

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2023
QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

WRITTEN RESPONSES PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING AS THE TIME LIMIT OF 60 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS WAS REACHED

Question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management from Councillor Anne Callaghan BEM

Staff have recently raised concerns that there are existing plans for County Hall to be closed in 2025.

Can the Cabinet Member allay these concerns and confirm that there are no such plans?

Response from Councillor Keith Girling, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management

The outcome of the Scrutiny Review of our Office Buildings, where Councillor Callaghan was a Member of the Task and Finish Group, was agreed by Overview Committee on 24th January 2023. We are now considering these recommendations, including those relating to County Hall, and we will confirm our proposals for the future of the Council's estate as part of that process.

I understand that in connection with the Overview Committee report, officers have put in place mechanisms for staff to feed back any queries that they have around any part of the review. I would urge staff to do that and would expect these to be considered as part of any plans. I can assure the Councillor that all staff and service teams will be involved in any plans and notice will be given when these decisions are being considered.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Kane Oliver

At the Place Select Committee on 11th January, you claimed that resident satisfaction with pot-hole repairs was "increasing." Further to this, on December 29th you said, "Residents are now telling us they can see a vast improvement in their roads – which is fantastic." At last week's meeting, after I questioned you – you produced no evidence to back this up. Do you think residents in places like Eastwood and across Nottinghamshire agree with your views?

Response from Councillor Neil Clarke MBE, Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

At this stage, my appraisal of increasing public satisfaction with pot-hole repairs is partly evidenced-based, partly anecdotal.

I'm aware that officers, Via operatives, and councillors have been receiving positive feedback, especially regarding the larger scale repairs being carried out by our eight

highways teams. I've even had reports of residents coming out of their homes to watch repairs being done and complimenting our teams on the quality of their work.

This may be due, at least in part, to residents recognising the aesthetic quality of these larger scale repairs compared with the use of Viafix for emergency repairs, which we are gradually reducing.

One of many reasons why the new Conservative administration carried out its cross-party Highways Review was to better understand and deliver the outcomes the public want from our highways work, while at the same time asking county residents to appreciate the scale of the road repair backlog we inherited.

From the Highways Review emerged our new Highways Improvement Plan, which advocated the gradual move away from Viafix towards larger scale surface repairs.

Improving communications is also a key part of the Highways Improvement Plan and it was good to hear that LGA peer reviewers who visited us in December recognised the progress made. They reported seeing an "Impressive turnaround in proactive communications".

There is more we are doing, rolling out QR codes on correspondence to get feedback from schemes, and conducting sample pop-up surveys as part of our permanent patching works. All with a view to get feedback from residents to continue to improve the service.

Looking at communications received through social media, we've seen a 52% increase in positive messages received by Nottinghamshire County Council's Customer Service Centre about highways, with 795 positive direct messages from residents and road users in 2022, compared with 523 in 2021.

At the same time, we've seen a 5% *decrease* in negative messages relating to highways, down from 601 in 2021 to 572 last year.


To give an example of positive written feedback we received, Barbara on Facebook offered her views in respect of the permanent patching on local residential roads. She said, and I quote:

"They came and repaired our street. It's not a bung it in the hole and rake it over job. It's a proper clear out of the deteriorated stuff and then put base material in (I'm not technical so don't criticise) then put on the hot tar, rake and then roller. They put a border around each patch and made a fantastic job of it. Some of the patches were huge. They didn't disrupt traffic and were very polite. Thanks guys. You did a great job!"

Also, Chairman, comments received from surveys for micro-asphalt works included:

- *'Quick and efficient'*
- *'Really friendly and helpful workers. Minimised all disruption whilst still doing their job.'*

And feedback on pothole repairs included a respondent saying:

'I reported a pothole this morning at about 10:15. It had been temporarily repaired by 12:30. Well done . I know you get lots of complaints it's about time you got a compliment!'

At this time of year, cold weather conditions do cause more damage to our roads and this can lead to more pothole reports and complaints, but we will continue to monitor feedback and seek to respond as soon as possible to the reports we receive from residents.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families from Councillor Michelle Welsh

At the Full Council meeting in January 2022, I asked if the Cabinet Member would be willing to host a summit with partners to co-produce a Covid-19 Recovery Action Plan for the Children and Young People of Nottinghamshire, and I was given assurances this was already underway.

Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the Covid-19 Recovery Action Plan for Children and Young People in Nottinghamshire?

Response from Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

I have a reasonably clear recollection of the original question from January 2022, but of course, Council meetings are now recorded and published on YouTube, so I've been able to listen back to exactly what was said.

Councillor Welsh asked if I would accept *"a proposal to host a summit with partner organisations in health, education, charities and other child and youth services, the purpose of which is to co-produce and agree a Nottinghamshire-wide Covid-19 Recovery Action Plan for children and young people"*.

Contrary to the implication in the latest question, I did not give an assurance to Councillor Welsh in January 2022 that I would accept her proposal for 'a summit' or start constructing a new plan from scratch.

I explained that work to support children and young people's wellbeing, as they emerged from the Covid 19 pandemic, was already being undertaken by the Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City Wellbeing & Recovery Consortium. This work has since come under the banner of 'NottAlone', which is a partnership between local authorities and the NHS, and also involves:

- A Better Life (ABL)
- Be U Notts
- MH:2K—Leaders Unlocked
- Ask Lion
- Notts Help Yourself and
- the Nottinghamshire Parent Carer Forum.

NottAlone is a system approach rather than a discrete project with a start and end point. It provides a range of information and advice for young people, parents and professionals. It also delivers webinars and supports the Senior Mental Health Lead Training for Schools and Colleges. Information on this was recently circulated to elected members on the Children & Families Select Committee at their request.

The Steering group for NottAlone meet three times each year, in January, May and October. NottAlone and wider associated transformation work, as part of our COVID response, is also reported in the Local Transformation Plan for Children & Young People's Mental Health which is refreshed annually. It was previously overseen by the Children & Young People's Committee and is now available for further scrutiny by the relevant Select Committee.

A full assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic on key aspects of health and wellbeing - with regard particularly to health inequalities, to help inform public health and partners' strategies, plans and commissioning - was scheduled in the work programme to be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the 1st of February with a further update on progress in July of this year.

A report specifically on the impact of Covid on Pregnancy and Early Years is to be presented to the Board on the 8th of March.

Schools are directly responsible for tutoring and academic catchup for children affected by Covid-19. This is through funding provided directly by the DfE and it is central government who will monitor the effectiveness of this approach. There is evidence that younger children's development has been affected by the lack of social interaction and mask wearing and we are therefore proud that in Nottinghamshire, the County Council invests half a million pounds per year into specialist speech and communication services that help with language development in addition to those clinical services that the NHS provides. This offer is rare in its size and scope.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance from Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan

In December, the Government confirmed that the long-awaited fair funding review will not take place for at least two years. Do you think that because a Conservative Government will not be in place to implement a fair funding review in 2 years time that this is the key reason that residents are seeing a 4.84% increase in Council Tax from your administration in the next financial year?

Response from Councillor Richard Jackson, Cabinet Member for Finance

I don't intend to pre-empt our budget meeting on 9th February and the comments I'll be making on that day, which will include addressing the situation around the Fair Funding Review. However, I will acknowledge, as I have before, that this Council is disappointed with the ongoing delay to the Fair Funding Review, particularly the latest delay. We are looking to the Fair Funding Review, when it happens, to provide better and fairer funding to Nottinghamshire on a consistent basis.

That said, the one-year settlement Nottinghamshire County Council is receiving from the Government for 2023/24 is better than we previously anticipated, so it would be wrong to say the delay to the Fair Funding Review is the key reason for the level of Council Tax and Adult Social Care Precept we are proposing for the coming year.

The Council Tax level we are proposing is below the maximum threshold permitted by Government, and less than is being proposed by many other county authorities.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Penny Gowland

Between 2016 and 2019, the Government Minister currently serving as Environment Secretary presided over the discharge of three million hours of sewage into British waterways and seas, the equivalent to 321 years' worth of sewage in just 3 years.

Which areas of Nottinghamshire have been worst affected by the Government's decision to pollute our waterways?

Response from Councillor Neil Clarke MBE, Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

With regards to sewage discharge into watercourses, Nottinghamshire County Council does not hold data on the watercourses affected. Such data is held by individual water companies and DEFRA. Although we do work with partners including Severn Trent Water to reduce flood risk, as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) we do not have any specific powers to prevent the use of combined sewer overflows (CSO's) during storm events.

The Government and regulators have been clear to water companies that the current use of storm overflows is unacceptable. Last year, the Government placed a legally binding duty on water companies in the Environment Act 2021 to progressively reduce the adverse impacts of discharges from storm overflows. This is in addition to the legal duties on water companies under the Urban Wastewater Treatment Regulations 1994, and under the Water Industry Act 1991, to effectively drain their areas.

During heavy rainfall the capacity of the sewer can be exceeded, which means possible inundation of sewage works and the potential to back up and flood peoples' homes, roads and open spaces, unless it is allowed to spill elsewhere. Combined sewer overflows (CSOs) were developed as overflow valves to reduce the risk of sewage backing up during heavy rainfall. There are around 15,000 storm overflows in England. They discharge at different rates depending on local conditions including climate, rainfall and the type of sewerage system. In 2021, 90% of storm overflows discharged at least once, with 5% discharging more than 100 times.

The Environment Agency works closely with water companies to ensure that they are closely monitoring and reporting back on their discharge activity. This data is helping us to understand where the system is not operating as it should, so that water companies can target investigations and investment.

Nottinghamshire County Council will continue to play its part supporting the work of the water companies (STW and Anglian Water) actively working towards reducing the impacts of CSO inputs into watercourses through innovative water storage measures such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) and Natural Flood Management (NFM). SUDS provide water storage in urban areas to limit discharges into sewer systems and therefore reduce CSO discharge. An example of this is the £76m Mansfield Green Recovery project which is led by Severn Trent Water and supported by Nottinghamshire County Council. Furthermore, during the planning consultation process, this Council as the LLFA require new developments to limit their discharge, with connection to a sewer system expected to be a last resort option.

Additionally, the Flood Risk Management team have delivered multiple NFM projects which temporarily store water within the upper catchment and therefore slow the flow to reduce downstream peak discharge. NFM measures work with natural processes and so deliver wider benefits such as river restoration, pollution reduction and habitat creation.