

APPENDIX B

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22nd MARCH 2018 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Vaughan Hopewell

Chairman, the bus services throughout the County have been severely cut back in recent years. Many areas including Mansfield and Ashfield have a service that ceases at 6.15pm. This means that businesses are being discouraged from coming to these areas due to the lack of public transport. Some residents are unable to travel after this time.

Nottinghamshire County Council have white minibuses that are currently not being used in the evenings. Is it possible for the Communities and Place Committee to assess the bus services and consider the use of these white minibuses to be used for an evening service in these areas?

Response from Councillor John Cottee, Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee

The reduction of bus services in the Mansfield and Sutton area was a commercial decision made by the main operators in the area due to low passenger numbers. Nottinghamshire County Council continues to support a number of local services during the day, several of which are operated by our own Fleet Transport Services.

The integrated use of Fleet vehicles formed part of the successful programme of service changes in 2014 and helped to maintain access to a wide range of services whilst reducing the overall cost of support.

As part of the on-going review of local bus support I will ask the Transport and Travel Services Team to investigate any potential alternative options, including the use of Fleet vehicles to deliver services in the Mansfield and Sutton area after 6.15pm in the evening.

Question to the Chairman of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor Muriel Wiesz

The pressure for respite care places appears to be growing across the County, as Carers look for such respite in order to continue to care for elderly relatives at home on a long term basis. Many families say that they struggle to plan ahead for regular respite, in an establishment where their relative becomes known, and feels safe, in order that they can have a break and hence be able to sustain their care in the long term. What plans does the department have to ensure that such facilities are available to families, without the struggle of exhaustive enquiries?

**Response from the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Health Committee,
Councillor Stuart Wallace**

In 2016/17 respite care was provided to 610 people and an additional 5,224 carers benefit from a direct payment, which can also be used for short breaks.

The importance of respite care for carers is recognised in specifications for contracted services including the new home-based care programme which is currently out to tender. The recently awarded contract for the countrywide rapid response service, known as 'Home First Response', includes the provision of home-based respite care when a carer is in a crisis situation, and is provided free of charge for up to two weeks.

Work is also underway with residential providers to develop supply, to ensure that there is effective provision to benefit carers who need this access.

The Council's directly provided adult social care services also offer respite care.

There are three dedicated short breaks units offering respite care to adults with learning disabilities which are very popular and can be booked up to a year in advance to help carers plan for their lives.

There is not huge demand for respite care for older people in our internal services and the short term bed capacity in the Care and Support Centre is used more to support people being discharged from hospital. Demand for this type of respite is mainly met by the independent sector.

In addition, the Council's day services play a key role in providing respite for carers.

Over the next 12 months, the Council's support offer to carers will be reviewed and updated, with the intention of new arrangements being in place by March 2019. This will include a review of respite and short breaks provision alongside processes for the assessment of carer need and support planning.

This acknowledges the findings of the Council's public consultation about carer support undertaken in autumn 2017, which identified respite and information and advice as the services considered most important to carers, which is something I accept as I have many friends out there who access the system. Carers will be involved in developing new service proposals.

**Question to the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee from
Councillor Samantha Deakin**

This winter has brought more snow than we have seen in recent years and though we have had fantastic communication from the Department as elected members there have still been many problems across the County.

There has been widespread school closures and large scale disruption to local businesses. Parents having to take time off due to school closures and businesses

not being able to move people and goods to where they need to be has had a significant impact upon our local economy.

While the levels of snow we have experienced is more than we have seen in recent years, it has been far from the worst winters this area has experienced. There are many other countries that experience much worse winters and yet they manage to keep their roads and schools open. We appear to have the equipment and the staff needed for this task but are we deploying them in the best way? I would therefore like to ask the following six things:

1. Why are many Nottinghamshire schools not directly served by Main or Severe Weather gritting routes?
2. Do school site managers have the equipment or third party services needed to keep their sites open?
3. When snow ploughs have been fitted to gritters they have been seen being used in a raised position where they leave several inches of snow still on the road. Have staff been trained in the correct use of snow ploughs?
4. While we would imagine our gritters have data loggers for the amount of grit spread, what monitor is in place for plough use?
5. How regularly and via what method is an individual driver's plough use reviewed by supervisors?
6. How regularly and via what method is the overall gritting strategy reviewed and modified if needed?

Response from Councillor John Cottee, the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee

Our general gritting/salting arrangements are as follows:

- There are currently 23 established main routes and secondary routes across the County, with a fleet of 30 gritters available. We have through Via, a night shift in place from October to the end of March, with a dayshift standby rota available to cover any requirement to treat the network during the day;
- All drivers are trained in City and Guilds 6159 – Winter Service Operations – and this includes the operation of a plough;
- There are approximately 1,400 grit bins sited around the County;
- Our forecast provider is 'The Metdesk', who provide a 24-hour forecasts and 2-5 day forecasts;
- There are eight weather stations around the County which record site specific weather conditions;
- We have 5 Duty supervisors available throughout the winter season, all fully trained with a Professional Certificate in Winter Maintenance. These are the individuals who make the decision on whether treatment is required;

- We have 'Masternaut' vehicle tracking on each vehicle, and CCTV fitted on each vehicle.
- Every day throughout the winter season, an initial forecast is received at 6.30am which gives an indication on action that may be required during the next 24 hours. The lunchtime forecast is generally the one that is used to make the decision for the day. Timing of any treatment and spread rates are established based on anticipated temperatures that are forecast. Most action will be to salt the main routes, however if severe weather is forecast then secondary routes will be covered as well. The majority of a winter season will require only precautionary salting to be instructed, however in snow events, which can have a significant impact on the network, there is a need to react to the conditions and issues that may arise on the highway network. This usually includes continuous treatment of the network and ploughing as required.

Moving on to your specific questions:

1. Why are many Nottinghamshire schools not directly served by Main Severe weather gritting routes?

We define our main and secondary routes as follows:

- Main Routes – All non-trunk A and B classified roads, strategic routes carrying high traffic flows of more than 1,500 vehicles per day and generally defined as Category 3 or higher in the current County Council Structure Plan hierarchy, major urban distributor roads and main bus routes.
- Secondary Routes - These are a further defined network of roads of identified importance such as bus routes, roads leading to essential industrial, military, medical or emergency service establishments or roads providing access to major settlements not served by "Priority 1" routes. "Priority 2" routes will also include those roads that establish at least one link to each settlement, accesses to special schools and certain problematic hilly areas.

In addition, not all schools are on roads that would be accessible by a gritter and any change in policy to include schools would need to consider safe access issues. Nottinghamshire County Council staff are due to meet with representatives from Via in April to review all winter maintenance operations, and a subsequent report and recommendations will be brought to the Communities & Place Committee.

2. Do School site managers have the equipment of 3rd party services needed to keep their site open?

That is a matter for Schools and School Governing bodies.

3. When snow ploughs are fitted to gritters that have been seen being used in a raised position where they leave several inches of snow still on the road. Have staff been trained in the correct way?

When ploughs are fitted to gritters they may not always be utilised on the route, and are only used on those roads where there is a requirement to do so. However, when in use, they are generally set to approximately an inch above the carriageway surface, this is to ensure no damage occurs to the surface and also for the safety of the driver.

Have staff been trained in the correct way?

Yes- City and Guilds training as mentioned earlier.

4. While we would imagine our gritters have data loggers for the amount of grit spread, what monitor is in place for plough use?

Control boxes within each vehicle allow for data to be recorded relating to spread rates and plough usage. This information can be linked to external systems for review, but currently no system is linked to access the data. This will be considered further in the end of season review.

5. How regularly and via what method is an individual driver's plough use reviewed by supervisors?

Plough use is dependent on the requirement for snow clearance on the highway network, and drivers react to the conditions they face. Each driver is familiar with the routes they cover and are trained on when and how to use the plough. Drivers are experienced in winter maintenance operations and their judgement is valued in the usage of ploughs.

6. How regularly and via what method is the overall gritting strategy reviewed and modified if needed?

As I mentioned earlier in this answer, there will be a joint review of winter maintenance operations between the County Council and Via at the end of the current winter season. This, along with resultant recommendations, will be considered by the Communities & Place Committee.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor John Peck

Does the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee share my concern that a BBC report has revealed Nottinghamshire has the greatest increase of any local authority in England of fines to parents for taking children on holiday during term time, and will he inform elected members today of the reason for this tenfold increase and cost to the local authority of employing additional staff to deal with the rise in fines and the cost of collecting each £60 penalty notice?

Response from the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee Councillor Phillip Owen

In Nottinghamshire over recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of fines issued to parents as a result of their child or children having an

unauthorised absence from school during term time. The vast majority of these absences have been for the purpose of a family holiday.

Following the Supreme Court Judgement of 2017 the Law was clarified, such that for a child to be considered to have regular attendance they must be at school every day that the head teacher requires them to be there. This judgement, alongside Section 441 of the Education Act 1996 creates the legal basis under which parents are prosecuted for their child's irregular attendance at school.

Each local authority area in consultation with schools sets their own threshold for Penalty Notice Fines. This is set out in the Nottinghamshire Code of Conduct. The Code was revised in 2015 and again in 2016 under the Labour administration, leaving the current threshold set at 3 days' absence (equivalent to 6 sessions) over 6 weeks regardless of the reasons for the unauthorised absence.

The reason for revising the threshold in Nottinghamshire was because:-

- 1) Historically our threshold was higher than many other authorities and as a result we were issuing far fewer fines;
- 2) The Department for Education in 2013 changed the definition for persistent absence from 15% to 10% and we needed to ensure our arrangements reflected this;
- 3) The Department for Education also amended the regulations by removing the flexibility Head teachers had to agree up to 10 days absence for holidays in term time; and,
- 4) Head Teachers in the consultation (that preceded the report to committee) were in favour of a change to the threshold.

The 2015 change in the threshold in Nottinghamshire brought the authority more in line with other local authorities and with national expectations set by the Department for Education.

The recently published national figures do not include reference to the thresholds being applied in other authorities, which may have some bearing on any variations in fines issued. To put the increase in context, for 2015-16 - according to the Department for Education figures - Nottinghamshire issued the third highest number of fines in the region and the fifth highest number amongst our statistical neighbours. This suggests that the increase has brought us more in line with other local authorities.

Ultimately, the discretion is with Head Teachers to authorise an absence, or to request that a fine is issued to parents where the absence is not authorised. The increase in Nottinghamshire represents a much greater use of fines by schools to address unauthorised absence rates, which in Nottinghamshire are now below the England average for both overall and persistent absence.

In 2015 the Council agreed to establish an additional 3 FTE Band A Posts (Education Enforcement Officers) and a 0.5 Band B post to help administer the anticipated increase in requests for fines from the local authority. The cost is currently about £185k for these additional posts within the structure. This is now largely offset by the income received from fines paid.

Question to the Chairman of Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee from Councillor Alan Rhodes

At the Improvement and Change Committee held on 12th March 2018, a table was shown on Appendix B1 of agenda item 9 'Progress report on delivery of programmes, projects and savings'. This table contained indicative closure dates for the five remaining residential care homes still owned and managed by Nottinghamshire County Council as follows:

Woods Court – May 2018 (confirmed)
Leivers Court – March 2019
James Hince Court – July 2019
St Michaels View – May 2019
Bishops Court – September 2019

This information appearing in a public document has caused concern and anxiety to staff, residents of the homes and their families, which in my opinion is totally unacceptable.

Will the Chairman of Adult Social Care Committee, on behalf of the administration, explain the situation in respect of the publication of indicative closure dates and the current administrations intentions in respect of the remaining homes currently in the county council's ownership?

Response from the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, Councillor Stuart Wallace

In February 2015 the Council, which was under the previous Labour administration lead by Councillor Rhodes, approved the closure of its remaining six Care and Support Centres across the County, with the aim of delivering savings of £4.3 million pounds.

Kirkland's closed in June 2016, and there is a confirmed closure date of May 2018 for Woods Court, following the opening of the Gladstone House extra care provision in Newark.

The report to Improvement and Change Committee did contain indicative closure dates for the remaining services during 2019. These were based on the earliest possible closure dates, which have slipped beyond the original 2015 closure plan which would have seen all services closed by spring of 2018. In other words, the plan that was put forward in 2015 would have seen all the care homes closed this year. Chairman, financial probity and good housekeeping demands that new indicative dates are necessary in order to re-profile the savings plan and inform the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The March report made clear that the timescales are indicative only, and may be subject to further change pending decisions on the approval of the (Housing with Care?) Extra Care Strategy and the re-provision of the short-term bed capacity.

Staff, residents and families have been aware of the closure plans since the original decision in 2015, which was in the public domain at the time, so this is not “new” news to anyone.

Having checked this week with all Care and Support Centres, I am not aware of any concerns being raised by staff, residents of the homes or their families in relation to the report to Improvement and Change Committee. The broader concerns which were expressed, the anxieties by residents and staff and families are in relation to the original 2015 decision to close the Care and Support Centres not timing when it would take place.

If Councillor Rhodes is aware of any specific concerns, we would be grateful if these could be passed on in order that we can address any anxieties with the individuals concerned.

The current administration will be considering the position on the closure of the remaining Care and Support Centres in the coming months. Any decisions will be predicated on the approval of the Extra Care Strategy, and ensuring that we are able to re-procure the short term care capacity in the independent sector as appropriate alternatives to the current services.

Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor John Peck

Following the unsuccessful bid by Newark and Sherwood District Council to obtain funding to support the rebuilding of Ollerton roundabout, and given the notorious bottleneck on the A614, the increasingly pressing need to unlock the regeneration of the former Thoresby Colliery site, the building of a proposed 800 houses, an employment park creating 500 jobs, and a new 350 acre country park, does the Chairman agree with me that we need to press ahead with our plans to do so as a matter of priority? Can he also assure me that the project will be completed within the next three years?

Response from the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee, Councillor John Cottee

I was disappointed with the outcome of Newark & Sherwood District Council’s bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund, but have been encouraged by the response from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government that they will explore using some of the additional £10 billion of funding allocated to housing delivery in the Autumn Budget to support local authorities to develop their housing ambitions.

Members of Policy Committee will recall that the improvement of Ollerton Roundabout is one of the priorities for highway investment in the Council’s Place Department Strategy approved in January. As a result of this, Officers have been

tasked with reviewing the scheme and preparing the economic case for investment, so that when future funding opportunities become available, we are actually at an advanced stage with a worked up project, which should improve the chances of securing funding.

The County Council and other stakeholders in this project will continue to press Government to invest improvements to the A614, including Ollerton Roundabout which is a key major route linked to our growth areas and in particular the redevelopment of Thoresby Colliery and the visitor economy. Members of Place and Communities Committee have already agreed earlier this month that this is a priority as part of our Safeguarded Routes.

It would be foolhardy to give you a guarantee that this scheme will be delivered in the next three years, as it is dependent upon external funding approvals and a statutory planning process which have considerable lead-in times. We are doing everything we can to maximise the chances of delivering this key scheme at the first available opportunity.