

## **APPENDIX A**

### **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2022 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

#### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jim Creamer**

Can the Leader detail what actions will be undertaken by this Council in the upcoming budget, to mitigate the impact of the anticipated cost of living crisis facing the people of Nottinghamshire?

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

Later today there is a motion from Councillor Zadrozny regarding the rising cost of living, so without wishing to pre-empt that motion I'm happy to extract three key points from it.

Point one, obviously this Council does note and recognise the considerable cost of living increase that will affect our residents.

Number two, that the Council believes we should do everything in our power to support those residents and indeed there are a significant number of programs, I think. Officers informed me yesterday that our Covid related support over the last couple of years amounted to some £12 million odd directly to the most vulnerable residents.

Number three is that this Council will obviously consider the impact of that cost-of-living crisis through our budget setting process as we always do.

The question, and the motion later, are a little premature because obviously our council tax plans, and medium term financial strategy will come forward in the coming weeks through first Finance Committee and then obviously to our Full Council budget meeting in February, so I'm sure Councillor Creamer will understand that I can't go into the full details of that quite yet, but colleagues will have the opportunity to properly study and to either support or amend those proposals in the coming weeks. I look forward to that constructive conversation, and to the no doubt full and comprehensive alternative budgets that will be coming for our consideration to that meeting as well.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee from Councillor André Camilleri**

Could the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee explain what steps the Council takes when planning and designing new schools, to provide safe stopping areas for parents or guardians dropping off and picking up their children in motor vehicles?

We should encourage parents to allow their children to walk or cycle to nearby schools wherever this is practical and safe because it is healthier for the children and better for the environment, but would the Chairman agree that in some cases motor vehicles

do need to be used, so we must look to engineer highways solutions outside new schools that minimise disruption for drivers and residents alike?

**Response from the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee, Councillor Keith Girling**

When considering planning applications, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear that refusal should only be recommended on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or where the residual cumulative impact on the road network, in terms of congestion, would be severe.

Within this context, the NPPF recommends that priority should be given to pedestrian and cycle movements, the premise being that the safest and least congested streets are those with the least amount of car movements. Introducing measures which make it easier and more convenient for car users to access and drop off pupils at schools only serves to encourage car usage. This is contrary to the National Planning Policy requirements as well as the County Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency and its stated aim of reducing CO2 emissions.

Notwithstanding this, we are realistic insofar as we expect there will always be parents who wish to drop off their children by car. In recognition of this, the Nottinghamshire Highways Design Guide requires roads serving as the primary point of access to be built with wider carriageways and footways than would usually be required for the remainder of the housing development. Developers are encouraged wherever possible to construct these as through roads and loops as opposed to cul-de-sacs, in order to minimise the need for turning and reversing.

When formally assessing applications, our focus is very much on creating safe areas free from significant car movement and obstruction in the immediate vicinity of the school access. We use traffic calming, school keep clear markings and other safety measures to create school safety zones, rather than convenient parking for parents.

That said, we are aware of the concerns raised by Councillor Camilleri and as part of the planning and development of new school developments, as far as is practicable, we should look for solutions that minimise disruption for drivers and residents.

We understand the concerns raised in terms of congestion outside schools at peak times, particularly at drop off and pick up. This is not just an issue to be debated when planning applications come to Planning and Rights of Way Committee, but it has to be thought about when a new school is at the inception stage.

With this in mind I have asked officers to review the processes we currently undertake around designing and planning for new schools to see whether changes can be made to address this issue. The outcome of the review will be reported to the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> April this year.

## **Question to the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor David Martin**

On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2022 – the Sunday Times ran a story saying that the Government were preparing to start charging residents for lateral flow tests to test for COVID. This story was followed up the Daily Mail, the Nottingham Post and broadcasters like the BBC and SKY News.

What impact does the Chairman think that the removal of free lateral flow tests will have on the continuing fight against COVID in Nottinghamshire?

## **Response from the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, Councillor Boyd Elliott**

Thank you, Councillor Martin for your question, which refers to Sky News amongst other news outlets.

On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January, the Sky News website published an article and a video featuring an interview with the Cabinet Minister Nadhim Zahawi, who dismissed a report in the Sunday Times, saying he “did not recognise” the newspaper’s story that lateral flow tests could be limited to care homes, hospitals, schools and people with symptoms.

Asked if there were any plans to stop free lateral flow tests, Mr Zahawi said, and I quote, “absolutely not”.

Also on Sky News last week, another Cabinet Minister Michael Gove was asked “How long will lateral flow tests be free?”, to which he replied “As long as we need them”, before going on to say, “It is the case that in this country Lateral Flow Tests are free unlike in many other jurisdictions. They are a vital tool in making sure that we can curb the spread of infection and also that people who need to isolate do so.”

Chairman, separately I consulted Nottinghamshire County Council’s Director of Public Health, who advised me that he has no information from UKHSA to suggest that there is a plan to withdraw free of charge Lateral Flow Tests.

In the last 24 hours, I’ve read a report from Reuters who claim to have seen a document saying that British health officials may be ready to start charging Britons for COVID-19 tests that are currently free at the end of June, but they add that this could be postponed if the virus throws what one official close to the health service described as another “curve ball”, perhaps in the form of another variant.

On the basis of this information, Chairman, I am not going to speculate on whether or when free lateral flow tests may cease and what the implications at that stage may be. The overall message I’ve gleaned from various sources so far is that free tests will continue as long as they are considered to be needed, and that this will be assessed over time depending on how the COVID threat develops or recedes.

### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny**

In the week of the death of Nottinghamshire's BBC icon Colin Slater MBE – the Conservative Government have announced plans to abolish the BBC licence fee in 2027. Does the Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council support this and what impact does he think this will have in terms of job losses at the BBC and its supply chain across Nottinghamshire?

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

I'm going to answer this at length but I'm going to do it as if it were two questions, because I have to be honest and say that I do find it in slightly poor taste to connect the two matters in the question.

I am going to first touch on the death of Colin Slater. I was, like many people, deeply saddened to learn about his passing. He had legendary status really for many supporters of Notts County Football Club having reported on almost 3,000 of their games, first for the local newspapers and then for Radio Nottingham.

Now County aren't my team, in fact across Nottinghamshire they're the only team I don't follow, but even for me Colin Slater was a well-known and much-admired local character who contributed a lot to people's memories and experiences of sport around Nottinghamshire.

He was affectionately known as 'Uncle Colin' or the 'Voice of Notts County' by many fans, and his connection with and love for the club extended beyond those reporting duties. For example, he even played a key role in persuading a local businessman, to invest to save the club as far back as 1965, such was his connection to Nottinghamshire sport and Notts County.

For that and many other reasons, the immense respect for Colin Slater in the football world extends way beyond Notts County fans, we've seen tributes to him from supporters of Nottingham Forest, Mansfield Town and other clubs across the country.

He also had a direct connection with Nottinghamshire County Council, which people may not know. He was appointed the Council's first PR (public relations) officer back in the late 1960s, and actually established the department before he joined the BBC in 1968 and reported on the cricket at Trent bridge, was a PA announcer and later took responsibility for Nottinghamshire County crew clubs marketing department until the mid-90s.

In 2001, he was recognised 'for service to radio and the community in Nottinghamshire' with an MBE not only for his contribution to radio but also for his work with the FA (Football Association) and his role as the deputy chairman of the Nottingham Bench of Magistrates.

In 2015 he had the monumental honour of having a tram named after him, an honour afforded only to those local people deemed to have made an exceptional mark on the community. I'm sure councillors will want to join me in saluting his fantastic contribution

to Nottinghamshire life and extending our condolences on his passing to all those who knew and loved him.

Second, and in a totally unconnected issue of the BBC Licence Fee, and I reiterate I do think the connecting of these two points is not ideal, I'll start by saying firstly Government hasn't announced that it's scrapping the licence fee at all. Its announced, and you will have seen in the statement in the Commons this week, Secretary of State announced a freeze to the licence fee for the next two years, and the start of a consultation about the long-term future of this funding mechanism ahead of the current Charter agreement in 2027. Now the Secretary of State has their own very strong view about this and has expressed that, but in terms of tangible decision and announcement, it is a consultation period.

The future of the licence fee has been subject of intense debate for many years, bearing in mind the television industry has changed beyond all recognition since June 1946, when the licence covered a single BBC monochrome channel and cost £2.

Many viewers now have a choice of hundreds of television channels, hosted by a variety of platforms, with specialist channels catering for all sorts of individual tastes, funded by advertising, subscription or both. The market is totally unrecognisable from 1946, so inevitably you have to question whether the funding mechanism is the right one.

I have a very strong personal view, I don't think there will ever really be a need for the County Council to take a corporate view, but I have a personal view, one that I've shared regularly which is that I think the licence fee has had its day, I don't think its viable anymore. Back when there were just a handful of channels and we needed public service television to enable people to access basic information, it made absolute perfect sense to fund it in this way. But now there are thousands of options, increasingly we find young people don't get or don't even access the BBC, they get their news and basic information through other channels and get their media content elsewhere. You have to consider what is the right option, it's only right with so much choice and variety, millions of people now spending their money on subscription services Netflix, NowTV, widely accepted part of our lives, it doesn't seem right or viable to me to continue to subsidise the media.

As I say that is just my personal view. That doesn't mean, for the record, that I want to BBC to disappear, in fact I am confident large parts of it would compete incredibly well in an international market. Those who believe that the BBC is a beacon of British creativity and is respected around the world, as I do, should take comfort then that if they are free from the licence fee and they're able to compete globally, you're not telling me they couldn't find a market to replace funding from millions in the UK who might choose not to play a BBC subscription, from a global market of 6 billion people who hold the BBC in very high regard? They could in my view, and as I say, my belief is that they absolutely should.

A poll carried out just over a year ago, by ComRes, found that nearly two out of three Britons believe the current BBC licence fee should be abolished, and whilst I would acknowledge that different polls can produce different outcomes, I think it's safe to say, there has been a growing feeling amongst the public that the licence fee should

be considered. It is of course another factor in the cost of living that Councillor Zadrozny highlights later today, although that cost won't now increase for the next two years as a result of the Government's announcement this week.

Councillor Zadrozny made the connection with jobs in Nottinghamshire, and I'd advise him that, sadly those jobs are under threat under the existing Licence Fee model, because those at the top of the BBC have chosen not to continue to fund the local news services to the same extent. Many of those staff at local BBC news and radio services are facing an uncertain future, an issue quite separate from the Licence Fee decision which, if it were to be scrapped, would not be implemented for another 6 years.

I also have a personal view on this, and again one I have expressed many times, one that I think many of my constituents share, which is that these jobs, the local news and reporting services, should be a much higher priority for the BBC than they currently seem to be, and that as a public service broadcaster they should be protecting those local news services at the expense of multi-million pound salaries for high profile presenters, at the expense of £100m diversity programmes. I was shocked this week to hear that the top Diversity Director at the BBC is on £267,000 a year for a three day week, which is quite incredible, when there seems to be no money for local reporters in regional news services, where so many local residents want to access the news from their area not just the national information. These are the kinds of areas where I think the service would benefit from being forced to compete in the wider market, having to make better decisions about how it spends its money. Again, just my personal view, which I will no doubt feed into that national consultation process.

So, in summary, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is perfectly entitled, even obliged, to review the necessity for the licence fee, and at the end of the current Charter which is due in 2027, she's right to want to give the BBC as much time as possible to adapt their model if that is necessary and to prepare for that 2027 deadline, so it is quite right and fair that the conversation happens as soon as possible. Ultimately that's a matter to resolve at national level and doesn't come within the policy-making power of Nottinghamshire County Council, hence me sharing a personal view. I don't see, certainly at this time, for the Council to have a corporate view. I am sure this will be more widely debated in Parliament, and I'm sure that will happen at great length and in great detail over the coming months.

### **Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Lee Waters**

On Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022, Via East Midlands carried out some work on Brookside in Hucknall. Workers chucked some Viafix into a few holes and drove off. This work was described by residents as "an embarrassment" as it went viral on social media.

Does the Chairman agree with me that the quality of work undertaken by Via East Midlands on Nottinghamshire's broken roads and pavements is the biggest single reputational risk to this Council? When will the recommendations of the Highways Review published at the Transport and Environment Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 finally be implemented?

## **Response from the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE**

You may well remember that last year, I did actually recount a story of me visiting Titchfield Park in Hucknall, and very nice Titchfield Park is too. In fact, Councillor Wilmott will bear testament to the fact that I was there as I met him whilst I was in the park. The reason I mentioned that Mr Chairman, is because after I had finished that visit, I thought, well, I'm not very far from Brookside, I'm going to nip round the corner and have a look at Brookside. Middle of last year, which I did, and it was in a very poor state and I decided then, we need to put this into the improvement programme for next year, because it needs doing, and I saw that last year.

So, I have now seen the emergency repair work that was carried out on Friday, as Councillor Waters mentioned, and it was not acceptable. In some cases, it is necessary to carry out emergency repairs to make the highways safe before our operatives return to carry out more extensive repairs. But in this case, the work carried out by a sub-contractor was unsatisfactory, even as a temporary measure and in fact, at the time, they undertook to redo the work at their own expense. However, I hope, because I have seen the photographs and that Councillor Waters and others have seen the photographs, of now the newly repaired Brookside, of the large scale patches, which are an immense improvement on the condition of Brookside at the moment.

The County Council, as everybody knows I'm sure, has recently carried out a highways review, where it was agreed as a matter of policy that we would be focusing on the local estate roads, carrying out more extensive repairs and re-surfacing roads that are in particularly poor condition. Brookside, as I have just mentioned and I have now had it confirmed as I checked to be sure, is scheduled in this forthcoming year for the further work to be carried out so that the end result will be far more satisfactory for local residents and the road users when completed.

The condition of our roads and pavements is indeed a reputational risk to this Council and that's why we are working a lot harder than our predecessors to address it. The incoming Conservative administration inherited a huge backlog of road repairs in 2017, a problem we have said will take a long time to put right, because there are so many other competing demands on our budget at this time.

Nevertheless, in recognition of that, we invested an extra £24 million. Mr Chairman, an extra £24 million in highways maintenance between 2018 and 2021 and we will be investing heavily again during this administration to ensure that the outcomes of the Highways Review can be turned into action.

As I demonstrated through the cross-party review process, I repeat again the cross-party review process, I am willing to work with councillors of all political persuasions across Nottinghamshire to address the issues raised by local residents and road users. A task of this size can only be tackled by working together, that cross-party bit Mr Chairman, in the interest of our residents, rather than playing politics in the media with outrageously misleading press releases, repeated in the media, claiming that the Independents forced this Council to undertake a review. What did we say, Mr Chairman, in the run up to the election? That the roads were probably the most

important and talked about aspect of all the election issues and we undertook then before the election, we need to get that through. What was one of the first actions that this administration took, Mr Chairman, and at the very first meeting of this Council only a couple of weeks after the elections, what did we do? We announced that we were undertaking a review of the highways. If that's called forcing us, well.

At the forthcoming Transport and Environment Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> February, officers will be updating my Committee on the progress against the agreed Highways Review actions, including our ambitious multi-year programme of highway repairs.

**Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor Michelle Welsh**

Can the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee outline what actions are going to be undertaken to assess and measure the level of impact Covid-19 has had, and continues to have, on Nottinghamshire's children and young people; specifically in terms of their progress and mental health?

**Response from the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, Councillor Tracey Taylor**

Regarding the impact Covid-19 has had on Nottinghamshire's children and young people, your question reads at the end "specifically in terms of their progress and mental health", so its not absolutely clear what you meant by "progress", but I have assumed that you are referring to educational progress, and then separately to mental health, so on that basis I will answer your question in two parts.

Regarding educational progress, we recognise that children and young people have had their education interrupted by repeated closures and moves to remote learning. Schools have developed new ways of working with pupils online which have really helped some students. In addition, there has been significant investment in catch-up programmes for those pupils who are vulnerable.

Whilst primary statutory testing was cancelled, arrangements for statutory GCSE and A levels were amended and students received outcomes which were determined by their teachers, who know their students best.

We don't yet have any data to make a proper analysis of educational outcomes or progress and we won't have this for some time, so it is too early to draw conclusions. The Council itself is ultimately no longer responsible for educational outcomes, this is now a matter for school headteachers and governing bodies, ultimately overseen by the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). What we can say is that Ofsted have resumed their inspections of schools in Nottinghamshire, with the early indications being that our schools continue to deliver a 'Good' or better quality of education.

So, moving to mental health regarding children and young people, since the outbreak of Covid, colleagues working across both the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Councils, with colleagues from Health services, have taken a national leading role in developing resources for schools to use in supporting children's mental

health. This began when children were being educated at home during lockdown, and then we supported their wellbeing as they returned to school, and now we continue to do this as children and staff learn to live with a changed learning environment in schools over the longer term.

Children's wellbeing has, quite rightly, received even greater focus in schools than was the case pre-Covid. Schools continue to be best placed to assess the impact Covid has had on their pupils' mental health and local authority services working in partnership with health colleagues continue to support schools in assessing pupils' mental health needs, in designing their school environment so it is conducive to positive mental health, and in accessing services where this is needed. Examples of this work include the creation of the 'NottAlone' website, the provision of training to Senior Mental Health Leads in schools, and the ongoing development of the 'Mental Health in Schools' teams.

The Director of Public Health's team is currently drafting the scope of a Covid-19 Impact Assessment focusing on health and wellbeing, and the effect on inequalities in particular. The scope will be agreed by 1<sup>st</sup> February, and children and young people's mental health is expected to be a part. The delivery date for this part of the Impact Assessment is yet to be confirmed and is subject to the capacity of Nottinghamshire County Council and partners. It will link closely with any Covid impact work being done by partners such as the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Finance Committee from Councillor Tom Hollis**

How much does the Chairman of the Finance Committee estimate that the delays to the Government's fairer funding review – due to be published in 2019 has cost Nottinghamshire County Council?

#### **Response from the Chairman of Finance Committee, Councillor Richard Jackson**

In my presentations to Council Budget meetings for the past couple of years I have referred to the Government's Fair Funding Review and the fact that this Council has participated constructively in the whole process. We have provided narrative and data-based responses to various consultations and technical papers as we look to ensure that this authority, and the East Midlands in general, will receive a better deal in the future than was the case under local government funding formulas of the past.

It is, therefore, frustrating that we are still awaiting the outcome of the Fair Funding Review. However, not for the only time today, I think we must acknowledge that the COVID pandemic has disrupted the plans and timetables of both central and local government, and I'm sure it has been a factor in delaying work on this issue.

I agree that we need clarity on the future of local government funding as soon as possible in view of comments last week by the Minister of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities - Kemi Badenoch – who suggested that councils will not receive a multi-year funding settlement until the Fair Funding Review is completed and the local government funding formula has been duly updated. We know from past experience that the sooner we can return to receiving multi-year funding settlements,

the more confidence we can have in our own Medium-Term Financial Strategy, based on firm guarantees of future funding levels.

However, I don't necessarily accept Councillor Hollis' assertion that the delay to the Fair Funding Review has come at a cost to this Council. It is true that the pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the County Council's finances. Additional costs and lost income directly associated with the crisis in the current and previous financial years are forecast to be approximately £138 million. However, the one-year settlements received by County Council for the current year and the next year, notwithstanding additional Covid-specific emergency grants, have been on the positive side of the assumptions we previously made in our Medium Term Financial Strategy. I could argue therefore Mr Chairman, that the delay to the Fair Funding Review has worked for us in the short-term, with Government assessing need on a more short-term, annual basis.

Only when the Fair Funding Review is concluded will we know exactly how beneficial it will be to this and other similar Authorities compared with previous settlements, but I agree with Councillor Hollis that the sooner we find that out, the better placed we will be to plan for the medium and long-term.

**Question to the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor Bethan Eddy**

In the last few months, the pandemic has taken another twist with the arrival of the Omicron variant. Colleagues in the care sector and other key workers have had to respond to the rapid rise in infections which in turn has put significant additional pressure on our services during a time when they are already likely to be at peak activity.

Could the Chairman of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee please provide an update on our workforce resilience and how the department has adapted to the increase in demand and staffing shortages over the winter period?

**Response from the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, Councillor Boyd Elliott**

You are absolutely right. Even without the challenges posed by Covid-19, winter is already the most challenging time for Adult Social Care and Health staff. During this period, they face the usual seasonal increases in requests for support, be this down to cold weather, seasonal illnesses or poorer mental health. These all adversely affect the health and wellbeing of our residents during the winter months.

Hospital admissions also tend to be higher; we work hard to ensure that those who are leaving hospital are able to do so safely. There is also an increased need to support people in our community and in their homes.

As this Chamber knows, this year we have been faced with the additional pressures of the Omicron variant of Covid which, at its peak, has caused significant difficulty for our staff and their ability to support residents.

Being vaccinated and having the booster does give our staff and the public great protection against serious illness from Covid, but it does not necessarily stop people from feeling unwell. And for those who would usually spend their time giving care and support directly to people face to face, it is not possible to work through the self-isolation period even if they felt well enough to do so.

This has meant that many of our staff and those who work in our public health or social care commissioned services have been absent from work. We have seen many of our care settings experience significant service disruption through outbreaks.

Nevertheless, our staff have stepped up to this challenge in a number of ways. Many of them who work in our day services and our 'Maximising Independence' service have worked extra hours, often at weekends, to support other services who had significant staff absence. I would like to personally thank them for their continued hard work.

Our Management team have been amazing. They worked intensively before Christmas putting into place contingency plans, so we were well prepared to support any resident who found themselves without support at the risky time of the Bank Holiday weekends over Christmas.

Our Quality and Market Management Team worked with our social care providers to make emergency plans, and to ensure we maximised the additional grants, that we have received from Government in December, to the best effect.

Omicron we believe has peaked, but we expect the pressures to remain severely challenging throughout this month. We will keep many of our emergency measures in place for now, but I feel confident that although this has been a very tough time, staff are doing all that they can, in many cases going over and above the call of duty, to ensure our core services are maintained keeping our residents safe and well.

**Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Steve Carr**

In the last Transport and Environment Committee on 5<sup>th</sup> January – this Council committed to spend £50,000 to carry out a Recycling Centre Strategic Review. Within the document, many operational problems are highlighted – specifically at our recycling centres in Beeston, Mansfield and West Bridgford. Will the Chairman commit to keeping all 12 recycling centres open in their current locations and does he accept that the failure to include the proposed recycling centre near Cotgrave in Rushcliffe breaks a Conservative manifesto commitment made on multiple occasions?

**Response from the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE**

Indeed, at that Transport and Environment Committee meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> January, that review was undertaken and that's being driven by the new National Resources and West Strategy which is part of the recently introduced Environment Act, and that will have significant implications for how domestic waste is collected, disposed of and indeed recycled in the future. New legislation will fundamentally change the type and amount of waste collected at the kerbside, and through those recycling centres.

This is very timely to have this review, in view of the amount of new housing that is coming on stream around the County. It varies from district to district, but some districts are having substantial additional housing around the County and time has moved on from four to eight years ago, methods and technology change, there's methods in recycling etc. that have changed and we need to respond to those changes in technology and efficiency and to change in the way products and waste is either reused, recycled or disposed of.

So, the commitment I can make is that the intent of the review is to strengthen our recycling centre provision, not to weaken or reduce it, and to drive up those recycling rates across the County, because there's an enormous disparity in recycling rates from district to district. We will also continue to look to get the very best value for the taxpayer through this service, with the County Council currently reassessing its priorities to ensure best use of the capital funding available to us.

So, I can't commit to keep all the centres open because maybe we might want to have some more or maybe the review might say, well lets close that one and build a bigger, more expansive super centre. We don't know that, that's the purpose of the review. So, I'm not pre-judging what the review is going to say. Let's wait and once the strategic review is complete and the requirements and the impacts of the Environment Act become more clear, because we're not even sure of that yet Mr Chairman, further proposals to improve recycling in the county will be brought forward for members to debate and consider.