

## **APPENDIX B**

### **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 13 JULY 2023 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

#### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Kate Foale**

Given the 317 cases of alleged electoral fraud investigated nationally by the police during 2021 resulted in only one single conviction, one acquittal and one caution, does the leader agree with me that the initial obstruction of 422 people in Nottinghamshire to exercise their democratic right to vote in recent local elections is concerning, and evidence that voter ID measures are disproportionate?

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

Of course we don't know how many cases of voter fraud there were nationally in 2021 because we had no real mechanism of identifying fraud, much less robust legislation around tackling that fraud and securing convictions.

We know that there was one conviction and I'm always intrigued at the argument around this because, of course, it may well be the case that only one speeding conviction has ever been given against anybody speeding down Loughborough Road outside this building, but we know that that does *not* mean that only one person has ever driven too fast down Loughborough Road. It's just only one person has ever been caught, and unless you have proper robust procedures legislation, proper robust regulation to identify people and a good and proper reporting procedure and good ways to identify said crimes, we will never know, will we?

You'll know that there are extensive national and local awareness campaigns; you'll know that residents have direct correspondence, if you were a registered voter you will have received a personal letter from your Returning Officer in the council at the time of the election; you'll know that free ID was made available; you will know that after many years this service still runs very well in other places like Northern Ireland; and clearly awareness will only grow in future elections as it becomes the norm, but our electoral system is precious, our vote is precious, it needs protecting from fraudsters. It is important that candidates, that authorities, that the public can have the utmost confidence in our electoral system. That means that we should have the most robust systems that we can and I'm very confident that we are in a positive place.

#### **Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families from Councillor Mike Quigley MBE**

Following the recent Cabinet meeting where members considered the draft Nottinghamshire Partnership Improvement Plan for support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, would the Cabinet Member explain what this Council is doing to fully engage parents in the process of accurately determining their child's needs, designing effective individual plans and support, and thereby maximising strong outcomes?

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

The Children & Families Act 2014 identifies the need for children, young people, and their parents or carers to be involved as fully as possible in the decisions being made about them, with their views and wishes being fully considered.

In that context, there are two aspects to supporting children with SEND.

This can be either through simple extra support at school, known as the 'graduated response', or through formal arrangements known as an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment potentially leading to an Education, Health & Care Plan.

Educational settings play a very important part in the initial engagement of parents and carers in the identification of their child's educational needs through the 'graduated response'. The needs of the child are assessed with their parents or carers and a plan of support is agreed. Regular reviews then take place to ensure that the plan is having the anticipated impact and if necessary, the plan will be changed to ensure that further support is available if required. The County Council devolves a significant proportion of its funding for SEND to educational settings to support the effectiveness of the 'graduated response'.

Local authority funded support services, including the Schools & Families Support Service, the Educational Psychology Service and the Partnership Teams play a vital role in supporting educational settings to develop their overall practices, but also to provide advice and guidance regarding individual pupils with SEND, including face-to-face meetings with parents and carers.

Despite this support, an increasing number of parents and carers are requesting an 'Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment', or an EHCNA, from the Local Authority. In the Nottinghamshire Partnership's Improvement Plan, it is proposed to introduce enhanced engagement with parents through the development of a 'structured conversation' involving the educational setting, parents or carers and the local authority. This would provide increased opportunity to draw out, even at this early stage, what the outcome should be of any provision which needs to be put in place for the child. Parents and carers will be involved in designing the 'structured conversation' process.

The EHCNA process is delivered through a digital hub which provides access to parents and carers, ensuring they can see the progress being made with their child's assessment and the reports from professionals being submitted. Parents and carers (as well as the children and young people) are also invited as part of the assessment process to contribute their views and aspirations.

A key part of the local area's SEND Improvement Plan is the capture of the lived experiences of children, young people, parents, and carers to evaluate the impact of the changes that we are making.

## **Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Steve Carr**

In May 2021, the number 11 and 12 LinkBus that served residents in my division were withdrawn and replaced with the woefully inadequate 13 bus service. I have been lobbying for over two years now about this matter and despite promises of action from staff in the transport department over the last two years my residents still have no answer as to when this problem will be addressed

The lack of a regular bus route to Beeston is not only inconvenient to residents it is also encouraging them to use businesses and services in the city.

When can my residents expect action from you and your staff on this matter as 2 years seems a considerable time given how other axed routes have been dealt with?

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

When Councillor Carr refers to a “*lack of a regular bus route to Beeston*”, I should perhaps clarify that there are very regular bus routes between Beeston and Nottingham in the form of - for example - the NCT 36, and the trentbarton Indigo and i4 services. These buses do I’m sure encourage residents to “use businesses and services in the City”, but passenger figures suggest they are highly valued by the public in the Beeston area.

Councillor Carr I think is referring more specifically to the relative lack of opportunities for people to travel by bus between Bramcote, Beeston North, Beeston town centre and other locations near his division, like the QMC hospital, since the Number 11 and Number 12 commercial services were withdrawn in May 2021. Perhaps it’s more of a north-south rather than east-west situation that he’s referring to, so I’ll address his question on that basis.

As he points out, there is now a CT4N service – the Number 13 – travelling between Beeston, Bramcote and Wollaton, but it is a limited service only available in the daytime on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The County Council currently supports a total of over 90 bus routes and a review of these is currently underway, looking at how we can maximise the impact of the funding we have available, for instance using Demand Responsive Transport, otherwise known as NottsBus On Demand.

Members were recently consulted and asked to identify services that need improvements or areas currently without services. This feedback has been collated and the areas covered by the former 11 and 12 services, along with many others, will be part of the network review.

The network review is due to conclude in the early Autumn with a view to making recommendations for revised services, including the use of Demand Responsive Transport. Councillors will be included in any local discussions before any changes or new services are introduced.

It is important to understand that it will not be possible to support every request made, as demand is higher than the available funding, but I know from my discussions with

officers that very hard work and a lot of creative thinking is going into trying to find sustainable solutions to problems such as the one described by Councillor Carr.

What we should all recognise is that this council invests far greater amounts of money in supporting bus services than most other relevant authorities, some of whom offer no such support at all.

Over £4 million per year is allocated to ensuring that communities across Nottinghamshire have access to bus services that would otherwise not be commercially viable, and over £1 million of additional funding has recently been provided to support 12 commercial routes that were scheduled to be withdrawn due to reduced patronage resulting from the Covid pandemic.

When Councillor Carr talks about councils “taking action” on providing and protecting bus services, he should appreciate that our record of proactivity and investment compares more than favourably with other local authority areas across the country.

### **Question to the Cabinet Member for Communities from Councillor Paul Henshaw**

Access to outdoor activity is very important to Nottinghamshire residents.

Can the Cabinet Member update the Council on why the Mill Leisure Centre had to close its open water swimming facilities in January 2023?

### **Response from the Cabinet Member for Communities, Councillor John Cottee**

Open water swimming at Kingsmill Reservoir is not provided by Nottinghamshire County Council and this is therefore not a matter for this Council. It is operated by an external specialist provider, ‘Love Open Water’, who hire changing facilities and access to water from The Mill Adventure Base.

We were advised that the provision was not open during early 2023 due to a shortage of qualified lifeguards, and therefore the provider Love Open Water was unable to deliver open water swimming safely. We understand that Love Open Water has now resolved this issue and open water swimming restarted at Kingsmill Reservoir in May this year.

If Councillor Henshaw has any further questions on this, I respectfully suggest that these will need to be directed to Love Open Water rather than this Council, but I’m pleased for the opportunity to resolve any confusion over who is responsible.

### **Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families from Councillor Nigel Turner**

As an illustration of Nottinghamshire County Council’s ongoing commitment to ensure that sufficient places are provided for primary and secondary-age school children, would the Cabinet Member join me in welcoming the progress being made towards delivering a new school at the Gateford Park housing development, and the 300-place expansion of the Outwood Academy Portland, both in Worksop?

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

You won't be surprised that I'm delighted to report on the progress to which you refer.

At Gateford, a new primary school is being delivered in the Gateford-Shireoaks planning area, and that's working with Arc Partnership Ltd and it will in the first instance be a 210 place school – that's One Form Entry and a Free School.

Arrangements for the governance of the new primary school have been shared with the Department for Education, as is standard practice for all new schools. As Cabinet Member, I will join other local councillors to interview prospective operators for the new school in September 2023 to determine the Council's preferred provider. Our recommendation will then be sent to the DfE for their final decision.

Planning permission for the school has already been granted. It has been designed with the capacity to grow to 315 places, which is One-and-a half Forms of Entry, and that's if the demand in the area requires it. The building is funded from Basic Need and from housing developer contributions collected by the local planning authority.

Arc Partnership Ltd are confident that the school will be delivered on time for opening in September 2024.

Outwood Academy Portland: the plans for this are well advanced for the expansion of secondary school places and the Council is working with Outwood Grange Academy Trust to deliver a 300 place, Two Form of Entry expansion at this secondary school, which is rated as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

The Trust is supporting the Council in the interim period with an additional sixty Year 7 places from September 2023 in anticipation of higher demand. The Council will work with the Trust to ensure that there are sufficient school places in the Worksop planning area until the new permanent accommodation becomes available in September 2025.

Outline plans have been submitted to Bassetlaw District Council. The project is funded via Basic Need and Community Infrastructure Levy monies. The Council has worked closely with all partners, in particular with Bassetlaw District Council, to secure this addition to school capacity in Worksop.

So, in conclusion, as you say, Councillor Turner, both projects are examples of the work that goes on, not just in Worksop but across the County, to ensure sufficient places are provided for both primary and secondary-age school children. This will help maintain this Council's excellent record for not only meeting such demand but also enabling most children to secure places at a preferred school.

**Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan**

What communication have this Council had with Leicestershire County Council about sharing their recycling facilities with Nottinghamshire residents?

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

I understand that Councillor Purdue-Horan has already asked a similar question at the Place Select Committee last week, and that he received a response from officers at that time.

So, to reconfirm, there have been no recent conversations with Leicestershire County Council about Nottinghamshire residents being able to use the Leicestershire recycling sites, albeit such conversations have taken place in the past.

For context, all our 12 Nottinghamshire Recycling Centres are currently open 8am-8pm, seven days a week. In Leicestershire, their sites are only open 9am-7pm, and are closed several days of the week, so they're not open every day.

By way of an example, the nearest Leicestershire site to Councillor Pursue-Horan's division is at Bottesford. The site is only open three days per week: Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

I'm sure Councillor Purdue-Horan will agree that whilst we could seek a reciprocal arrangement with Leicestershire to allow our residents to use their sites when they are open, Leicestershire residents would be much keener to travel over the border into Nottinghamshire to dispose of their waste any day of the week, as our sites are open every day. This may well end up in more costs to our residents outweighing the benefits gained.

**Question to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health from Councillor Kate Foale**

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that for the Healthy Families Programme 2024 and beyond a success, all new-born babies and mothers must be offered an in-person Health Visit?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Councillor Matt Barney**

Thank you for drawing attention to the brilliant work that Health Visitors do.

Before I answer formally, I was taken back to my own experience with Health Visitors, with my own four children, and the health visits that we had some many years ago now. But certainly, my kids have got a lot to be thankful for, because I remember the first Health Visitor that came to our house, I was so novice and had so little idea what to do with my first-born son that I asked if I could pick him up when he was crying and she looked at me with a horror, saying "Of course you can, you stupid boy!".

So, my children have got a lot to be thankful for with the work of Health Visitors, but more seriously as well, having had four children my wife and I, the role each time that

Health Visitors have played has been very different, because each birth has been different, each experience has been different, the child's needs have been different, so for each of the four occasions even as we grew in competence, even I grew in competence by child four, there were still essential things that the Health Visitor did, so it's from that like that I'm happy to answer this question.

I agree with completely, completely with you that it is essential that families are seen in person, and I'm pleased to say that this has always been the position in what has been historically a very well-performing service here at Nottinghamshire County Council.

The Healthy Families Programme currently, already provides all new-born babies and mothers across the county with an 'in-person' review, in line with the Government's Healthy Child Programme. This means all families are offered, face to face, visits which include:

- a New Birth review, between 10 and 14 days;
- a 6-8 week review;
- a 1- year health and development review; and
- a 2-2.5 year health and development review.

These existing arrangements will continue into 2024 and beyond, and as I explained in Cabinet, we are pleased to be entering into a co-operation approach to develop this service with the current provider, who can evidence that they meet the outcomes we expect for these young children.

I would emphasise again that good performance levels are already being met through the existing provision, including good performance for 'in person' reviews.

I would once again like to thank Health Visitors for the brilliant work that they do across Nottinghamshire.

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

On February 8<sup>th</sup> 2023, the current Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council stated the ambition "...that every Nottinghamshire community will be connected to a bus or other public transport route." Can the Cabinet Member please give a timeframe for this?

Further to this, Nottinghamshire County Council carried out a consultation on a network review of supported bus services on 26th May with all Nottinghamshire County Councillors. Would the Cabinet Member agree to extend this consultation to Borough / District / Parish and Town Councils and other residents?

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

Councillor Oliver is quite correct that in February our Council Leader stated: "We've made a commitment that every community will be connected to public transport and we're going to stick to that."

Councillor Bradley did not state a timeframe, and nor for that matter did the Conservative Group's manifesto in May 2021, because it would essentially be meaningless.

Public transport services are a living, evolving organism.

New routes and providers emerge, while others may cease or withdraw, sometimes at short notice, as we have all experienced, meaning that at any given time, we might be nearer to or further from achieving our goal.

Even as and when we reach a time where we believe every community is connected to public transport, that situation could still change, so our commitment is to never stop striving to deliver that ambition. There isn't a precise 'end' date. It's an ongoing, continuous issue.

The more cynical element amongst our political opponents will no doubt choose to highlight areas where we are not achieving our ambition completely at a given point in time. That's a matter for them. We cannot control whether others choose to be constructive or destructive, but it won't deter us from pursuing a very admirable and commendable goal.

Our political opponents might also sneer and say, "Well, any council can state that ambition, it doesn't mean anything on its own!" – well, they might be right - but not all councils are investing more than £4 million per year to back up that ambition!

I am focused on working with those who share our unwavering ambition and who want to be constructive, not destructive. There are many such councillors in this Chamber, not just on the Conservative side, and they will recognise that this Council has a strong track record for supporting local bus services.

The over £4 million per annum I've just mentioned is ensuring that communities across the County have continuing access to 80 bus services that would otherwise not be commercially viable, and over £1 million of additional funding has recently been provided to support 12 more commercial routes that were scheduled to be withdrawn due to reduced patronage resulting from the Covid pandemic.

Where gaps in public transport provision exist or occur, we will seek to resolve them as soon as practically possible, using whatever means are at our disposal.

We've been innovative and introduced new Demand Responsive Transport services in the Newark, Ollerton, Mansfield, Retford and South Rushcliffe areas. DRT is a transport solution suited to where it is not commercially viable to provide a traditional service. It's our intention to further roll out DRT where it makes sense to do so.

To answer Councillor Oliver's second point, our bus network review consultation with County Councillors was designed to find out from a County Councillor perspective what is working well and less well in their divisional areas. County Councillors are well placed to understand the needs of their local constituents, as we frequently say in this Chamber. A good level of responses has been received from those elected Councillors and it is not intended to widen the consultation at this stage.



### **Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Families from Councillor Anne Callaghan MBE**

Child poverty data published last month identified 54,221 children living in poverty in Nottinghamshire, an increase of 16,056 more children than in 2015.

In 2022, the number of those attending the Holiday Activities and Food programme was 12,133, which is 739 fewer participants than the year before.

As child poverty is rising, can the Cabinet Member explain why the Holiday Activities and Food programme participation is decreasing?

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

The simple answer at this moment is “no”.

I cannot explain exactly why we see the implied discrepancy between an increase in children in poverty according to data from the End Child Poverty Coalition, and a decrease in the numbers participating in the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. I’m going to refer to that as HAF.

I don’t necessarily accept the premise that we should automatically expect the two figures to track each other upwards or downwards, because that would make certain assumptions which may or may not be accurate or justified, but I would certainly be interested to read the outcomes of any scrutiny around this matter.

Councillor Callaghan was present and will probably recall that at the recent Children & Families Select Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> June, the Committee Chairman, Councillor Sam Smith, commented on the HAF Programme figures for 2022. He noted that engagement with the HAF programme in Rushcliffe was comparatively high compared with other areas of Nottinghamshire, even though apparent eligibility in the other areas was typically higher than for Rushcliffe. Councillor Smith asked whether these figures were used to inform and perhaps *change* the choice of locations used to deliver the HAF programme in the less engaged areas, in pursuit of higher participation.

In response, the relevant officer explained that there is a HAF ‘group’ that examines such data, and that the way HAF operates is that invitations are sent out to be a HAF provider, and sometimes “our hands are a little bit tied” – and that’s a quote from the officer - if we don’t get a bid from a particular geographical area, so we work on an ongoing basis to address the deficit.

Earlier in the same Select Committee meeting I made a point about the take up of free school meals which could be equally applied to the HAF Programme. I said that, whilst we do everything possible to promote the availability of such support to children and families, we cannot compel families to engage with it.

I detect an implication in Councillor Callaghan’s question that the contrast she is making between the child poverty data and the HAF participation data suggests

something is wrong with the way the HAF programme is promoted or administered. However, we surely should not rule out the possibility that the data for the uptake in HAF could be the accurate representation of current need or want, and that in fact the child poverty data quoted is somehow skewed, not least given that the figures in the question are taken over an eight year period to show high growth, and the HAF Programme, which has only been around a couple of years, is a one year comparison showing limited decline.

To be clear, Chairman, I'm not drawing one conclusion or another. What I'm saying is that we shouldn't approach this question from a presumptuous starting point. Councillor Callaghan will be aware that the decision made by the Children and Families Select Committee at the recent meeting was, and again I quote: 'That a report on the delivery of the HAF Programme be brought to a future meeting of the Committee at a date to be agreed by the Chairman', so the opportunity to scrutinise this issue more thoroughly is forthcoming.

Chairman, I've sought to answer the question in a constructive manner because it is a serious subject, but I do take issue with Councillor Callaghan claiming in the local press that 'Conservatives don't take rising child poverty seriously enough'. I can assure you I take child poverty extremely seriously as the Cabinet Member for Children & Families, and I would not be so disrespectful to suggest that other members, including herself, do not.

The question she raises is a valid one, but the way to find the answer and shape future policy is through calm, rational, non-partisan analysis, and not by making silly and insulting statements to the media in pursuit of a headline.