



Council

19:40 to 21:50

15 March 2022

Present: Councillor Maguire (Lord Mayor), Ackroyd, Button, Bogelein, Carlo, Champion, Driver, Galvin, Giles, Grahame, Hampton, Harris, Haynes, Huntley, Kendrick, Lubbock, Maxwell, Osborn, Packer, Peek, Price, Sands (M), Schmierer, Stonard, Stutely, Thomas (Vi), Waters, Wright and Youssef

Apologies: Councillors Brociek-Coulton, Davis, Everett, Fulton-McAlister (E), Fulton-McAlister (M), Jones, Manning, Oliver, Sands (S), Thomas (Va)

1. Lord Mayor's Announcements

The Lord Mayor said that he understood that Councillors Manning, Maxwell and Youssef had indicated that they would be standing down from the council after the May elections. He invited group spokespersons, Councillors Waters, Schmierer and Wright to say a few words acknowledging the contribution of the outgoing councillors after which he presented the outgoing councillors present at the meeting with a badge in recognition of their service to the city council.

The Lord Mayor invited Councillor Waters to announce the nominations for Lord Mayor and Sherriff for the upcoming civic year. Councillor Waters said that it was the intention that Councillor Kevin Maguire would continue as Lord Mayor and Caroline Jarrold would continue as Sherriff. The Lord Mayor invited group spokespersons, Councillors Galvin and Ackroyd, to speak on the nominations.

2. Declarations of interests

Councillor Bogelein declared a pecuniary interest in items 7a and 7c on the agenda and would withdraw from the meeting for the debate and vote.

Councillor Price declared a non pecuniary interest in item 6 on the agenda.

Council Haynes declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7c on the agenda.

3. Public questions/petitions

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

The first public question was from Ms Julie Young.

Ms Young asked the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion the following question:

“Poor air quality kills over 100 people in Norwich every year and damages the health of thousands including and especially children and the elderly. The Government recently offered grants to local authorities to improve air quality, including projects to help reduce exposure to pollution hotspots and improve air quality as well as knowledge about health risks. This opportunity was flagged with the city council by Green Party councillors well in advance of the October deadline, however it was not until February that the council provided a response, acknowledging that they had missed the deadline. Can the cabinet member explain how they will rectify this mistake so that the council takes opportunities in future to improve air quality?”

Councillor Hampton, cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion gave the following response:

“Alongside ambitious plans to deliver climate change targets, the council’s approved Air Quality Action Plan, identifies many projects to address air quality citywide.

Air quality in Norwich City Centre is improving. We have procured new monitoring equipment and are investigating mobile equipment to target further improvements. We work with the County Council to promote low/zero emission vehicles and travel shift to non-polluting modes.

We successfully secured Government funding to drive forward our ambitions, with funding to retrofit homes recently secured. We continually seek opportunities to secure funding for climate change and air quality with plans being prepared to access the Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds.

The many Government grants available proves resource intensive for councils. In recognition, Whitehall has committed to streamlining the number of funds. Although we cannot bid for everything, we are proud of our record of securing funding for climate change, carbon reduction and air quality and will continue to be ambitious when opportunities arise.”

Ms Young thanks Councillor Hampton for her response and as a supplementary question, asked whether the council would support community groups their own air quality monitors so that the council could form a picture of the air quality across the city. Councillor Hampton replied that she would be happy to support the idea in principle but would need to have detailed conversations with officers and would be pleased to receive any further information from Ms Young.

The second question was from Mr Liam Calvert.

Mr Calvert asked the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods the following question:

“Over recent years I have noted that local leaflets from the Labour Party repeatedly and prominently feature the alley gates scheme, suggesting it is a successful flagship initiative. Despite this, in my local ward of Wensum, according to data supplied by council officers, there were just two gates installed in the last five years.

The total across the city was just 21 in that time. Could you explain why these figures are so low?”

Councillor Waters, leader of the council gave the following response on behalf of Councillor Jones, who had given apologies for the meeting:

“The current scheme to fund alley gates for private residences started in March 2020 building upon a successful programme that ran from 2002-2007.

That programme provided more than 500 gates across Norwich. The current initiative aims to plug any gaps and has been promoted in local press, NCC publications and our website.

Gates installed since March 2020 have protected 88 homes. Three more are currently on order.

Applications are welcome. The only criteria being that all property owners must provide written consent and the alley cannot be an adopted highway.

The scheme manager can provide support to obtain consent via letting agents but owners may not always be willing to provide that consent.

In response to demand, the eligibility criteria of the scheme is being widened to include repairs to older gates to bring them back into use and protect more homes. Publicity will soon be available.”

As a supplementary question, Mr Calvert asked whether the council would review its Anti-Social Behaviour policies within the next six months. Although the supplementary question was not directly related to the question or response, the Lord Mayor offered a written response to Mr Calvert.

4. Minutes

The Lord Mayor allowed Councillor Packer to make a point of clarification on the minutes of the meeting of council held on 25 January 2022. Councillor Packer explained that comments were made at that meeting by another councillor that a community garden would go ahead following a meeting with officers and ward members. The councillor stated that the community garden was not taken forward despite this meeting taking place. Councillor Packer clarified that he attended that meeting and although officers were encouraging, they did not guarantee that the community group would be able to take the land for a community garden.

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022.

5. Questions to Cabinet Members

The Lord Mayor said that twenty one questions were received from members of the council to cabinet members for which notice had been given in accordance with the provisions of the council's constitution.

The questions are summarised as follows:

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| Question 1: | Councillor Mike Sands to the leader of the council on Ukraine. |
| Question 2: | Councillor Vivien Thomas to the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing on Kings Arms Site. |
| Question 3: | Councillor Button to the leader of the council on the Economic Strategy 2019-24. |
| Question 4: | Councillor Stutely to the cabinet member for health and wellbeing on the cost of Heigham Park tennis for residents. |
| Question 5: | Councillor Giles to the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing on the Pathways service. |
| Question 6: | Councillor Huntley to the leader of the council on the Revolving Fund Projects. |
| Question 7: | Councillor Maxwell to the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth on East Norwich. |
| Question 8: | Councillor Driver to the cabinet member for resources on infrastructure investment. |
| Question 9: | Councillor Peek to the cabinet member for resources on the use of City Hall as a vaccination centre. |
| Question 10: | Councillor Champion to the leader of the council on Ukraine. |
| Question 11: | Councillor Galvin to the leader of the council on Freedom of the City for the River Wensum. |
| Question 12: | Councillor Bogelein to the cabinet member for resources on Asset Management Review. |
| Question 13: | Councillor Schmierer to the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing on the boiler system in Normandie Tower. |
| Question 14: | Councillor Osborn to the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth on the toilet provision in Anglia Square. |
| Question 15: | Councillor Price to the cabinet member for inclusive and sustainable growth on the Prince of Wales regeneration. |

- Question 16:** Councillor Grahame to the cabinet member for climate change and digital inclusion on the Cosy City initiative.
- Question 17:** Councillor Haynes to the deputy leader and cabinet member for social housing on properties without gas credit.
- Question 18:** Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for environmental services on bins on pavements.
- Question 19:** Councillor Youssef to the leader of the council on an update on progress on actions from the Black Lives Matter motion.

(A second question had been received from Councillor Bogelein to the cabinet member for health and wellbeing on the Biodiversity Action Plan. As the time taken by questions had exceeded thirty minutes, the question was not taken at the meeting. (Norwich City Council constitution, Part 3, paragraph 35) A second question had also been received from Councillor Carlo to the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods on licensing of taxis. As thirty minutes had elapsed since the start of questions to cabinet members this question was not taken at the meeting. (Norwich City Council constitution, Part 3, paragraph 35)).

(Details of the questions and responses were available on the council's website prior to the meeting and attached to these minutes at Appendix A, together with a minute of any supplementary questions and responses.)

6. Pay Policy Statement 2022-23

Councillor Waters moved and Councillor Harris seconded the recommendations as set out in the report.

Following debate it was,

RESOLVED, unanimously, to approve the council's pay policy statement for 2022/23.

7. Motions

(Notice of the following motions 7(a) to 7(c), as set out on the agenda, had been received in accordance with the council's constitution).

7(a) Motion: 'Robin Hood' tax on oil and gas firms

(Councillor Bogelein left the meeting for the debate and vote on this item having declared a pecuniary interest).

The following amendment Councillor Osborn was received.

Replacing the word "**efficient**" with "**inefficient**" in resolution 1).

Inserting the words “**and elsewhere**” after the words “**in Norwich**” in resolution 2).

Inserting the words “**and renewable installation**” after the words “**emergency home insulation**” in resolution 2d).

Inserting the words “**noting that the New Economics Foundation estimates that upgrading all the UK’s leaky homes to EPC grade C requires a total spend of £35.6bn over a five-year period (2020/21 – 2024/25), with £28.3bn on energy efficiency and £7.3bn on low-carbon heating**” after “**and on low incomes**” in resolution 2d).

Removing the words “**This would cost an estimated £500 million in the next year**” at the end of resolution 2d).

Inserting the words “**including oil and gas companies**” after the words “**energy companies**” in resolution 3).

Inserting the words “**through carbon taxes based on polluter-pays principles which could raise £80 billion in the first year**” after “**pay their fair share**” in resolution 3).

Inserting the words “**an immediate**” after the words “**calling for**” in resolution 4).

The following amendment from Councillor Stonard was received.

Inserting the words “**including models of ownership and regulation**” after the words “**widespread review**” in resolution 3).

Councillor Wright had accepted the amendment and as no other member objected, it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Wright proposed and Councillor Ackroyd seconded the motion as amended.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously, that:

“Council **RESOLVES** to

- 1) note the excessive profits being made by oil and gas companies, including the boss of BP describing the company as a “cash machine” after soaring oil and gas prices boosted its profits to £2.4 billion in the third quarter of 2021 alone and that since 2015 the Conservatives have scrapped zero carbon standards for new homes, and failed to insulate the millions of energy inefficient homes.
- 2) support calls for a “Robin Hood” tax – a one-off levy on the super-profits of oil and gas firms to raise money to support the thousands of families in Norwich and elsewhere that are facing soaring energy costs which includes:

- a) A proposed one-off levy to raise an estimated £5 billion from companies that are making record profits from soaring energy prices. This would be used to support vulnerable families facing a 50% increase to their energy bills.
 - b) This “one-off” tax could fund a substantial package of emergency support to help over 17 million people with their heating bills.
 - c) This package of support would include doubling and extending the Warm Home Discount, doubling the Winter Fuel Allowance
 - d) A new ten-year home insulation scheme: This would be spent on reducing people’s energy bills in the long-term through an emergency home insulation and renewable energy installation programme to upgrade poorly insulated UK homes - including through fully funded grants for those in fuel poverty and on low incomes, noting that the New Economics Foundation estimates that upgrading all the UK’s leaky homes to EPC grade C requires a total spend of £35.6bn over a five-year period (2020/21 – 2024/25), with £28.3bn on energy efficiency and £7.3bn on low-carbon heating.
- 3) recognise any such one-off tax should be followed by a widespread review, including modes of ownership and regulation, to ensure energy companies, including oil and gas companies, pay their fair share, through carbon taxes based on polluter-pays principles which could raise £80 billion in the first year, share and ensure that residents of Norwich are not left in fuel poverty as a consequence of excessive profits.
- 4) ask group leaders to write to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, calling for an immediate one-off tax on excessive profits made by oil and gas companies in order to help vulnerable people, especially those in Norwich, with heating bills and upgrade poorly insulated homes.”

(Councillor Bogelein was readmitted to the meeting).

7(b) Motion: Retrofit taskforce to tackle cost of living crisis

The following amendment from Council Hampton was received.

Inserting the words “**Continue to**” at the start of resolution 1).

Replacing resolution 2) with the following “**Lead the development of a retrofit strategy for Norwich across all tenures, with a paper to be presented to cabinet within 12 months, which includes the role of the retrofit taskforce and the role for Government to provide assistance.**”

Adding the following words “**while ensuring Government is reminded and held accountable for the need to provide strategic, long-term resource, which could start with the effective and sustainable funding of local government to at least pre-2010 levels**” after “international business” in resolution 3).

Replacing the word “**increased**” with the word “**sufficient**” in resolution 5)

Councillor Osborn had accepted the amendment and as no other member objected, it became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Osborn proposed and Councillor Haynes seconded the motion as amended.

Following debate it was:

RESOLVED, unanimously, that:

“Energy prices are set to rise by 50% in April 2022, on top of a 12.2% rise in October 2021. This will plunge many people into fuel poverty and exacerbate the cost of living crisis.

The poor energy efficiency of housing is contributing to this crisis. Due to decades of under-funding and lack of coordination for the domestic retrofit sector, the energy efficiency and renewable energy provision in UK housing lags behind much of Europe.

Norwich will be hit hard by the cost of living rises due to high levels of deprivation and significant fuel poverty. Norwich has a strong tradition of working to improve the energy efficiency of homes through the retrofitting of council and social housing and schemes such as Cosy City. However, there is much more work to be done.

The Climate Change Committee recommends that virtually every house will need to be upgraded to meet carbon reduction targets, as well as the need to insulate households against fuel poverty. This equates to upgrading two houses every minute for the next thirty years nationwide, including in Norwich.

Retrofit industry experts have called for local leadership in the retrofit sector. The successive failures of the Government’s Green Deal, Green Homes Grant, and Heat and Buildings Strategy have left a vacuum in coordination for the retrofit policy that local authorities must fill.

Despite the scale of the challenge, there has hitherto been no coordinating role between the various agencies that are required to work together to deliver retrofitting. Some local councils such as Lewes District Council are piloting a “Retrofit Taskforce” approach, establishing a local authority-led partnership between the construction and renewable energy industries, further, higher and vocational education institutions, architects, social housing providers, and other stakeholders. Lewes’ approach is a three-pronged strategy; a detailed assessment of local housing stock starting with social housing, looking beyond inadequate EPC ratings; a ‘community wealth building’ approach to developing the local supply chain, and an ‘economies of scale’ approach by bringing together a partnership of all social housing providers and councils across a wider area. The retrofit taskforce will be dedicated to developing a local supply chain to retrofit 44,000 social homes in the wider Sussex area and boosting the provision of retrofitting for other tenures.

Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) Continue to work with partners to establish a retrofit taskforce for Norwich, dedicated to developing and promoting a local retrofit supply chain and the targeting of resources to help those in most need of protection from fuel price rises.
- 2) Lead the development of a retrofit strategy for Norwich across all tenures, with a

paper to be presented to Cabinet within 12 months, which includes the role of the retrofit taskforce and the role for Government to provide assistance.

3) Through the retrofit taskforce, seek to mobilise alternative sources of finance beyond insufficient and sporadic government grants, including working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and local and international businesses, while ensuring Government is reminded and held accountable for the need to provide strategic, long-term resource, which could start with the effective and sustainable funding of local government to at least pre-2010 levels.

4) Through the council's membership of UK100, share the aims and expertise of the retrofit taskforce with other local authorities, thereby establishing Norwich as a leading authority.

5) Through UK100 and other channels including the LGA, submit to Government a business case for sufficient funding to scale up local authority-led retrofit taskforces and call for the Net Zero Forum to produce a plan for long term funding for locally led retrofit strategies."

7(c) Motion: Cost of living crisis in Norwich

The proposer of the motion indicated that he wished to defer this motion to a subsequent meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to defer the motion to the next meeting.

The meeting was closed.

LORD MAYOR



NORWICH
City Council

Council
15 March 2022
Questions to cabinet members

Question 1

Councillor Mike Sands to ask the leader of the council the following question:

“Vladimir Putin’s attack on Ukraine is an unprovoked, unjustifiable outrage and a heinous violation of international law that will have tragic consequences. Can the leader comment on the actions and steps this council has and will take to support Ukraine and those Ukrainian citizens living in the city?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“The council is shocked and appalled by Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine. Our thoughts are with all Ukrainian people here in the UK, and their loved ones back home.

We know that the people of Norwich want to provide whatever help they can and we have included advice on the council’s website on the best routes to do this. The most effective way to help is via financial donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee. This allows them to quickly and efficiently purchase what’s required on the ground, rather than trying to transport goods from the UK. The government has pledged to match every pound donated.

At the time of writing, councils have just received further detail on the community sponsorship scheme, which allows individuals, community groups and local authorities to sponsor and support those in need. We stand ready to support those fleeing Ukraine however we can, and City Council officers are liaising with the County Council’s People from Abroad Team. This follows from the commitments made when we took part in the Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme last year, which saw us safely resettle families in affordable accommodation in the city, and the Syrian resettlement scheme before that.

We stand in firm support of the people of Ukraine and at the outset of the crisis we lit up City Hall in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, in solidarity. We have further strengthened our show of support by flying the Ukrainian flag on the building. And earlier this evening we convened a special meeting to grant Freedom of the City to the Ukrainian cities of Lviv and Odesa.”

(In reply to Councillor Mike Sands’ supplementary question, Councillor Waters said that the announcement by the Government on the scheme to provide accommodation and support for the Ukrainian refugees would need more details

especially what resources would be allocated to the council, and senior officers would be updating members on details of any local schemes. He stressed that council would be proactive on bringing this together.)

Question 2

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

“I saw from the Evening News that the cabinet member for social housing recently visited the site of the former Kings Arms Pub on Mile Cross Road again to check on progress to build much needed new council housing. Representing Mile Cross Ward, I know the vital difference this new housing will make to tackle the crisis of affordable housing in our city. Can the cabinet member confirm that the site will be completed by autumn and new tenants moved in?”

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

“I was delighted to visit the site, and see development progressing so well, following the council’s acquisition using a compulsory purchase order. This site has been a blight on this area for many years.

Work commenced in September and construction on the five properties is now well underway. These much-needed new family homes will form part of the council’s housing stock and are being built to enhanced energy efficiency standards to keep bills as low as possible.

The timber frames are up, and installation of roofs is currently underway - this is a significant point in the programme as it means the houses are weatherproof so all the work inside them can start in earnest. The contractors have been lucky that the winter was relatively mild, so any delays were minimal.

The homes are on course for completion as predicted, so I remain confident tenants will be able to move in during Autumn 2022.”

(As a supplementary question, Councillor Vivien Thomas asked what the timescale for further council housing on Argyle Street would likely be. Councillor Harris said that the plans for the development had been submitted and would be determined by committee within the appropriate timescales. The development will be built to the Passivhaus principles and would have fourteen homes for social rent.)

Question 3

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

“With the cost-of-living crisis and wider impacts of both the Tories bungled Brexit deal and the conflict in Ukraine, I know many of my constituents face particularly difficult times ahead. Building a sustainable Norwich economy that provides decently paid, secure jobs is vital for our both our city’s future and residents living in Bowthorpe Ward. I was therefore pleased that the Norwich Economic Strategy 2019-24 was refreshed to take into account some of these recent events and how we can use the powers and influence available as a council to develop a better, more sustainable, economy. Can the leader comment on the strategy and how it will help better develop the city economy in the years ahead?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“To be effective economic strategy must take account of what is changing in the local area and what is driving that change whether it is technology, globalisation, demographic change or other trends. Understanding the city’s strengths and opportunities as well as weaknesses and threats will identify what it is possible for local policies to address or exploit and, where this is not possible, what we can do to mitigate against the things that we cannot directly influence.

Setting out what Norwich needs to develop and maintain a healthy economy that benefits local people and businesses in this way provides the baseline for the work that we do, projects that we seek to fund and the things that we do or influence in partnership with others. There are rarely the resources to do everything, and some things are more easily achieved than others which may require a much longer term approach – the Economic Strategy and annual action plans make it clear how we are working and collaborating with partners to deliver inclusive growth and a sustainable, diverse economy to raise living standards in Norwich.

For the Economic Strategy to be successful, Norwich will need sufficient levels of government investment, our £25M Towns’ Fund Programme is allowing us to invest in improved skills infrastructure, public spaces, urban regeneration and new business space. This investment will be complemented by local partnership working to drive skills support, employment, in-work progression and business growth. As this work progresses, we will be seeking further investment and the Economic Strategy and Local Economic Assessment will provide the foundation on which we move forwards.”

(Councillor Button, by way of a supplementary question asked whether the leader agreed that the Government needed to provide further investment in skilling up employees, improving standards within the workplace through terms and conditions and an industrial strategy. Councillor Waters said that he agreed with calls for the Government to invest in such areas and have a national plan for where skills were needed within each industry to improve the lives of the residents of Norwich.)

Question 4

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

“At a recent scrutiny call, a member of the committee complained that the cost of tennis court provision at Heigham Park would be too expensive for those living on Universal Credit. Can the cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing comment on whether these fears are warranted and what other options were put forward prior to the commencement of the scheme?”

Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing’s response:

“Norwich Parks Tennis offers excellent value for money for Norwich’s residents when compared to private tennis clubs and other public sector providers across the County and country. The current cost per household of £35 is a year – less than 70p a week - gives access to all the tennis courts that the Council operates at Eaton Park, Waterloo Park, Lakenham and Harford. We will shortly be adding Heigham Park and are about to award a new contract for the operation of Norwich Parks Tennis scheme. All of this will increase and improve access to tennis for households on low incomes and Universal Credit, and the new contract will provide free taster sessions for all households in Norwich that want to take part.

At the Scrutiny Committee last month, officers agreed to consider concessions for households on Universal Credit, and we aim to have this work complete by the time the new contract starts on 1 April 2022.”

(In response to Councillor Stutely’s supplementary question, Councillor Packer said that one of the options presented was to retain the grass courts at Heigham Park. This option was not taken as the cost of maintaining grass courts that would not be accessible and playable throughout the year, would have resulted in the membership cost being £60 for each individual member of a household.)

Question 5

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

“As the cost-of-living crisis bites ever further, with the particular risk of private rents increasing higher, I am concerned at the prospect of increasing homelessness in the months ahead. This city council has built a significant range of multi-agency services to best tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in our city, including the Pathways scheme launched just a few years ago. Can the cabinet member comment on how these services continue to perform and whether this increased risk approaching can be adequately responded to by the resources of this city council?”

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

“We believe that the most effective way to deal with homelessness is to prevent it from happening and place great emphasis on this approach through the provision of specialist housing advice and assistance to all those facing homelessness or in housing difficulty in the city.

Our housing options team provides a range of options and advice to such clients, including a homeless prevention fund, a private sector leasing scheme, mediation, legal advice and referrals to supported accommodation. We continue to develop our service and, through external funding continue to enhance our provision, with new specialist advisers in post and more specialist accommodation being brought onstream.

Over the past year, this pro-active approach has directly prevented more than 650 households from experiencing homelessness and assisted many hundreds more in resolving their own housing issues.

As well as performing our statutory obligations regarding the prevention and relief of homelessness, we also recognise that Norwich, because of the opportunities it presents, is a magnet for those facing homelessness or rough sleeping from East Anglia and beyond. We are committed to preventing rough sleeping and dedicate significant resources throughout the year to preventing homelessness, as well as providing support to anyone who finds themselves on the street. This includes the employment of a specialist rough-sleeper co-ordinator to provide intensive support and assistance to rough sleepers, the provision of hostel and supported accommodation, Covid-19 accommodation, a winter shelter, re-connection to home areas and provision of specialist outreach support through our partners at Pathways Norwich, including substance misuse and health specialist workers. The success of this partnership led approach can be seen in number of the latest verified rough sleeper count, showing a 50% reduction in numbers, year on year.”

(As a supplementary question Councillor Giles asked for a comment on the statement from the Chartered Institute of Housing that Right to Buy had been a

strategic failure. Councillor Harris said that Right to Buy had meant the loss of around 140 council homes a year, which would often result in those properties being rented privately and highlighted the pressures this caused on the council's housing stock. She hoped the Government would also implement ending Right to Buy in England as has already been done in Scotland and Wales, and if this were not to happen, she called for a reform to the way in which retained Right to Buy receipts could be used for building further social housing.)

Question 6

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

“Across my ward in Mile Cross, but in many other parts of the city, the issue of eyesores involving private owners who have land banked sites and left them in very poor condition is a real problem. Such sites attract anti-social behaviour and detract from the quality of life in communities already often living with many, worsening pressures. The need to permanently resolve these, through Compulsory Purchase Orders is well accepted and examples of the success of this have been discussed this evening. I was therefore particularly pleased that the success of this council in securing the £25m investment from the Towns Fund, has also led to the opportunity of commissioning a Revolving Fund Project. Can the Leader discuss how this might work in practice and whether opportunities to secure further much needed social housing can be delivered?”

Councillor Waters, the leader's response:

“Thank you for your question.

The Towns Deal Revolving Fund is an exciting and innovative project that originated from work done to address the problem of stalled sites acquired by developers, but then left undeveloped to become eyesores and magnets for anti-social behaviour.

Officers recently held a workshop for councillors providing information on the Fund and to encourage the reporting of sites that may be causing issues in your wards through emailing the housing development mailbox.

The council has already identified some sites of potential interest, and the Towns Deal has allowed us to appoint a property expert to support us in assessing their suitability for acquisition through the Fund, and to explore possible disposal routes.

Whilst the Fund is not exclusively set-up to bring forward housing, and social housing in particular, most sites will be for residential development.

Our property expert will advise on potential valuations of sites to acquire, either by negotiation or using Compulsory Purchase, and the preferred delivery mechanism for the site once acquired. The options for delivery could include sale of the site to developers with a deliverable planning permission, partnership with a Registered Provider of social housing, or the council developing the site itself, either for council homes or through Norwich Regeneration Ltd. We would seek commitment from any purchaser to swift delivery of the site to prevent further issues.

These are sites where delivery of social housing can pose problems for viability, or where extant planning permissions may already exist, and therefore the council and its property advisor are looking carefully at practical solutions to ensure delivery.”

(In response to Councillor Huntley's supplementary question, Councillor Waters said that the fund would work as a deterrent to stop people from sitting on unused sites as the council would have the ability to use Compulsory Purchase Orders to buy those sites for development of social homes and regeneration. He also highlighted that derelict sites would need to meet the criteria of the fund, and the council would look at the applicable stalled sites for redevelopment.)

Question 7

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

“I am acutely aware of the significant strategic opportunities which the regeneration of East Norwich can bring, especially with regard to much needed housing, jobs and investment in our city. The decision to purchase Carrow House was particularly welcome given the importance of its historic character and history to our city. I was therefore particularly pleased that the updated status of several heritage buildings on the East Norwich site which have now been listed by Historic England, following a request for a review of their status by the city council. Connected to this, work has started on the new, unlisted, part of Carrow House (the 1920's block) to begin to turn it into office space for start-ups and small local businesses. Given this recent progress, can the cabinet member update council on the regeneration of East Norwich?”

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

“Significant progress is being made on bringing forward the regeneration of East Norwich which is being guided by a public private partnership involving many public bodies and all significant landownership interests. The stage 1 masterplan was agreed by Cabinet in November 2021 and stage 2 is now well underway, key outputs, will include an updated masterplan, infrastructure delivery plan, refined viability assessment, and a draft Supplementary Planning Document for East Norwich to guide the implementation of policy in the Greater Norwich Local Plan. A comprehensive update on progress was recently given to Sustainable Development Panel. The safeguarding and enhancement of valuable heritage assets, supported by Historic England's listings review, is a key driver for future regeneration of the sites. Not only is the heritage on the sites massively important to preserve but it also offers huge potential to assist with the creation of a new quarter of immense quality and character. It is important that the strengths of this are fully recognised, and it is not simply treated as a constraint. The purchase of Carrow House demonstrates the council's commitment to the regeneration process and gives us greater scope to influence the wider development. Work to refurbish the office accommodation is well underway and should be completed by spring. Works to safeguard its heritage features and external areas should be tendered shortly so will be able to undertaken over the summer. The council and partners are currently discussing next steps in taking forward the masterplan to delivery with Homes England. It will be important to maintain the momentum for this strategic regeneration opportunity and unlock funding to ensure that not only the heritage is safeguarded, but also that wider infrastructure better connecting the City to the Broads and unlocking the potential for significant new homes and jobs can be delivered.”

(Councillor Maxwell, by way of a supplementary question, asked for further details on individual listings. Councillor Stonard highlighted that the following sites had recently been listed; the conservatory at Carrow House (Grade II*), Trowse Railway Station

on Bracondale (Grade II), a late nineteenth century engine house at the Trowse pumping station, on Bracondale (Grade II), the early twentieth century engine house, boiler house and cold store at Trowse sewage pumping station (Grade II) on Bracondale and already listed but with new information was the timber-drying bottle kiln at the Norwich Deal Ground. He added that listing buildings across the site ensures that the heritage of the site could be better cared for by the developers.)

Question 8

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

“Can the cabinet member for resources tell this council the level of investment in the infrastructure of this city in the next financial year that this city council will provide, and the projects it will fund?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“We set a budget last month that will enable us to invest in vital infrastructure for people living, working and visiting the city in 2022/23. £3.5m will be spent on cultural and leisure facilities in the city; £4.8m on parks, open spaces, public realm and sports facilities; £2m to bring forward stalled development sites; £2.2m on infrastructure to support the digital economy and £12.9m on the building of much needed new homes and affordable housing for the city. Joint working with Greater Norwich partners will result in community infrastructure fund money being spent in Norwich on projects including Wensum Lodge and the River Wensum link between St Georges and Duke Street. Housing Infrastructure Fund money is available to pay for works to enable the regeneration of Anglia Square and we are supporting transport projects in the Transforming Cities programme.”

(As a supplementary question Councillor Driver asked what the investment would mean for building new homes. Councillor Kendrick said that the Mile Cross depot site was an example of the investment the council has made into developing brownfield sites into social housing. He highlighted the development in Bowthorpe that was a mixture of homes in private ownership and social housing which had created a new community. He added that the council was working with local housing associations to develop other sites across the city.)

Question 9

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

“It was announced in January that the vaccination centre at Castle Quarter was moving to City Hall. This opened on 10 January 2022 and now offers vaccination jabs seven days a week to help boost protection against the Covid-19 virus. It’s excellent to hear that the city’s civic building is being opened up for the benefit of residents. Could the cabinet member comment on the use of the space in this way?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources’ response:

“Thank you for the question. The use of City Hall as the vaccination centre is an excellent example of the council and the NHS working together at pace, to deliver a new facility that’s clearly vital to the city and our residents. It was through our engagement with both the NHS and Castle Quarter that led us to assist with the search for a new mass vaccination centre to serve the City. Whilst City Hall was only one of several spaces looked at for the centre it quickly became apparent that in terms of its location and its readiness to be established it was the preferable solution.

Establishing the centre involved intensive work from many council officers and NHS staff over the Christmas period to get the new vaccination site up and running. Repurposing space within City Hall in this way is the right thing to do as the council continues to work closely with the NHS in responding to the pandemic, and my thanks go to all those who were involved in this.”

(In response to Councillor Peek’s supplementary question, Councillor Kendrick said that the council was working with the NHS and other partners to enable pop up vaccination centres to be available in areas outside of the city centre, such as the Norman Centre.)

Question 10

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

“A resident of my ward is trying to bring relatives from Ukraine to safety in Britain. Our city of sanctuary has a tradition of welcoming refugees, and I'd like to thank the People from Abroad team for their work. Can the cabinet member explain to me what further practical measures the council and its partners can take to welcome asylum seekers and refugees to the East of England?”

Councillor Waters, the leader's response:

“Norwich has a proud history of welcoming people in need of refuge and the city council has always been one of the first in the county to step forward and resettle refugees in the city. This has been shown over the past few years in our work to resettle 175 refugees as part of the Syrian resettlement scheme, now known as the UK Resettlement Scheme, as well as those fleeing the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, with 37 people resettled in Norwich so far. We continue to work proactively with the county council's 'people from abroad' team to find suitable housing and support to those we welcome to Norwich.

The government has announced two routes for Ukrainian refugees to resettle in the UK – those with relatives already living in the country and a community sponsorship scheme.

Currently the government is in the process of designing the community sponsorship route which would allow sponsors such as community groups, businesses, private sponsors or local authorities to bring people to the UK. We are awaiting further detail from government about the role councils will play in this process. We are engaged with the county council and will do what we can to ensure safe passage. A number of residents of the city have already come forward offering support and we thank them for that”

(Councillor Champion, by way of supplementary question asked, whether the leader agreed with the implementation of visa-free access for refugees. In response Councillor Waters said that the matter had thoroughly discussed at the Freedom of the City meeting earlier in the evening. He highlighted that a joint letter from group leaders would be sent to the Government highlighting the concerns raised.)

Question 11

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

“The River Wensum is a rare chalk stream which flows through our city. There has been an enormous amount of public support for this council’s decision in January to look at granting the freedom of the city to this precious river, jointly through some of the key organisations which join to protect it, such as the Norfolk Rivers Trust and others. This will be a unique and helpful move to value and respect nature and put our council and Norwich on the map. Can you update me on progress including when the freedom of the city is likely to be granted to these organisations?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“The motion to council called on us to investigate whether the Wensum could be awarded Freedom of the City. Unfortunately, as was suspected at the time, Freedoms can only be granted to people or persons (which would include organisations) but not to natural assets. We can continue to look at how we can reward the river; having won the UK river award in 2014 we may need to wait a little time before applying once more.

Through our ongoing support for the River Wensum Strategy, we can strengthen the relationship we have with partners and look at opportunities to promote its use and enhancement and if there are individuals or groups that are worthy of further recognition, we can of course consider that”

(As a supplementary question, Councillor Galvin asked whether it was possible to look at the motion itself to ensure that Freedom of the City could be awarded to entities that protect the river. Councillor Waters said that the recognition of the River Wensum Strategy group was welcomed but this had not been discussed at the meeting in January, instead that the River Wensum Strategy group had been criticised.

Councillor Galvin raised a point of order to clarify that she was referring to all entities that protect the river and not just the River Wensum Strategy Group.

Councillor Osborn raised a point of explanation to state that his comments during the January meeting were in relation to the fact that the River Wensum was one of the most polluted rivers in the country and therefore more needed to be done.)

Question 12

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

“The council is currently conducting a much-needed asset management review to assess characteristics, use and the state of the council's assets including shops and other buildings. Assets are clearly in a state of disrepair, requiring millions to be invested to address repair issues. These repairs will be more expensive because issues were not addressed earlier. I was, therefore, surprised to learn that in 2010 the council invested £100,000 in an asset management review. Nothing happened following this review, which will have added to the state of disrepair. From the outside, this looks like another case of mismanagement where nothing was done with a piece of work and the effort and cost had to be repeated, adding to the ever-growing cost of reactive repair of the council's assets. Could you please explain why nothing was done with the 2010 review and why assets were subsequently allowed to fall into further disrepair?”

Councillor Kendrick, the cabinet member for resources' response:

“Following the recent adoption of our Strategic Asset Management Framework the council has a clear and well-resourced plan to make the most of its asset base. This along with the insourcing of property services will give us greater control over how we manage assets, will ensure that our use of property is aligned with corporate objectives, enable us to respond to the challenges facing local government and ensure a process of continuous improvement and transformation of the council's property portfolio which will enable us to respond to many of these challenges to benefit Norwich and its residents.

I'm not sure that investigating events of over a decade ago is the best use of time. Much has changed in the nature of assets the council holds and how they are managed since then and asset management frameworks do require regular updating and review. During this time the council has achieved a lot with its property portfolio including the realisation of development on the site at Three Score, Bowthorpe and also the acquisition of commercial property which generates over £4.5m of revenue income to the council to support front line services.

However, I don't recognise the picture you paint of what happened in 2010. My understanding is that the investment made in 2010/11 effectively led the to the council's decision shortly after this to progress the joint venture arrangements with Norse for the outsourcing of property services to NPSN and also led to the 2011 asset management strategy. Whilst we have chosen to do different with regard to property service provision more recently I'm not sure this makes the original decision to outsource the services wrong nor to investigate such historic matters further a good use of time.”

(In response to Councillor Bogelein's supplementary question Councillor Kendrick said the council had not had the funds to maintain the council's assets to the standards that it would have liked to due to austerity and that it was the right time to conduct an asset management review.)

Question 13

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

“I have recently been made aware that the council was planning to replace an oil-based boiler system in Normandie Tower with another oil-based system. I am glad that when leaseholders and Green councillors flagged up that this would go against all promises to switch to renewable heating systems, this plan was abandoned. However, enquiries showed that the council was aware that this boiler system was coming to the end of its life and nevertheless feasibility studies for a renewable heating system had in the council's own explanation not been conducted in time, which led to the initial plan of replacing the oil boiler with another oil boiler. Can you please explain this lack of forward planning, which meant it needed an external intervention to stop the plans and how you will ensure that this does not happen again in the future?”

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

“As part of the investment work being undertaken at Normandie Tower there was a plan to replace the existing oil fuelled boiler with a new oil filled boiler. This approach was based upon practical issues relating to existing energy supplies to the building, the fact that the existing boiler was failing and strategically the fact that the boiler would require a further replacement prior to the Government's carbon neutral target 2050 at which point there may be more appropriate energy efficient solutions.

Consultation commenced with leaseholders where concerns were raised that we were looking at a like for like solution. We have taken those concerns on board to establish if there is an alternate, cost, efficient and environmentally efficient solution. This work is currently underway and once potential solutions have been identified we will re-engage with the residents.”

(Council Schmierer asked as a supplementary question why a consultation was needed to highlight that a like-for-like replacement of oil boilers was not suitable when considering the council's net zero targets. Councillor Harris said that forward planning of improvements to properties had been focused on replacement of components rather than a whole house approach. Through the development of a Housing Revenue Account Asset Management Strategy environmental factors would also be considered.)

Question 14

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

“Many residents have raised with me concerns about the lack of public toilet provision in the city, especially around Anglia Square since the Anglia Square management decided to close the toilets. Disabled residents have told me of how they are now anxious about going to shop in Anglia Square as there is no public toilet should they need one. The Greggs toilet has a code-lock so skeleton keys do not work. I have raised this a number of times with the Anglia Square management but have simply been told that they will not reopen the toilets. Will the city council commit to working with partners to encourage the provision of accessible public toilets?”

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

“I agree with Councillor Osborn that public toilets help people to enjoy the many facilities in our fine city, and getting the right provisions is especially important for those with disabilities. The lack of appropriate toilets can lead to discomfort, a lack of freedom and embarrassment. Therefore, the council submitted an application for £105,000 to central government last autumn to pay for Changing Places Toilets at The Forum and Wensum Lodge, working with The Forum Trust and Norfolk County Council. Changes Places Toilets are the highest standard of accreditation, and we are waiting to hear whether our application has been successful.

We have also consistently asked for Changing Places toilets to be included in the redevelopment proposals for Anglia Square. They were included in the scheme rejected by the then Secretary of State in 2021 and have been assured that the new planning application expected to be submitted shortly will feature them in the early phases of the development. The sooner we can deliver on the longstanding objective of securing the regeneration of Anglia Square the better.”

(By way of supplementary question Councillor Osborn asked whether the cabinet member would join the management of Anglia Square to be reopened before the development is completed. Councillor Stonard said that he would.)

Question 15

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

“Ward councillors appreciate the efforts of the cabinet member and officers approaching the issues of waste management and fly-tipping in the Prince of Wales Road area with renewed positivity. Unfortunately, at the budget setting meeting, the Green amendment was lost, and so currently there is no commitment to scoping a long-term vision of regeneration of this area. Can the cabinet member provide me with some assurance that the council will commit some resources to developing a new strategy for the area which balances the needs of residents with the goal of increasing economic activity?”

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

“I am glad that Councillor Price appreciates our efforts to manage waste around Prince of Wales Road. As Councillor Price is aware, officers have agreed to engage with businesses on Prince of Wales Road to ensure that they are disposing of their waste responsibly. They have also agreed to target fly tipping by residents and businesses in this area. We would be welcome the opportunity to influence the design of communal waste storage facilities aimed at encouraging responsible waste management and improving the amenity of this area. The government’s agenda to deregulate the planning system through extending permitted development rights has made it much more challenging to manage the relationship between housing, businesses, and other users in city centres; this is one reason why we would like to produce a vision for the city centre. We have been looking at the potential scope of this work and have identified that Prince of Wales Road as one of the areas that deserves special attention. Unfortunately, our joint application with the BID for money from the Community Renewal Fund to support this was not successful but we are currently considering other funding sources including the Shared Prosperity Fund. If successful, this could allow this work to commence later this year. Understanding the experience of residents and businesses will be an important influence on the content of any vision so engagement will be key.”

(In response to Councillor Price’s supplementary question Councillor Stonard said that all councillors would be involved in the regeneration of the city centre, as well as ward councillors, as the city centre was an important part of the city.)

Question 16

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

“I would like an update from the cabinet member on what help residents can expect from the Cosy City initiative. Residents tell me that help is not available if you already have loft insulation. A councillor enquiry sent early in November hasn’t been answered and the resident who initially contacted the council is still waiting for a response. What does the Cosy City initiative provide people living in council, housing association and private accommodation?”

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

“Cosy City utilises an external grant called ECO Flex where eligibility is determined both by residents’ income, any vulnerabilities they may have and the existing energy efficiency characteristics of the property. Therefore, in properties with pre-existing loft insulation grant funding is often not available. I am sorry to hear that the resident has not yet had a response. Having looked into this it seems their details have been passed to our partner contractor who will be in contact soon to arrange a survey.

The grant funding rules for ECO flex mean the Council cannot provide assistance to people living in council accommodation through Cosy City. However, council residents will benefit from our programme of regular maintenance. Through Cosy City we can offer assistance to those in housing association and private accommodation, if they are eligible, although the provision of this support is dependent on the landlord agreeing to the works.”

(As a supplementary question Councillor Grahame asked whether there was reassurance that homes with existing insulation would not be excluded from any retrofit strategy. Councillor Hampton said that many homes within the city needed to be retrofitted and that the motion that would be debated during the meeting would look at what was achievable. She added that the current approach was to prioritise those properties in which the tenants were in fuel poverty. Residents would be able to explain their circumstances on the website, and then officers will be able to advise them.)

Question 17

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

“Over the last two years, 218 council properties were without gas credit at the time of their Gasway service. This resulted in the supplies being capped, leaving residents without heating. Gasway do not have to service or maintain a capped property and numbers of properties affected in this way are likely to rise as the energy price crisis hits. A plan is needed to prepare for the risks that this crisis represents. Can the cabinet member outline the council’s intervention strategy to address this?”

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

“As part of our legal duties as a landlord we are required to cap the gas supply where a safety check cannot be carried out, to ensure the installation is safe. When we are made aware of a property with a capped gas supply, we contact the tenant, providing financial assistance where necessary to get the meter into credit and then rearrange a gas safety check. However, some tenants chose not to reinstate their gas supply, preferring to remain without gas on a permanent basis. As you say, we may sadly see more residents affected by this in the future as energy prices continue to rise but will continue to provide assistance to ensure supplies remain uncapped.”

(By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Haynes queried why a resident would not want to reinstate their gas supply. In response Councillor Harris said that the support available for residents who were struggling to afford their gas supply was detailed in the answer to the original question. The council used communications to residents to advise them on the requirements of gas services and the offer of support for capped supplies.)

Question 18

Councillor Carlo to ask the cabinet member for environmental services the following question:

“The storage of bins on narrow pavements in terrace areas is a long-standing issue on terrace streets. A combination of bins on pavements and cars partially parked on the pavement can block access for pedestrians, especially for people pushing buggies or in wheelchairs, forcing them into the road. Over the last three years, several Nelson residents and myself have been reporting the bins problem to the council, without redress. Residents who submit an on-line complaint say they often hear nothing further or else they receive just an acknowledgment. I have had no success via councillor enquiries in requesting a solution and don't always receive a reply if I report a problem. Will the cabinet member agree to develop an action plan for dealing with this persistent problem?”

Councillor Oliver, the cabinet member for environmental services' response:

“I am aware of this problem and acknowledge the challenges that this behaviour presents to the disabled or parents with pushchairs and prams. This issue was considered at the council's Scrutiny Committee in June 2021, when committee was informed of the wide range of powers available to the council to ensure that pavements are kept clear of incorrectly stored bins.

Using information from this scrutiny review and as part of our recent initiative to increase enforcement activities in relation to a range of local environment issues the council is developing an approach to tackling this. This will involve using a mixture of informal approaches and using under sec 46 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in more persistent and serious cases. We will shortly be rolling this out this new approach on a trial basis and will engage directly with local members in trial areas.

I have arranged for Councillor Carlo to receive a response to any outstanding enquiries that she may have regarding this issue.”

(As a supplementary question Councillor Carlo asked why the council had not used the great number of powers that it had available to keep pavements free of bins. As Councillor Oliver had sent her apologies Councillor Carlo would receive a written response to her supplementary question.)

Question 19

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

“In July 2020, the council passed a motion on ‘Black Lives Matter’ which asked for, amongst other things, to provide members with training and support to champion diversity and to work with the police to ensure that policing is fair to all residents of Norwich. Could the cabinet member what progress has been made on these and other resolutions of this motion?”

Councillor Waters, the leader’s response:

“The council has been rolling out a comprehensive programme of training for officers and working with the provider to develop a scope for member training, which we intend to include as part of the induction planning post the 2022 elections. The training is around Inclusive leadership and being inclusive and includes developing an understanding of institutional discrimination, removing barriers and confidence in challenging discrimination at all times. Members were also invited to attend an e-training course on unconscious bias last September. I also had a meeting with senior police officers about the comprehensive programme training they are doing in relation to the issues raised by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Delivering good equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) outcomes underpins the council’s work, with the new corporate plan 2022-26 reiterating our commitment to ensure that our services are accessible to all, promoting a city that is diverse, inclusive, and fair, and representative of the communities we serve. As part of this, a new cross-council officer group is working together to develop an EDI strategy and refreshed Reducing Inequalities Action Plan”

(In response to Councillor Youssef’s supplementary question Councillor Waters said that he would need to confirm why the inclusivity training was not being offered to frontline agency staff. He added that if any member had any further thoughts on how to improve the equality and diversity of the council they could contact him directly.)

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 Bogelein to ask the cabinet member for health and wellbeing the following question:

"In September 2019, the council unanimously passed a Green motion that asked for an updated biodiversity action plan to be created, given that the previous biodiversity action plan was 20 years old! The importance of such a strategy was reinforced by a Labour motion 'promoting pollinators in the city' in March 2021. However, two and a half years after the Biodiversity Emergency motion, the Labour administration has still not produced this emergency strategy, despite promises that it would be ready by the autumn of 2021. On the council's getting talking website there is a timeline which reads: 'As we move through into spring 22, guided by the action plan there will be some exciting projects and challenges you can get involved in to help improve biodiversity.' Now spring has sprung, the guiding action plan is nowhere to be seen. When will the council produce a biodiversity action plan?"

Councillor Packer, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing's response:

"The biodiversity strategy and action plan will be published for consultation with cabinet in June of 2022, as set out in the corporate plan. Comprehensive drafts of these documents have been evolving since summer of 2021, with a public consultation event held in November 2021 to further inform their development. The documents are currently being developed in association with service areas across the council to ensure they successfully integrate with other related strategies and plans. With regards to timing of the strategy, Cllr Bogelein should be aware that over the last two years we have had a devastating pandemic and were required to focus our resources on combatting it. During this time though, the strategy was being developed. With the appointment of a new environmental strategy manager earlier this year, it seemed an appropriate opportunity to carry out a review of the developed strategy document before moving ahead with it. I would rather this council took a reflective, sensible approach to plans such as this because I want them to be right when they are launched."

Question 21

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

“The Environmental Strategy includes a 2023 action to: “Encourage more electric taxis by the provision of discounted rapid charge refills and potential increase of vehicle age licencing rules if fully electric.” However, consultation with taxi companies on provision of rapid chargers hasn’t yet occurred. Action is required, given plans to extend the city centre low-emission zone and the need to halve carbon emissions by 2030. Cambridge City Council is using licensing requirements to manage a switch to EVs, issuing new licenses only to vehicles under four years old meeting Euro 5 standard or higher. Since April 2020, licenses have been issued to zero or ultra-low emission vehicles, not renewed on vehicles over nine years old or those which do not meet Euro 4 standard or higher. In future only electric or ultra-low emission vehicles will be admitted to the city centre. Will Norwich adopt a similar action plan?”

Councillor Jones, the cabinet member for safer, stronger neighbourhoods’ response:

“The licensing standards and conditions for taxis and private hire are being reviewed currently. The provision of electric vehicles in the taxi and private hire fleet will be considered at this time. There will be a full 12-week consultation on the proposed standards and conditions where representations may be made formally. The county council has submitted an expression of interest to the Department for Transport for money to fund a business case to introduce a pilot low emission zone in the city centre. We intend to work with them on this to consider the role of regulating emissions and engine standards in the taxi and private hire fleet that would use streets and ranks within the zone.”