

Member Questions for Council

25 March 2026

No.	Subject	From:-	Responder:-
1	Together for Children	Cllr Mark Burrell	Cllr Michael Butler
	<p><i>“Can the Leader set out how the re-contracting of Together for Children will align with the council’s strategic priorities for children’s services, and how this process will ensure the continuation of an outstanding standard of performance?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>The achievements of Together for Children over the past 9 years have been far reaching and in the words of Ofsted “the leap from ‘Inadequate’ to ‘Outstanding’ was unprecedented”. Ofsted’s 2025 report states there has been an ongoing “relentless dedication to improvement” and that since 2017 Together for Children has created a service that is “highly aspirational for children’s futures”.</p> <p>Together for Children’s vision is to improve the lives of children and their families, keep children safe from harm and ensure they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Together for Children’s contract extension ensures that this outstanding performance and support to children and young people not only continues but strengthens and continues to improve.</p> <p>It also strongly aligns to the City’s ambition of ensuring our children and young people are achieving the best outcomes, everyone is connected to opportunities, and whatever your aspiration, you can achieve it in Sunderland.</p>		
2	Pothole Plague	Cllr Margaret Crosby	Cllr Lindsey Leonard
	<p><i>“The city has been plagued with potholes following recent wet and wintry weather with council staff responding admirably in challenging circumstances. Residents want to know why an acceptable repair consists of chucking some tarmac in a hole and whacking it with a shovel. Does the portfolio holder agree that the city and residents deserve better?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>I agree that council staff have coped well with the huge increase in reports of potholes appearing in the city in January and February. Staff have repaired over 5200 potholes in the first 2 months of the year which is over double what is normally repaired.</p> <p>Staff were under huge pressure to repair potholes and keep roads safe. It is important to note that pothole repairs are generally emergency repairs and the council’s duty is to make them safe.</p>		

	As part of the council’s ongoing search for efficiencies, new repair materials and techniques are constantly being sought and trialed. Officers have been trialing a new repair material which can be compacted with the back of a spade or tamping tool or by driving over it.		
3	Culture House	Cllr Lyall Reed	Cllr Beth Jones
	<i>“Can the cabinet member detail the full extent of what will be included in Culture House, on each floor, when it opens?”</i>		
Response	<p>The spaces across the building are made up as follows:</p> <p>On the Ground Floor we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture House Gift Shop • Blacks Corner (Hospitality Space) • The Atrium (36 screen Digital Gallery) • Focus Gallery (Exhibition Space) and • Vision Gallery (Exhibition Space) <p>On the First Floor we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion Gallery (360 Digital Gallery) • The Den (which includes a Children’s Library and Family space) • Podcasting Studio • The Exchange (A space for media presentations, Gaming, Talks, and VR activity) • The Domain (a young person’s gathering space and Library) • Engagement studio (Large classroom) • Media Studio (Studio for Photography and Filming and Music) • Bring your Own device working spaces, and • Creative Computer access spaces. <p>On the Second Floor we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Collection (Additional library space) • Three Meeting rooms • Learning Studio (Large classroom) • Sunderland University Gallery (home of the NGCA) • Podcasting space • Bring your Own device working spaces • Creative Computer access spaces, and • Lounge space <p>On the Third Floor we will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events Space • Sky Garden • City Eye (A multipurpose space for promoting activity across the city) • Bring your Own device working spaces • Scanning Studio (A professional document digitising space) • The Record (Local studies space) • Inventors Lab (Maker space with 3D Printers, Lazer cutters, Specialist 		

	<p>Printers and more) and a,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small meeting room <p>This summarises the information shared with Elected Members in a presentation at Economic Prosperity Scrutiny Committee in February, which also included a link to a video walk through Culture House Sunderland Nov 2025</p>		
4	Strengthen Community Wealth Building Across Sunderland	Cllr Sean Laws	Cllr Alison Smith
	<p><i>“As a cooperative Council, I welcome the work that has been done to strengthen community wealth building across Sunderland and the benefit that brings to our local economy. Can the Leader outline what further steps we are taking to ensure that more of the council's spending supports local businesses, co-operatives, and social enterprises so that wealth created in Washington and Sunderland stays in Washington and Sunderland?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>The Council has a well established track record of using and supporting local suppliers through its Buy Sunderland First approach. This proactive approach has led to over £170 million being spent with Sunderland suppliers in 2024/25, the highest recorded level to date, and over £1.4 billion since 2012/2013.</p> <p>We will continue to maximise community wealth building through our procurement by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking into account the local supplier market when developing our procurement strategies. • Ensuring local suppliers are aware of contract opportunities and providing them with support. • Going further than the requirements of the Social Value Act by incorporating social value requirements for all types of contracts - securing maximum value for local communities and businesses, such as employment for young people not in education, employment or training and the increased use of local sub-contractors, and • Facilitating donations of assistance or money through social value to help our local communities and voluntary sector <p>In addition to this, the Council is building measures that benefit local businesses, co-operatives, and social enterprises into its activity wherever possible. This ranges from programmes such as Enterprising Sunderland and Wear Together, developed and supported through UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme, which will now continue into 2026/27 with funding from the NE Combined Authority, as well as a digital support programme for independent retailers on high streets across the city – to the pre-opening programme for Culture House through which the approach of commissioning from local creatives</p>		

	<p>alongside regional and national talent has been embedded.</p> <p>Supporting and sustaining the city's business community is really important, for the wide range of benefits this can generate across the city as a whole – and the work that we continue to prioritise with our local businesses, co-operatives, and social enterprises to strengthen the local economy is key.</p>		
5	National Glass Centre	Cllr Niall Hodson	Cllr Beth Jones
	<p><i>“The Glass Centre site was handed over to the University, does the leader agree that if the University doesn't want the site anymore, that they should offer it back to the Council?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>The council are not in a financial position to take back the Glass Centre from a capital or revenue perspective. The Labour Group position on the Glass Centre was made clear in the motion that was passed at Full Council on the 25th of March which was supported unanimously by all members.</p>		
6	Active Families NE	Cllr Michael Hartnack	Cllr Michael Mordey
	<p><i>“Following the recent high-profile reports of how the Council has treated Active Families NE, will the cabinet member commit - as a minimum - to reimbursing the costs they spent on legal fees and surveyors, having agreed heads of terms with the Council, only for a spurious 'review of assets' to disrupt the process?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>Active Families NE were advised on 12th September 2025 that the council would reimburse bona fide and evidenced costs, subject to the provision of appropriate supporting documentation.</p>		
7	Women's Rough Sleeping	Cllr Stephen Elms	Cllr Kevin Johnston
	<p><i>“Can the Leader confirm whether the Council intends to participate in the Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2026, and if so, what preparations are being made to support this important work?”</i></p>		
Response	<p>I can confirm that the Council intends to participate in the Women's Rough Sleeping Census and is working with Shelter and our neighbouring Local Authorities to confirm the details of the count in Sunderland.</p> <p>The findings will not only help us identify the number of women who sleep rough in the city, but also those who are homeless and vulnerable who may not be visible to us, other services and traditional rough sleeping counts.</p> <p>It will also help us identify gendered patterns of homelessness and the experiences of women, including why they may be in unsafe places and situations, and why they are hidden due to fear of harm or controlling behaviours.</p>		

	Once we understand these experiences we can work with partners to engage with and support women into safe accommodation via the design of specific support projects. Without the survey, some women may remain 'hidden' from services and unable to access the appropriate assistance and support they need.		
8	Crown Works	Cllr Julia Potts	Cllr Michael Mordey
	<i>"Residents of Pallion and Ford have been keenly following developments surrounding the Crown Works site and the proposed development of 'Palliwood'. Earlier this year the leader claimed that there would be major news in the spring and ground would be broken. Is this going to happen and would the leader stake his reputation on it?"</i>		
Response	<p>Cllr Potts will have seen the recent press coverage on the announcement of the funding package and that the formal decision was made by NECA Cabinet on 17th March and Sunderland City Council's Cabinet on 26th March. All the funding for phase 1 is now secured.</p> <p>Contractors have already been procured and are in the process of mobilising to site, with construction to commence by July 2026, with the studios complete by the end of next year. Once phase one is complete Sunderland will be home to the largest film and TV studio in the North of England, something I think we can all be proud of. This is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the career opportunities in the creative industries for people not just across Sunderland but the wider North East.</p>		
9	The Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative	Cllr Antony Mullen	Cllr Lindsey Leonard
	<i>"The Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative contract, agreed in 2024, said that the first phase of digitisation of static speed cameras would be completed within 9 months. How many static speed cameras in Sunderland have been upgraded to date?"</i>		
Response	The Northumbria Road Safety Partnership agreement was completed in March 2025 between Northumbria Police and the six local authorities within the force area. Since that date, Gateshead Council as lead authority has been working with partners on the selection and procurement of a supplier. This has now been completed and arrangements for fixed speed camera sites are now progressing.		