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## Anger as Norwich city councillor brands Covid-19 'biggest con in history'

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Norwich city councillor Nigel Utton. Picture: Ruth Lawes

A city councillor has been blasted by his colleagues after he described COVID-19 as a “little virus” which is “the biggest con in history”.



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*Labour city councillor Mike Stonard. Pic: Archant.*

Former Green councillor Nigel Utton, who is now an independent representing Thorpe Hamlet, made the comments at a virtual meeting of Norwich City Council, where the council's response to the virus and how to recover from it, was being discussed.

Mr Utton said: "Only 15 people in Norwich have died from COVID-19. If you compare that to the number of people who usually die of the flu in Norwich, it's far less.

"The problem is not COVID-19, which is a little virus which affects a few people, it's the government's response."

Mr Utton mentioned Neil Ferguson, the government scientist who quit after he broke lockdown restrictions after an "error of judgement" when a woman he was a relationship visited his home and government advisor Dominic Cummings, who travelled to Durham during lockdown. He said they were people at the heart of government decision making and said: "They know COVID-19 is not what it is purported to be."

Mr Utton, an osteopath, said he had been forced to close his business in Norwich because of the restrictions and move out of the city.

The former headteacher said: “COVID-19 is the biggest con in history. We need to get back to normal. We need to open parks, get pupils back to school and stop this panic.”

But other councils criticised his comments as “outrageous and irresponsible”. Labour’s Beth Jones, who works as a nurse, said what he claimed was a “kick in the teeth” for her NHS colleagues.

She said: “As a nurse, who has worked through this pandemic, I am gobsmacked by that. This was not a little thing, this has been terrifying for the general population and my frontline colleagues.”

Labour’s Karen Davis said: “I am absolutely staggered by councillor Utton. I have known two of those people who have died and their relatives are utterly destroyed. This is not some kind of conspiracy theory that we should brush under the carpet.”

Labour’s Mike Stonard said he was “horrified” at Mr Utton’s remarks. He said: “I have to say that, if COVID-19 is the biggest con in history, have you any idea how much of a cover up there would have to be? It beggars belief that anyone would suggest that.”

Sandra Bogelein, leader of the Green group on Norwich City Council, supported the condemnation of Mr Utton’s remarks.

She said: “Views like those expressed by councillor Utton tonight are not in keeping with the values and science based approach of the green party. His stance on COVID-19 is as dangerous as it is wrong.”

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