

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2020
QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

WRITTEN RESPONSES PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING AS THE TIME LIMIT OF 60 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS WAS REACHED

Question to the Chairman of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee from Councillor Rachel Madden

This Council is facing a £19.7million deficit from the cost of COVID. This is despite the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government claiming earlier this year that not a single Council would lose out as a result of the pandemic. Can you list what you have done to lobby the Government for extra funding and whether the deficit breaks a direct promise made by the Secretary of State?

Response from Councillor Richard Jackson, Chairman of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee

At Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee on 30 November 2020 my Financial Monitoring report indicated the total estimated cost of COVID to the Council, to date, was £66.8 million, as shown in paragraph seven. That figure includes all costs and lost income.

Later, in paragraph thirteen, the report set out that the Council has received four main tranches of grant, which is non-specific grant, totalling of £47.1 million.

I can see that in reaching the figure of £19.7 million, you have simply deducted £47.1 million from £66.8 million, but in fact the £66.8 million figure is also partially offset by some specific grant allocations including for Infection Control and Home to School Transport. The full list of specific grants is shown at paragraph 6 of the report.

Nevertheless, I understand the premise of your question, because earlier this year, over the summer months, many councils were expressing concern that the Government was backtracking on the pledge made in March by the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government that, and I quote: "The Government stands ready to do whatever is necessary to support councils in their response to coronavirus."

The County Councils Network and the Local Government Association both began to question whether and how sufficient money would materialise from Government to meet the spiralling costs of doing 'whatever is necessary', and I publicly expressed my own intensifying concerns about the immediate situation in Nottinghamshire which left us facing some very difficult decisions.

However, I am pleased to say that the announcements of additional, non-specific tranches of funding by Government since then, coupled with greater clarification on some of the specific grants, has greatly improved the position. We update Government through what are called our monthly Delta Returns comparing our costs with the grants we have received. The latest of these was last week's entry, known as

Delta 8, which showed that we actually now have an excess of funding from the Government of £4.4 million to meet our COVID costs as they stand for this year.

This demonstrates that the lobbying of Government, Ministers and their Officials by the Council Leader, the Deputy Leader, myself as Chairman of the Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee, the Chief Executive and our Section 151 Officer has actually been immensely successful, working of course with other partners including the CCN (County Councils Network) and the LGA (Local Government Association).

The caveat to this much improved financial position for 2021/22 is that the COVID challenge is by no means over. The figure in the Delta 8 return only reflects a current snapshot in time. We still do not know what the final costs of responding to COVID-19 will be, and there remain wider uncertainties, such as the future approach to adult social care funding through the delayed Green Paper.

As shown in my 30 November Budget Update report, COVID and non-COVID related pressures amounting to some £22.5 million are emerging for the coming three years, and the forecast gap in our Medium Term Financial Strategy by 2024 stands at around £50 million.

It therefore goes without saying that we must continue our hitherto successful lobbying efforts to ensure we receive our fair share of funding from national level, but just as importantly, we must do whatever is necessary to make the existing local government budget in Nottinghamshire go further.

Question to the Chairman of Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor Sybil Fielding

Could the Chairman please clarify the process with regard to notifying Members of intended changes to Children and Young Peoples' service delivery in their areas, in particular when a full consultation maybe required?

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

The level of consultation, or in fact the statutory need for of any formal consultation, will depend on the nature of the service in question. I believe this refers to changes to designated Children's Centres premises.

There is an obligation on the council [under Section 5D of the Childcare Act 2006] to "secure that such consultation as they think appropriate" before any change is made in the services to be provided through a Children's Centre or before the closure of a centre. There is no legal or constitutional need for a Committee to approve all consultations. Where the proposal is for more than a "technical" change, the matter will be put before the relevant Committee with information from the consultation made available to Elected Members. Local Members are invited to feedback their views during consultation. In some cases and depending on the consultation proposals, local Members are informed of proposals prior to consultation, through planning meetings and calls.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Pringle

What else can we do as a local authority to support the high levels of girls and women across Nottinghamshire who cannot afford to purchase sanitary products during their monthly menstruation, and are instead forced to use toilet paper?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

In January 2020, the DfE launched a scheme to provide free period products for all schools and colleges. Leaders of schools and colleges decide how they make products available to learners, in such a way that maximises support and minimises stigma. The local authority promoted the scheme to all schools in Nottinghamshire, some of whom have set up schemes. Our Healthy Families teams, commissioned by Public Health, will be mapping the schools who are accessing the scheme and encouraging all other schools to sign up to increase access.

Period Poverty is included in the Council's '*Improving the Life Chances of Children, Young People and Families Action Plan*' overseen by the Life Chances Group. Action to address the issue for all women in Nottinghamshire is already planned through developing collection points for hygiene products and linking with Food Banks. As part of this work, the number of collection points for hygiene products will be mapped and feedback will be collected from recipients. Where gaps are identified additional collection points will be developed.

Question to the Chairman of the Governance and Ethics Committee from Councillor Tom Hollis

Does the Chairman believe that every Councillor on this authority should treat the County fairly and equitably?

Response from Councillor Bruce Laughton, Chairman of the Governance and Ethics Committee

Every Member of this authority has a duty to represent the interests of the constituents who elected them, but as a County Councillor they have an equal duty to consider the interests of the whole County in reaching their decisions, whilst adhering to the Council's protocols including the Members' Code of Conduct.