner”. A key objective will be to establish a ‘Nature Recovery Network’, creating and connecting wild places and habitats across the city to give nature room to thrive. This will involve the council beginning to manage our own parks and open spaces in a way that enhances biodiversity, but also encouraging strategic stakeholders across the city to manage their land in a more biodiversity-conscious way.

A range of benefits will be realised through the Strategy and Development Plan, relating not just to biodiversity improvement but also to climate mitigation and adaptation, improved health and wellbeing and educational experiences for our residents, and the growth of the green economy within the city to support people to find good quality jobs. This is an important strategy and I look forward to sharing our progress on it with colleagues in the coming months.”

Question 8

Councillor Davis to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“The United Nations Climate Change Conference 2022, or ‘COP27’, concluded last week. This council has previously declared a climate emergency and recognised that local, national, and global co-operation will be key tackling this in a truly just manner. Could the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion reflect on the outcomes of this conference with the most salient points relating to Norwich?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:

“The key messages set out by the António Guterres, the Secretary General of the UN was that *“our world is facing the most pivotal, precarious moment in generations”* and that *“the goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees is slipping away”*.

The council recognises that the goal of limiting global average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as set out in the Paris Agreement of 2015, is unlikely to be met and that urgent action is required, by all parties, to prevent a climate, biodiversity and humanitarian catastrophe. A great deal of work has been achieved to date. Norwich’s territorial greenhouse gas emissions (those for the whole city) have more than halved since 2005, despite a 12% increase in population. The council’s own emissions, according to a methodology defined by central government, have reduced by over 70% in a similar period.

Work is underway to understand the full scope of the council’s emissions, including Scope 3 emissions - those emissions outside of our direct control. In collaboration with our partners, we are also working to update our understanding of the city’s emissions.

As well as generating good quality data, comprehensive plans are in development, based on evidence and prioritised according to risk, to reduce emissions to net zero as quickly as possible. The Council also recognises the need for adaption and resilience strategies to manage the social, environmental and economic impacts of the changing climate”

Question 9

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

“The member for housing advised cabinet last month that there were around 3,400 people on the council housing waiting list while over 230 council houses were empty because the voids (time taken to do work on an empty property in preparation for a new tenant) were taking longer to turn around than has been the case in the past.

She said this was due to a backlog of repairs and specialist contractors were being used. Can she explain the work of the of specialist contractors when they were not used before?”

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

“When the repairs service transferred from the joint venture with Norse to the council’s wholly-owned company – Norwich City Services Limited – in April, there was a backlog of works. In order to allow NCSL to get off to the best start, the council appointed contractors to clear the backlog rather than passing it to NCSL.

To date, 5775 reactive repairs have been cleared. At present there are 125 reactive repairs to complete and we are on target to complete these by the end of December 2022

Unfortunately, some delays have occurred due to works that the contractors are reliant on from other contractors to enable them to be compliant with H&S requirements. However, delays can also occur due to lack of materials and wider supply chain and labour pressures. These impacts are not unique to Norwich.

In appointing the contractors, the council followed the correct clearance and procurement protocols, mobilised the contract and put an internal backlog team in place to support. This took a period of time but was necessary. Now everything is in place and the contractors are working through the backlog.”

Question 10

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

“The backlog in repairs in council housing that the Labour administration has overseen has left at least thirteen homeless people waiting for months for the keys to a home that they were promised they could move into within weeks. Families have been living in cars or sofa surfing while council properties are sitting empty. Please can the cabinet member explain what the council will do from now on to ensure that people who have been promised homes are not kept waiting for several months?”

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

“A project team comprising of staff from Tenancy, Lettings and Property Services has been created. This team is meeting weekly with NCSL and the Norwich City Council backlog contractors to monitor and manage and drive performance.

Those properties that are in most need and have people allocated to them have been prioritised, this does not mean that newly created empty homes are not being actioned.

Based on this priority contractors are expected to focus on allocated properties and if they are paused due to awaiting facilitation works or have capacity work can commence in unallocated properties.

Further contractor support is being engaged by both NCSL and Norwich City Council to enable accelerated delivery is delivered.”

Question 11

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

“I understand that the planned programme of installing secure entry systems has yet again been delayed. In January 2022 I asked for reassurance from the cabinet member that the work would be progressed quickly. The measuring up of doors is now expected to only go ahead by the end of the year, which is a further delay on an already extremely delayed start to the programme. Can you please explain why the timetable has yet again slipped and explain to residents when they can expect the programme to finally start and what measures you are putting in place to ensure that this is now the last delay to one of the highest priorities for residents in some areas of the ward I represent?”

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

“We have been working hard with Eastern Procurement Limited to expedite the procurement of the programme and we are currently awaiting the return of tenders.

It is anticipated that the contract will be formally awarded before Christmas. The successful contractor will then be expected to attend the blocks that are in-scope to undertake measured surveys and place orders for the doors and similar bespoke equipment.

Subject to lead-in times, it is expected that works will commence on site (including any asbestos removal and other enabling works) in early 2023.”

Question 12

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

“Tests on damaged ceilings in need of replacement at a flat in Golding Place, caused by a leaking roof, have shown white asbestos. The tenant has been informed of the need to move out whilst the work to remove the asbestos and replace the ceilings in several rooms is carried out and this will cause considerable upheaval for the tenant. Could the cabinet member please tell me the number of council properties known to contain white asbestos and the estimated costs involved in replacing it, including the cost of temporary accommodation for tenants and moving expenses?”

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

“We have 14,140 properties that were built before the year 2000 and therefore could contain some asbestos as it wasn’t banned until November 1999.

Survey information relating to domestic properties is limited as there is no requirement to survey (or have a management plan) for domestic properties under The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (specifically regulation 4). However, management surveys within domestic properties are carried out when a refurbishment survey is carried out, for example Kitchen and Bathroom replacements/window replacement and voids.

Whilst there is no requirement under the regulations, Property Service are recording the information as part of the survey process and this will be recorded in the Asset Management database in order to build up our knowledge of asbestos in our property portfolio.

The cost of removal of a typical 25m² textured coating (so one room in one property) is likely to be in the region of £1,000.

Health and Safety Executive guidance is not to remove asbestos containing materials that are in good condition that are not being (or going to be) disturbed. Decorative textured coatings contain very low quantities of Chrysotile (white) asbestos that is heavily bonded into a paint matrix, this means that fibres do not normally become respirable unless heavily abraded such as being sanded or sawn.”

Question 13

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

“Norfolk County Council is believed to have submitted 'Expressions of Interest' in multiple sites becoming Investment Zones without publishing any details. We now know that Investment Zones will not be established, but it was likely that such zones would have undermined local democratic control of development, and efforts towards nature recovery. The guidelines' only reference to the environment was about removing legislation that protects it. Does the Leader agree that it is important for the city to keep control of the planning function; insist on existing, if not improved, environmental protections and nature recovery rules; and continue a commitment to the current affordable housing percentage for development, whatever new scheme the government may come up with?”

Councillor Waters, the leader's response:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Grahame. You will be aware that there are speculative observations in your question since Investment Zones have been dropped by a shuffling of the Prime-Ministerial pack.

My understanding from colleagues at Norfolk County Council is that that they submitted an Expression of Interest in multiple sites becoming an Investment Zone in Norfolk

In the case of the city, we only requested that the county include a single site, the East Norwich Regeneration Area, within the Expression of Interest. This was done.

In seeking the inclusion of East Norwich within the county's Investment Zone Expression of Interest we considered many factors. One of these was the environmental risks posed through the possible planning and environmental protection regimes that may apply to the areas. We took the view that there was simply insufficient information available to allow these to be assessed at this stage. In the light of this we choose to include material in the case we made to the county noting these concerns and stressing that the council would want to see, and discuss, any proposed future arrangements regarding planning controls, and implications for environmental standards before agreeing to an Investment Zone designation.

You will also be aware that following last week's autumn statement that:

“The government will refocus the Investment Zones programme. The government will use this programme to catalyse a limited number of the highest potential knowledge-intensive growth clusters, including through leveraging local research strengths.”

All goes to show what a massive waste of time by the government insisting that local authorities bid in this way for various initiatives rather than properly fund local government in the first place to deliver regeneration of their areas.

With regards to the second part of your question, the answer is obviously yes. Take, for example, our ambitious Biodiversity Strategy that went through cabinet last week and our strong commitment and delivery of genuinely affordable housing at social rents.”

Question 14

Councillor Young to ask the cabinet member for community wellbeing the following question:

“I am sure you joined in celebrating the recent national first prize for Norwich when a street in Wensum ward won Best Parklet in the country. In late 2019 the former highway team at the city council had begun researching the subject of parklets in order to establish a policy on the subject. Unfortunately that work was halted by the termination of the highway agency agreement with the county council. I understand that officers are making progress with developing a joint policy with the county on this issue so that Norwich can build on its excellence and enjoy the wider benefits of parklets that have been seen elsewhere. When can we expect to see the policy developed?”

Councillor Giles, the cabinet member for community wellbeing’s response:

“We have spoken to the county council as the responsible highways authority who have said they plan to produce a policy to address issues such as safety, and we have supplied them with research that was done previously. We do not know when the county council will undertake this work but we have said we are willing to advise them further based on previous experience.”

Question 15

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

“Anglia Square and Magdalen Street are popular because their retail and commercial offer is cheaper and easier than the city centre. Small businesses there are concerned about rent rises or being forced out due to the proposed Anglia Square redevelopment. The local community also fears that big chains will not meet their needs and that this unique part of Norwich will lose its distinctive character. These worries have been confirmed in answers to councillor enquiries saying some businesses will be "displaced by the early phases of development at a point where no alternative accommodation can be provided" and those who can relocate to the new centre will see rent increases. With the effects of covid, the cost-of-living and energy crises, plus residents demanding protection for small businesses, what will the council do to ensure a smooth transition for all Small Medium Enterprises at Anglia Square and Magdalen Street?”

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

“I agree that retail offer of Magdalen Street, Anglia Square and St Augustine's Street is unique and distinctive from the rest of the city centre and the vibrant and independent nature of area should be nurtured. My own view is that offer of the current Anglia Square detracts from the character of the wider area. The blight created by the large derelict and underused buildings doesn't assist the retail environment.

The current planning application for Anglia Square proposes demolition of the shopping and office precinct and redevelopment with a residential led mixed use development. The impact of development on existing business is an important consideration and this is still being worked on as part of the assessment of the application. Officers have been discussing with the applicant a possible package of proactive business support for affected businesses which may be deemed necessary to be required by a legal agreement in the event of committee deciding to grant planning permission being approved. Under the possible agreement, the developer would be required to provide affected businesses access to free independent business support which would assist them with business planning, possible temporary (or permanent) relocation plans, and applications for any available grant support. The support would also look at how these businesses can use the redevelopment as a growth opportunity to provide new products and services.

Clearly this will be one of many matters that will need to be taken into consideration by the planning applications committee in reaching a

determination on the planning application in due course and I would not want to do or say anything in this forum that could fetter their discretion to do so.”

Question 16

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

“The council has a responsibility to ensure that people with disabilities and medical conditions are housed appropriately. However, I am aware of a number of council tenants, including some willing to move to smaller properties, whose health is currently being made worse by their living conditions. Tenants in my ward have applied for higher banding and been refused, despite supplying evidence from doctors and other professionals. Will the cabinet member supply unsuccessful applicants with feedback, including explaining the process that the council follows when deciding which band applicants should be in?”

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

“Norwich is an area of extremely high levels of housing need and the Home Options scheme provides a fair, efficient, and transparent way of allocating the social housing available. The scheme has been identified as a best practice model which has contributed to the award of ‘gold standard’ status for our housing options service, one of only fourteen local authorities in the country to be given this accolade.

Where a Home Options applicant feels that their medical situation is made significantly worse by their accommodation, they complete a medical assessment form, which enables a full review of their circumstances by a panel, in accordance with policy. The role of the medical panel is to assess the degree of medical need relating to an applicant’s current accommodation and whether this merits additional priority to move to a more suitable property.

Medical priority is awarded where an applicant needs urgent re-housing due to a significant and enduring medical condition or disability which is strongly evidenced as being seriously and permanently affected by their current accommodation.

Specifically in relation to the question every single applicant, whether successful or unsuccessful, are advised of the outcome of the medical panel setting out the reasons for the decision in writing and advisors them of their means of appeal.

This process is applied equally to all applicants to ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency. I am satisfied that through this consistent application of Home Options policy we are able to ensure that scarce social housing in Norwich is allocated to those in the greatest need.”

Question 17

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

“It has become apparent that housing officers are no longer being allocated to specific areas. When communication from the council has already been raised as a big issue for tenants, why are the council removing named points of contact for tenants?”

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

“Tenancy team leaders have made some amendments to ensure that all tenants receive a consistent service whether in the north or south of the borough. There are two teams; North and South, and 10 officers cover these sites. There are a further two dedicated housing officers to ensure access for compliance activity in relation to gas and electrical safety.

The query highlights the risk of having named individuals assigned to activities. It is important to focus on operational resilience, with a system which allows the management team to redistribute casework to the wider team to ensure all enquiries are addressed.

The service needs to remain flexible. Housing casework relating to tenancies come into our call centre or online and is allocated directly to a housing officer, who triages the need for a direct intervention or allocates the requests made by tenants. By using this method, we have seen improvements in turnaround time to enquiries, catching up on outstanding casework, and access into homes to keep tenants safe.

We continue to monitor progress and review our effectiveness as a council to respond to the needs of our tenants. This is a challenging time for recruitment into various social housing sector and local government roles.”

Question 18

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

“When the insourcing of Norse was first proposed, we were repeatedly assured, in response to Green councillors’ questions, that creating NCSL would allow the council more scope to decarbonise environmental and building services. Yet officers have told me that NCSL has no carbon reduction plan. Can the cabinet member please provide details of carbon reduction targets for NCSL as a company that is wholly-owned by the council?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“A familiar Green Party template for this question. Greens claiming credit, unnamed officers giving their opinion etc.

From the very start of the new company important environment features were built into the new depot and site. I quote a length from a question (Council, 16 March 2021) to the then portfolio holder Councillor Kevin Maguire asking about new environmental and biodiversity improvements at the new depot:

“As you are aware we have been able to incorporate many environmental features within the design of the new depot to improve the environment locally and so it can contribute to our target in the Environmental Strategy for the council to become carbon neutral by 2030. Moreover, it is worth noting that the project itself is inherently sustainable as it is reusing a former wine warehouse building that has been vacant for some time.

Last month it was announced that the council had been awarded just over £100,511 through the government decarbonisation funding scheme to deliver energy efficient LED lighting within the depot and a solar PV system on its roof with associated battery storage measures. The LED lighting has been installed for depot opening, both within the main depot and the office accommodation, the solar PV scheme will follow in the summer.

These measures sit alongside the other measures that were built into the scheme to promote cycling to work, to future proof it by providing ducting to ease the process of adapting to using electric vehicles in future, and external lighting schemes that are specially designed to minimise disturbance to bats.

Furthermore, we are particularly proud of the on-site features designed to support biodiversity in the area. These include multiple bat and bird boxes, new pond and various measures to encourage reptiles and amphibians on the site.

A carefully designed landscape scheme, including 84 native trees, 88m of hedging and 71 climbing plants, has been developed in close consultation between Council officer's and landscape and ecological consultants. This provides new and varied habitat opportunities across the site. Significant tree and hedge planting has taken place in accordance with the agreed landscaping plan which, in time, will more than compensate for biomass lost as part of the development.

A combination of trees, hedging and climbers has been used. The climbers are designed and located to attract invertebrates which will in turn benefit the local bat populations. Native trees and woody shrubs have been planted, many as standard trees. The native hedgerow species have been chosen to increase diversity and promote good management for the benefit of wildlife in accordance with specialist ecological advice.

An area of fruit trees has been planted in the south of the site. The fruit trees have been selected to provide additional food sources. As they will not grow to be tall trees, this leaves an area of open grassland near to the proposed wildlife pond which should create considerable habitat opportunities for reptiles and amphibians."

Also, as part of NCSL's 2022-25 business plan a company objective for the 2022-23 financial year is to develop a detailed carbon reduction strategy for NCSL and investigate carbon offsetting schemes.

Work is continuing and the company have met with city council officers in order to align the company objectives with that of the council's."

Question 19

Councillor Ackroyd to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“With the prospect of colder weather coming, many groups ranging from churches, the voluntary sector, the NHS, and the county council are working to set up much needed warm hubs to provide not only a warm place but company and refreshments for part or all of the day.

Whilst primarily a county council function, could the cabinet member outline what work is being undertaken by this council in conjunction with these groups?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion’s response:

“We recognise the very difficult position many residents of Norwich will be in this winter.

We have provided funding to the Norfolk Community Foundation to support them to establish new warm spaces in the city or expand current provision.

We are also using all opportunities to signpost community groups to this service, and to other funding opportunities as appropriate to access additional support, including via:

- the many relationships we have with groups in our communities and
- by maintaining a database of information about where people can go for support, so that any residents contacting the council can be directed to warm spaces, support, and other help as relevant to their circumstances – so they experience a “no wrong door” approach when they contact the council for help.

Wider partnership work continues through the City Vision Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Partnership, Greater Norwich Homelessness Forum, Norfolk Community Advice Network, and Financial Inclusion Consortium to raise awareness of activities, support and advice and ensure we are working together to support our communities through this unprecedented period.”

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 20

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“Recent reports by three United Nations agencies warn of the terrifying outlook on climate change. The UN says there is no credible pathway to 1.5C in place and that “woefully inadequate” progress on cutting carbon emissions means the only way to limit the worst impacts of the climate crisis is a “rapid transformation of societies”. The UN also says that current pledges by countries for action by 2030, even if delivered in full, would mean a rise in global heating of about 2.5C, a level which would condemn the world to catastrophic climate breakdown. Norwich City Council has adopted two targets relating to climate change: carbon neutral for the council's own operations by 2030 and net zero for Norwich by 2045: too little and too late. What additional targets for 2030 will the council adopt and implement in a strengthened programme of action as a matter of extreme urgency?”

Councillor Hampton, the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion's response:

“The council recognises that the goal of limiting global average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as set out in the Paris Agreement of 2015, is unlikely to be met and that urgent action is required, by all parties, to prevent a climate, biodiversity and humanitarian catastrophe.

The council's emissions reduction strategies and plans are part of a national and international effort, most recently in Egypt at COP27. Infrastructure and social and economic change is needed that is far outside the control of the operation or sphere of influence of Norwich or any district council, county or Nation. But as I described earlier, we have a track record of success and are ambitious within our own emissions and those we can have an influence over. We are ensuring we have the best data, and that clear plans in place, to reduce emissions from the council and across the city, with our partners.

As part of the council's environmental planning processes, we will always review the outputs of credible climate scientists and agencies, and seek the opinion of trusted advisors and strategic partners, to update and adapt our plans as necessary.”