

## **APPENDIX A**

### **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 31 MARCH 2022 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

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

Does the Leader agree with me that in order to be able to “live with” Covid as this Government intends we do, it will be imperative for us to continue to develop an understanding of Covid, including through continuing to monitor transmission and mutations effectively?

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

I do agree, though we are lifting restrictions and seeking to move forward, clearly it's important that we continue to monitor the impact and development of the disease. I believe that is exactly what is happening, and as far as the County Council is concerned I believe there is a paper coming to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee in April, where those proposals will be discussed in more detail.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee from Councillor Nigel Turner**

In light of misleading comments by certain Labour councillors in the Worksop area, would the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee confirm that Nottinghamshire County Council will be delivering a new primary school in the Gateford area of Worksop, and will he explain why developer contributions to this project are not at risk?

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

The provision of sufficient school places for our young people is very important to this administration, and we are determined to ensure that we receive land and monies from developers towards new school provision.

The Council will be delivering a new school at Gateford in Worksop. I'll repeat that, Chairman, the Council will be delivering a new school at Gateford in Worksop.

We are taking appropriate steps to ensure that the developer meets their obligation to provide land and a funding contribution for a new primary school, so that the land and the monies for the new school are retained. We do not intend handing them back. Negotiations are currently taking place with the developer over the transfer of the land for the new school.

The Housing Developer Contributions available for the new build at Gateford are as follows:

- A new 210-place school backed by £2.567 million from the Gateford Park developers, supplemented by £433,000 from Bassetlaw Community Infrastructure Levy monies;

plus, if required

- Expansion from 210 to 315 places, which would be backed by £1.64 million from the Gateford Common development, plus a contribution of £40,000 for extra land.

Once the land has been transferred, the Council is expected to have up to five years to start the building of the new school.

The Council has yet to decide exactly when the school will be constructed and it is in discussions to vary the legal agreement to ensure there is sufficient time for the school development to be progressed, not to cancel the agreement with the developers.

Chairman, the only potential risk to the project is if certain councillors misunderstand the process or stir up unnecessary public concern for cheap, short-term publicity.

We have good officers working on this project who, given patience and support, will ensure that the new school is delivered as soon as the necessary procedures allow.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Jason Zadrozny**

Does the Chairman feel that the Provisional Highways Capital and Revenue Programmes 2022-2025 is the magic bullet needed to fix Nottinghamshire's broken roads and pavements?

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

Chairman, it is not so much a case of a 'magic bullet', this is more a case that we have actually 'fired the starting gun' for the implementation of the recommendations of the cross-party Highway Review.

This does give me the opportunity to really thank the Independents and all the opposition members for their unanimous support of these recommendations. The unanimous support of the recommendations, so I'm so glad we were all in agreement. Recently published data from the Department for Transport actually reveals that:

- Nottinghamshire is ranked joint second out of 24 County Councils for having the best A roads in the country;

and there's more Mr Chairman

- Nottinghamshire is ranked joint first out of 24 County Councils for having the best B and C roads in the country.

So, Chairman, the truth is that the major roads for which we are responsible for are among the best in the country. These are the ones that are most critical to the economic prospects of this Country and County.

Therefore, the main thrust of our work now is to improve our Unclassified roads, but even regarding these, we are by no means the worst, according to Department for Transport statistics. Therefore, the continuing mantra of claiming Nottinghamshire has the worst roads in the country is absolutely, simply, misleading and not true, Mr Chairman.

In last month's budget meeting, this Conservative administration created a £15 million reserve for Highways and Environmental initiatives, from which an extra £12 million will be spent to implement the unanimous recommendations of the Highways Review – have I mentioned it was unanimous, Mr Chairman? - and the resulting Highways Improvement Plan.

Strangely, the Independent Alliance voted against that £15 million extra investment. However, we will invest around £3 million per year to double the number of gangs from four to eight working on permanent patching repairs on our highways, delivering road re-surfacing and other improvements across Nottinghamshire. This is already underway.

We have for the first time moved to a three-year programme allowing the public to be better informed of forthcoming works. This approach also gives us a better opportunity to plan ahead and seek efficiencies with our contractors.

We are changing the emphasis from small pothole repairs to larger, permanent patch repairs, and I'm sure that doesn't come as a surprise, because we've mentioned it many times, Mr Chairman, although obviously we will still carry out some temporary pothole repairs where emergency and immediate safety concerns need to be addressed.

There are 381 individual road, footway and drainage schemes planned across the county, full details of which can be found on our website. Residents can expect an increase in spend on footway improvements and drainage repairs, demonstrating that these are all part of the highway too.

The three-year programme, and the asset management work that it is based on, provide us with an evidence base to make the case for future funding bids to Government, including the opportunities that devolution may bring forward around longer term funding.

For the second Conservative administration running we have boosted the basic highways budget with significant additional resources, showing our commitment to improving Nottinghamshire's roads. However, we all need to be realistic. As we stated very clearly last month, this should be seen as the latest stage in a long, ongoing process to improve our unclassified road network to the standard we would all wish to see.

## **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Tom Smith**

In February Government released their Levelling up White Paper, within it Nottinghamshire and Nottingham have been named as one of the first nine areas in England invited to seek a Devolution Deal. Could the Leader of the Council please give an update on where we are currently at with the discussion process and provide some more detail on what this will actually mean for the County along with any likely long-term Economic benefits this will bring to Nottinghamshire?

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

Thank you, Councillor Smith, for the question and another chance to update Members on progress with our devolution talks, which I know are central to many people's thoughts in terms of the work of the Council and came up a lot in our discussion around governance earlier on, so I'm grateful for the chance to raise this.

We are making progress. We are moving very much in the right direction in terms of ticking Government's boxes and on Friday of last week we, together with partners in Nottingham, Derby and Derbyshire submitted the more detailed proforma which explained precisely what kind of structures, what kind of powers and outcomes we are seeking from our negotiations.

The next step is likely to be that we will hear back from the minister, from the Department in the coming weeks, to let us know that they are happy to go forward; I hope also to let us know that they are happy for us to go first, which I think is important. It's worth feeding back from our recent meetings with ministers that they were very clear that they want to take forward first the most ambitious proposals in terms of devolution, in terms of scale, in terms of the powers that we're seeking. They want to do something big and important, and our County is big and important.

The deal that we are seeking is, we think, the most ambitious of all of those that are coming forward in terms of the scale, the population of the area that we're talking about that would make us the third largest Combined Authority in the country. So, huge potential, and I would hope that we will be one of the early adopters of the scheme.

In terms of opportunities to improve things, where the proforma asks us, 'Would you like powers over X?', we have answered 'Yes', and we will take the opportunity to ask for absolutely everything and more. We filled in a very lengthy '...and any other things you can think of' section at the bottom of that proforma and we will continue to push for all of those, but they include things like:

- powers and funds to improve our local transport infrastructure including buses - the ability to access things like bus innovation funding;
- to localise our adult skills and further education policies that build on some of the work that's already happening in the County such as the NTU / West Notts partnership in my own constituency that builds career paths within those communities;
- to collaborate more closely with district and borough colleagues and others on delivering public services to the benefit of local residents.

There are lots of opportunities for us to take forward. Having submitted that proforma - which has been made available to stakeholders including those district and borough colleagues, including people like universities, Police and Crime Commissioners and others who have been involved in working up some of the programmes behind the scenes - it has been a very collaborative process. We will take all of those forward and people should have the opportunity to see them. I think all Group Leaders in here have had them and seen them as well, so if you haven't as backbench members please go and ask your Group Leaders to have a look.

I'm pleased to say that these proposals were passed unanimously through Policy Committee on Thursday. I'm grateful for the unanimous support in that meeting and grateful to Councillor Laughton for stepping in to chair. I had to be in Westminster to protect Government business, I know that colleagues will recognise given the motion that we have coming later on today that I was in Westminster to protect business around increasing National Insurance thresholds, which is a £330 tax saving to many Nottinghamshire residents, so it was important for me to go and do that.

It's great to say this is an important milestone to the Council. We had already discussed it in great detail behind the scenes including with leaders of other groups in the room, and Councillor Laughton was able to very effectively chair that meeting and ensure that we had the perfect outcome to that, although I understand there were some shenanigans from Councillor Girling behind the scenes in other areas!

So, it went well and I'm grateful for that unanimous support, grateful to colleagues across both city, and district and borough councils for their support and collaborative efforts to get the bid over the line – lots of work going on behind the scenes in great detail with officers and Leaders, so we look forward to hearing from the minister hopefully that we can go first, crack on and pass the deal this year.

**Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor Michael Payne**

I've been contacted by families in Gedling Borough regarding the Notts Holiday Activity and Food Programme, which is set to replace Household Support Fund Vouchers from 31 March 2022. The County Council's website currently provides limited information about the Notts Holiday Activity and Food Programme in relation to the Easter holidays provision. The County Council's website says an 'update regarding Easter 2022 provision is coming soon' but the Easter school holidays begin in a few days and this update still has not been published.

Would the Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee please provide a comprehensive update and briefing to all elected Members on the Notts Holiday Activity and Food Programme provision for the 2022 Easter school holidays?

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

The Nottinghamshire County Council website does have an up-to-date Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) webpage for Spring 2022, complete with pretty pink lettering, an Easter chick and an Easter egg!

The webpage contains links to other pages with information on:

- Activities and venues of HAF events in each of the Nottinghamshire districts and boroughs;
- Information for parents and carers on eligibility and how to get involved;
- Information tailored to schools and professionals;
- Information about activity providers; and
- A facility for children and their families to feed back on their experiences.

Councillor Payne is correct, however, there was – erroneously - a separate page on the Council website stating that an ‘update regarding Easter 2022 provision is coming soon’. Clearly, this page was outdated and did not need to be there. I apologise for any confusion caused to families and children who perhaps used ‘Notts Holiday Activity and Food Programme’ as their search term and found themselves looking at the old page rather than the current one.

I do thank Councillor Payne for bringing this to our attention. On Tuesday night the outdated page was deleted, and the address re-linked to the correct one.

However, Chairman, there are also two positives to come out of this discovery:

- Firstly, we asked officers to conduct a search of the website to detect and clean up any other pages which may be out-of-date or duplicating similar pages; and
- Secondly, we will be publishing, on the correct web page, and elsewhere, some excellent news that I can actually announce today...

The news is that Nottinghamshire County Council will once again be providing free school meals vouchers to thousands of Nottinghamshire children during the Easter Holidays.

The scheme will again be delivered using money from the Government’s Household Support Fund (HSF), following the Chancellor’s announcement in the Spring Budget that he is doubling HSF investment to £1 billion.

This is great news for more than 25,000 eligible youngsters across the county who will receive 125,000 meal vouchers. It confirms our ongoing commitment to helping low-income households as we continue to recover from the effects of the Covid pandemic.

Parents in Nottinghamshire can find out if their child is eligible for free school meals vouchers by visiting the website, and of course we will also provide a link to this information from the Notts Holiday Activity and Food Programme webpages to make it as easy as possible for families to access this help.

### **Question to the Chairman of the Communities Committee from Councillor Keith Girling**

Would the Chairman of the Communities Committee confirm that there are no plans to re-locate or close Hucknall Library?

### **Response from the Chairman of the Communities Committee, Councillor John Cottee**

I'm happy to confirm - again - that there are no plans to re-locate or close Hucknall Library. That's contrary to suggestions made by Councillor John Wilmott recently in the local media.

At the recent budget meeting of the Council on 24<sup>th</sup> February I promised that this Conservative administration would protect every one of the Council's network of 60 libraries and their mobile provision.

I stated that nobody who has access to a library within a reasonable distance of where they live now will cease to have that access while we were in office.

I was therefore disappointed that Councillor Wilmott seemed to twist my words to imply that Hucknall Library is under threat. To be clear, I said that we would protect Hucknall Library and our other 59 libraries. I did not suggest that there were any plans to move Hucknall Library from its current location.

Last week, I took the opportunity to visit three libraries in Ashfield with Councillor Girling to make this position clear to the library staff and users.

Chairman, I've known Councillor Wilmott since the days he represented the Labour Party and Hucknall First Community Forum. I don't previously recall him using scaremongering tactics to seek some cheap political advantage. It certainly doesn't suit him. I think Councillor Wilmott should stay true to the standards of decency which he is usually known for, and that I expect from him.

### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan**

The Policy Committee on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> March was one of the most important meetings we've held for a generation at Nottinghamshire County Council. This meeting discussed the creation of a Combined Authority and the potential to unlock hundreds of millions of pounds along with extra powers for our region. The meeting was Chaired by Councillor Bruce Laughton, who gave your apologies stating you, "...had been called down to Westminster on a three-line whip – I don't exactly know why."

Could you inform the Council of the details of this whip and what you voted for in Parliament on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022?

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

I'm sure the Chamber will recall that I answered this question about two minutes ago in response to Councillor Smith.

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

Does the Chairman acknowledge the findings of the County Council Network's report, Impact Assessment of the Implementation of Section 18(3) of The Care Act 2014 and Fair Cost of Care, and the comments of the County Council Networks Adult Social Care Spokesperson, Councillor Martin Tett, who said:

- the Government have “seriously underestimated the costs of its proposals”
- “Councils will be left between a rock and a hard place – either by raising council tax to excessive levels and cutting local services, or by seeing widespread care home closures in their areas.”

and will the Chairman consider writing to Government, echoing the analysis, findings, and recommendations within the report?

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

Nottinghamshire County Council has a close and positive working relationship with the County Councils Network (CCN), given the CCN's self-proclaimed role as the “voice of England's counties”.

We are usually consulted directly by the CCN for our input, and it's fair to say that the views expressed in their statements, and the conclusions drawn in their reports, are often well-aligned with our own thinking.

The CCN's new, independent report by healthcare market specialists LaingBuisson analyses two key elements of the Government's adult social care reforms:

- The first element is a proposal to bring into effect Section 18(3) of the 2014 Care Act from October 2023, which would enable more people who fund their own care in care homes to ask their local authority to arrange care on their behalf to secure better value;
- The second element is the Government's intention to introduce a new ‘Fair Cost of Care’, which aims to increase care fees paid by councils to make the care market sustainable.

The Government has presently allocated £378 million per year for councils to pay this new Fair Cost of Care for Care home placements; and to protect providers from revenue losses when private fee payers become able to ask their local authority to arrange their care and access lower council rates.

However, the County Councils Network report calculates that an extra £854 million a year is needed, as a minimum, to make the proposals workable and avoid large-scale care home closures. Such closures could leave councils struggling to find beds for those who require care and trigger a deterioration in the quality of care between local authority and private placements.

CCN Spokesman, Councillor Martin Tett is therefore right to highlight the perceived shortfall of funding at this stage, thereby giving the Government time to address this issue well before October 2023.

Members will be aware that the Government's 1.25% Health & Social Care Levy, through National Insurance, is designed to raise an extra £36 billion over the next three years. Currently, councils will have to wait until 2025 to access full funding from the Levy, which would leave a significant funding gap between 2023 and 2025. The CCN is therefore calling on Government to bring forward the planned funding uplift for local government in order to pay for the additional £854 million a year required, giving councils and local care providers confidence that their care markets will be sustainable. If this extra funding is not forthcoming, CCN argues the Fair Cost for Care and Section 18(3) policies should be delayed until at least 2025.

To answer the final part of Councillor Henshaw's question, I will not write to Government echoing the findings of the CCN report, but only because these points are already being made clearly and consistently in Government circles by our Council Leader, who is better placed than anyone to make the case for Nottinghamshire and, by extension, other County Councils too.

In fact, late last month, Councillor Ben Bradley, in his capacity as MP for Mansfield, led a debate in Parliament – we talked about it in our committee, Councillor Henshaw - on Social Care in Nottinghamshire. Councillor Bradley told the Minister for Care and Health (Gillian Keegan) that funds described as being raised “for social care” through the National Insurance increase must make their way to local authorities and care providers quickly, to improve support and capacity.

Cllr Bradley observed that Governments often tend to focus on hospitals and the health side of funding, but ministers need to recognise that primary care, community-based services and social care are by far the best, most cost-effective ways to improve wider health service provision.

As we heard from Councillor Richard Jackson in last month's budget, the Government has already supported this Council with a very positive 2022/23 funding settlement. This included:

- A £33.5 million share of the national £636 million Social Care Grant, which is an increase of £9.2 million on the current year; and
- £2.4 million from a new £162 million Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund;

The Government has also responded to our calls for extra funding to respond to the Covid pandemic, to the tune of £165 million in grants over the past two years. We should therefore be optimistic that the Government will again listen and respond to the case being made by this and other County Councils regarding Fair Cost of Care and Section 18 (3).

**Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor Penny Gowland**

I understand that Centrebus will cease running the No19 Melton-Nottingham route from 10<sup>th</sup> April. This will disadvantage those who are unable to drive and goes against attempts to reduce car use to protect the environment and limit economic development in Melton and West Bridgford. How will the County work with partners to recover this service, and protect other services in the near future?

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

Yes, I was aware very quickly actually that this service had been given notice. In fact, I only live a mile or so away from the route, and so I was well aware of the withdrawal of the service by the current operator.

Local bus services are important to our communities and this is why the County Council continues to invest over £4 million per year to support local services, remembering that some counties no longer fund any local services.

The County Council's Transport and Travel Services team are therefore working with alternative operators and Leicestershire County Council to ensure that Nottinghamshire residents continue to have access to public transport, noting that the service crosses the boundary obviously from Nottinghamshire into Leicestershire. If we are able to work with Leicestershire we can look at more options, and hopefully, more acceptable options.