

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2021 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

One of the Government's stated priorities is 'levelling up the country' – would the leader agree with me that this Council should prioritise 'levelling up the county' and give specific examples how the Council have sought to allocate resources based on indices of deprivation since May 2021?

Response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

I am pleased to be able to answer, because as Councillor Zadrozny knows this is a hugely important issue for our County, for myself as well, it is something I am very passionate about. It is a key priority for the Council too. I agree with him that we need to level up within our County, clearly its in the stated aims and ambitions of the Conservative Government to support areas like many in our County, like the ones that he and I represent and to tackle all sorts of inequalities.

It starts with national Government and we're making a good start because of course North Nottinghamshire, where perhaps the most obvious pressing needs exist in areas of Ashfield, Mansfield, Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood, which is not to say it doesn't exist elsewhere, but they're the places where the data that he refers to most clearly show that social and economic disadvantage. We have already had commitments of more than £120 million of additional towns funding and future high streets funding, with Ashfield of course arguably set to benefit more so than anywhere, so I know that Councillor Zadrozny will welcome that additional government funding. There are more opportunities to seek and secure investment through the levelling up fund, there are bids going in all over the place as we speak and the County intends to bid for transport projects that levelling up and deprivation element is a key part of how we will decide which projects to put forward.

Its not just about money though of course, we know it helps but there's more to it and this autumn the intention is to set out in a White Paper what levelling up means in a more holistic way, particularly around skills, particularly around health inequalities and the key thing for our area, I think, is creating sustainable jobs and careers that can be accessed by those disadvantaged communities, not just geographically but in terms of having the right training and the right skills to support. Tying these things together will help those residents to take advantage of the opportunities.

Initially I wrote a speech that went into all of the potential work we are doing with all sorts of partners on skills and things like that, but I am conscious that we are short of time, so I will name some of the areas most impacted by inequalities.

Much of our Council's core work is built around tackling that social and economic challenge, supporting residents with everything from accessing the basics throughout the pandemic to complex safeguarding or social issues across children's services. For

example, you'll know that a large proportion of our spending on protecting vulnerable children, supporting families and seeking to improve life chances takes place in the most disadvantaged communities, particularly at Ashfield and Mansfield. You'll know that the MASH, our safeguarding hub is based there, you'll know that we've recently invested in new facilities in those areas to support residential care for vulnerable children. That kind of investment and work takes place where the need is greatest, based on the disadvantage he finds in his question, but in terms of indices of deprivation we have to focus those services where the need is, although it links and maps closely with the indices of deprivation, we have to deliver it to individuals who need it and therefore its not data that backs that up in the same way, when a child comes forward who needs that support we will deliver it. So, it's not necessarily mapped out as he would like.

Whilst Government has measured out that priority need based on district level indices, obviously we're more engaged directly with those communities, individual families in need and we can't necessarily manage those services on that same level.

What we have done in terms of additional projects to support people various actions - we've approved a Local Communities Fund to help people who have been hardest hit by the pandemic; we're investing in extending the Healthy Families Programme; secured Government support for people recovering from substance misuse, which has been a prevalent conversation today; working with partners through the ICS, care system to look at better support for people in care; an additional £3.3 million into maximising the independence of adults around the County and although we don't judge those things based directly on that data it is a part of the conversation when we allocate things, and I think he will find if he looks at those services they are matched quite closely to the areas of greatest need.

So what I want Councillor Zadrozny to know, I will come to a close Chairman, the question is slightly over simplistic in its nature, I hope that from this fairly comprehensive answer he will see that there is a huge amount of work going on in the most disadvantaged areas to level up within the County which is certainly a key priority for me, but it's often not desirable or possible for us to measure it quite so neatly as he would suggest.

Question to the Chairman of the Communities Committee from Councillor John Lee

Can the Chairman of the Communities Committee provide an account of what this Council is doing to help support armed forces families in Nottinghamshire, in particular those affected by the recent developments in Afghanistan?

Response by the Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Keith Girling on behalf of the Chairman of the Communities Committee, Councillor John Cottee

I am very proud of what this Council, cross-party, has done, so Labour were administration, we've been in administration, but the whole support of this Council, in terms of what we're doing for our Armed Forces, so I just want to get that out first before I go into the written answer. It is in there but I just wanted to highlight it first.

It's fair to say there are many very strong views regarding the withdrawal of American, British and other forces from Afghanistan.

However, the decisions taken in recent months are not within my control or this Council's, and consequently there is little to be gained from ruminating over them in this particular forum.

We must instead concentrate on the things we can control, and for which we do have some responsibility. I know that borough and district councils across the County have already stepped forward to offer whatever help and housing capacity they can to accommodate refugees who have arrived here after fleeing Afghanistan for fear of being killed under Taliban rule. A total of 105 people from 21 families are being re-located in the county and we are working with our borough and district partners to provide housing, education and support to these families. Something we should all be very proud of.

And Chairman, as Councillor Lee's question states, we must support our own military veterans of the operations in Afghanistan. I am aware that Councillor Lee has spoken to the media about his own service there, during which he suffered a severe injury, or scratch, as he lost half a leg, that's a military term and he accepts it, so don't have a go at me for me being rude, from an Improvised Explosive device (IED) in 2007. Therefore, I can well understand why witnessing pictures of Taliban forces reclaiming control of the country will be an emotional time for him and many other veterans, to use Councillor Lee's own words.

Fortunately, Nottinghamshire County Council under several successive administrations has developed a proud record and reputation for appreciating and supporting its armed forces.

In January 2013, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council jointly signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant, which had been enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011.

At its core are the principles that service personnel, veterans, and their families are not disadvantaged by their service and that special provision is made for those who have sacrificed the most, including the injured and bereaved.

Even before signing the Covenant, but especially since, we have developed a long-standing, supportive relationship with the local regular and reserve units, as well as the veterans and cadets. We bring together councillors, officers and representatives from the armed forces and military civilian charities to work on various activities, issues and projects.

However, now we are taking this work to a new level which will embed this support and these principles into the heart of our policy and decision-making.

Earlier this month, through a paper taken to Communities Committee, members unanimously approved Nottinghamshire County Council's new 'Supporting Our Armed

Forces Community Strategy', through which we will identify key areas of work to support our Armed Forces in line with our Covenant Duty.

In practice, this means that when developing policy and making decisions ourselves or in partnership with other local authorities and bodies regarding housing, healthcare and education, this Council makes a firm commitment to carefully consider:

- The unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the British Armed Forces;
- The desirability to remove disadvantages arising for service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and
- That special provision for service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.

That's obviously technical jargon as it didn't make sense to me. What we're going to do is make sure they're looked after.

There are five cross-cutting factors that will provide a backdrop to the overall co-ordination of service provision, all of which form the basis of an action plan to be taken forward in the years ahead. These cross-cutting factors are:

1. Collaboration between organisations
2. Coordination of Veterans' services
3. Data on the Veteran Community
4. Public perception and understanding
5. Recognition of the Armed Forces Community

Charitable Sector

The Armed Forces Charitable sector supplements the core essential services provided by the public sector, by providing additional custom-built support. Charities as a whole provide specialist services for Veterans and the bereaved on a range of issues, including information helplines, healthcare, mental health support and housing throughout Nottinghamshire. Based on their own organisational eligibility criteria, Nottinghamshire County Council will encourage the charitable sector to work together and act as advocates and champions for the Armed Forces community.

Private Sector

An increasing number of private sector organisations across Nottinghamshire recognise the particular skillsets and experience that Veterans and service leavers can bring into the workplace and the business benefits of employing them. Private sector employers are closely engaged with successful transitions to civilian life and employment for former military personnel and have a pivotal role in providing training and employment.

Nottinghamshire County Council will liaise with and support the work run by the Defence Relationship Management, or DRM. DRM acts as a single point of contact linking employers with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and offers advice and support on employing members of the Armed Forces. We will encourage the private sector to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and work with employers to try to ensure that they offer opportunities and pathways from military into civilian life. In doing so, we will

work with the Ministry of Defence's Career Transition Partnership, helping ex-forces personnel to access career transitional guidance, skills workshops, vocational training and routes into employment.

The Employer Recognition Scheme

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme encourages employers to support the Defence services and inspire others to do the same. The Scheme encompasses Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support for the Armed Forces community and align their support with the Armed Forces Covenant.

So, the plans are in place, Chairman, but in order to turn these aims into action we need Member and Officer support, and money.

We have secured all three.

From the Member side, I am proud to have been nominated by the administration as the Council's Armed Forces Champion, and I will be joined by Councillor John Lee in a new Armed Forces Advocate role to help develop and drive this agenda forward. Councillor Lee and myself have previously served in the Armed Forces, me for 18 years in the Grenadier Guards and Councillor Lee for just shy of 12 years in the Yorkshire Regiment both having seen active service which means we bring that insight, understanding and passion to the roles. I'm also delighted to say that there are several other Members in this Chamber who are armed forces veterans or who have strong military connections in their families, so there is no shortage of armed forces insight and understanding within the ranks of this authority.

From the Officer side, within our Communities Team we already had an excellent officer liaising with our local Armed Forces, military families and veterans on a part-time basis, but as a demonstration of our commitment to this work, we are now extending this into a full-time post.

With regards to money, the Communities Committee agreed to establish a £20,000 per annum Armed Forces Community Budget to assist in delivering the new strategy and work programme. This will be used for example to:

- Support veteran's breakfast/food clubs;
- Promote key information and links; and to
- Support key events e.g. commemorations and anniversaries.

For information Chairman, we currently have 30+ veterans working for Nottinghamshire County Council, they are valued officers in this organisation who also bring a wide variety of experience. To show our support there will be three Council veterans breakfasts a year where they can attend to get support and any help they may require. To ensure they can attend we will be giving managers plenty of time to arrange suitable cover and giving our armed forces family protected status.

Once we go firm with the dates of the breakfast meetings, I will ensure members that are veterans know so that if they wish, they can also attend.

To summarise, Chairman, this Council's commitment to supporting current and former Armed Forces personnel and families is greater today than it has ever been, and better defined than it has ever been, and the current circumstances demand that this be the case, not only with regard to events elsewhere in the world, but also the impact that COVID-19 has had on the social and economic situation in this country.

As Armed Forces Champion I shall be proud to lead this work and I look forward to the support of Members across the Chamber in doing so.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Pringle

How is Nottinghamshire helping the national effort to resettle refugees from Afghanistan, recognising that many of these people were working on behalf of the British government and our incredibly brave armed forces?

Response from the Chairman of Children and Young People's Committee, Councillor Tracey Taylor, on behalf of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

I should probably explain to colleagues in the first instance the reason that the Leader has asked me to answer, is because of my role as a member of the Strategic Migration Board at the East Midlands Council.

Members will be pleased to know that my answer is not as long as Councillor Girling's, but it is probably helpful to follow him because he has actually give context to the wider situation and the wider difficulties.

The immediate presenting need of those relocating from Afghanistan is that of accommodation. We have been working closely with our District Council partners on meeting that need. Where those individuals or families have additional needs that are the responsibility of the County Council, we are of course liaising and working with the District Councils and families to meet those requirements, and again I reference my membership of the East Midlands Council and the partnership work that is going on there.

One example of this would be where resettled families have school-aged children and need to access school places. If a child or family have other additional needs, they will be assessed by the appropriate Council and/or health organisation.

Importantly, this is a partnership effort that also involves our partners in Health, and across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, 80 out of 125 GP practices are signed up to deliver a local service providing an enhanced level of care to refugees and asylum seekers. The Syrian and new Afghanistan Resettlement Programmes sit within this service.

Our understanding is that our combined offer with District Councils across the County under the Afghan Relocations Assistance Policy Scheme, or ARAP, is being delivered to 21 families who we expect to be on average a 5 person household and therefore, around 105 children and adults in total.