

**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2021**  
**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 Communities Committee from Councillor Daniel Williamson**

Does the Chairman agree with me that Nottinghamshire County Council has a problem supporting the arts?

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

Chairman, for anyone who did not happen to be at the Communities Committee meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September, this question may appear to be rather abstract and lacking in supporting detail.

“The arts” is a broad-ranging term which will mean different things to different people, unless Councillor Williamson explains what particular “arts” he has in mind.

And when he asks whether I agree with him that Nottinghamshire County Council has “a problem” supporting the arts, what precisely does he mean by “a problem”?

If he means an ideological problem, then my answer to his question is “no”. This Council has given financial and practical support to “the arts” for many years under a succession of different political administrations. At no point do I recall hearing any ideological objections to doing this, bearing in mind I’ve occupied various chairman and cabinet or shadowing roles with regard to Culture and Communities & Place for the best part of two decades.

Does Councillor Williamson instead mean, do I agree we have a problem “financially” supporting the arts? If so, then the answer is a little more nuanced. In an *ideal* world we would be able to invest more in the arts and in cultural services than we can at present, but we all know the competing pressures we face in funding critical services to children and adults. Over the years, demographic factors have caused the pressures on critical and statutory care services to increase, squeezing and reducing the amount of money we have remaining to invest in cultural services, including the arts.

I’ve made no secret of my regret that this is the case, but it’s a dilemma that has faced councils across the country. There was a time when certain local authorities increased council tax by extraordinary amounts to avoid making difficult decisions on spending priorities, but even if council tax had not been capped by Government in recent years to protect the taxpayer, it would still be morally unfair to place such a high tax burden on our local residents.

What we have done instead is invested to save, and by modernising and changing the way we work, we have actually *protected* several services that have long since been cut by other Councils.

For those Members who are not aware, at Communities Committee Councillor Williamson moved an amendment to the recommendations for our new Local Communities Fund, calling for a feasibility study into establishing a 'Talented Artists' Programme similar to our 'Talented Athletes' Programme. This may have served a purpose in giving his Group a platform for campaign leaflets and press releases with a headline along the lines of '*Independent councillors support the arts*', but it overlooks the fact that this Council *already does* invest particularly in young artists.

The Local Communities Fund, or LCF, will provide local, arts-based organisations with the chance to apply for funds to support their projects and facilities, and has done so for a number of years in its previous life as the Local Improvement Scheme. Our new LCF scheme criteria, approved by the Communities Committee last week, will continue to offer this opportunity.

Thanks to Inspire - our charitable community benefit society delivering cultural and learning services across Nottinghamshire - we can commission and maintain a comprehensive range of cultural and arts services where other councils cannot. If you visit the 'Arts' section on Nottinghamshire County Council's website – and the first thing to celebrate is that we still have one – you will find a number of arts provision headings which invariably link through to the Inspire website.

Our provision includes:

- A large school music support service that works in many of our primary and secondary schools, and supports all levels of young musicians;
- A young people's arts programme, based around the Old Library in Mansfield, that delivers outstanding opportunities for participation in all forms of the arts for many young people who might otherwise not get such chances;
- A community learning and study programme that includes a range of arts-based programmes, focused in those areas of the county where disadvantage is greatest;
- A strong and long-term partnership with the Arts Council that is delivering innovative and inclusive community arts projects on a County-wide basis;
- Through our large library network, examples of gallery spaces, performing arts events and other projects that promote and nurture local arts activity - indeed, tomorrow [referring to 24 Sept 2021] will see the launch of our county wide Poetry Festival at Southwell, with a performance by nationally renowned poet Don Paterson;
- Inspire has an '*Arts in the Community webpage*' advertising artist Alex Godwin and author Caryl Hart as Inspire's 2021 Artist and Author in Residence;
- Inspire has an *Open Studios Notts* initiative which aims to widely promote Nottinghamshire artists' and film-makers' open studio events in co-operative collaboration, creating opportunities each year during May and June for visitors to connect with artists and to discover their work and practices;
- Inspire supports the *Open Studios Notts* initiative by commissioning and curating photography exhibitions in our Library Galleries, with photos capturing

rare and varied behind-the-scenes images of the artists' and crafts people's working worlds, shown alongside information about where to visit the *Open Studios* events taking place across the county;

- We work with *Jazz Steps* to bring an exciting programme of live jazz to libraries throughout the year, and since the first gig back in 2011, the programme has gone from strength to strength, featuring some fantastic names from the world of jazz and achieving sell-out audiences.

It's worth emphasising, Chairman, that Inspire has been an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation since 2018, which has drawn down an additional £1 million of funding to develop arts and creativity for children and young people, providing thousands of opportunities for communities across the whole of Nottinghamshire to access high quality theatre and original productions at their local library. A significant amount of our arts provision is delivered through our impressive network of 60 libraries which we vigorously defended and maintained while many other councils were shutting theirs.

Elsewhere in the Council, I know that many services, from our country parks with their exhibition spaces and displays, to our youth service with its annual Showcase events, provide numerous opportunities for local people to experience, explore, and take part in all manner of artistic endeavours.

So, Chairman, does Nottinghamshire County Council have a problem supporting the arts? No, we don't. We are proud of the arts services we deliver with the help of Inspire, which are better than the offer to residents in many other parts of the country. Do I wish Nottinghamshire County Council could do *even more* to support and fund the arts? Yes, I do, but I always will, because I'm passionate about this area of our work and always have been. But the desire for more shouldn't lessen our appreciation of what we already have.

I hope that at some point in the future we may return to a situation where local authorities are not so constrained by the pressures of delivering critical and essential services and can invest more in services that encourage creativity and enjoyment, and for that matter more opportunities to support sport and leisure and promote our heritage. But this needs to be achieved in a way that is sustainable, whether the money ultimately comes from central or local taxation.

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

What is the Council doing to enable residents to charge electric vehicles particularly in residential roads where there is only on street parking available?

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

As part of our Go Ultra Low programme, we have secured £2 million of funding, along with Nottingham City and Derby City Councils, for the delivery of a public charging

network across the area. These charging locations will be available to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days each week and will be promoted as such.

Work is underway to continue to identify potential locations, assess their feasibility, and install infrastructure at the most suitable sites. Officers from Nottinghamshire County, Derby and Nottingham City councils, as well as district councils, have proposed a number of potential sites for inclusion in the Electric Vehicle charge point network. Currently, 68 publicly accessible electric vehicle charge points have been installed in the county at 23 different locations.

In addition, we have recently completed a further study into options for on-street charging. This addresses issues such as:

- the practical and policy issues surrounding implementing on-street parking infrastructure;
- the locations where on-street Electric Vehicle infrastructure may be required in the future;
- an evaluation of the different types of infrastructure available and their practicality in both urban and rural settings; and
- specific issues faced in rural communities when providing Electric Vehicle infrastructure.

The report will be used to identify locations in Nottinghamshire for potential trials of the most appropriate on-street Electric Vehicle infrastructure in a variety of settings. It is intended to bring a report to a future Transport and Environment Committee to consider these opportunities. I have recently attended a stakeholder workshop on Electric Vehicle charging and look forward to the discussion on how we take this forward to benefit our residents.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Economic Development and Asset Management Committee for Councillor Reg Adair**

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant stress on the County's economy and on the business community. Can the Chairman of the Economic Development & Asset Management Committee offer the Council an overview of the work of his Committee in supporting the economic recovery and in particular the support offered to our businesses, noting the many challenges which lie ahead?

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

I am grateful for Councillor Adair's question, as it highlights the particular challenges faced by our businesses over the past 18 months and the work of the Council and its partners to support them over the course of the pandemic.

I will start my response by commending the support from national Government. This has been unprecedented in scale and ambition. Over the course of the pandemic:

- Nottinghamshire businesses secured over £560 million of Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans and the Bounce Back Loans;
- Over 136,000 Nottinghamshire jobs were protected by the Furlough scheme;
- Over 70,000 claims for grants supporting Nottinghamshire's self-employed were paid out across the County;

The Council has been instrumental in ensuring the County's businesses were aware of and were enabled to access this support. In addition, our district councils played a key role in the distribution of Government grants, supporting key impacted businesses such as those within the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors; offering grants covering periods of local restrictions, as well as managing wider discretionary grants and the re-opening up of high streets. I pay tribute to this magnificent demonstration of partnership working across local government.

Chairman, this Council responded early, pulling together the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Action Plan for 2020-2022, which now falls within the remit of my Committee, demonstrating the valuable and important contribution we are making to support Nottinghamshire's business community and those seeking work and training. I would urge members to review the latest report to my Committee in June, and further reports will be brought to my Committee over the course of this year.

For today's Council meeting, I am delighted to be able to highlight just three areas of work, which I think best reflect the wide-ranging impact of our support:

Firstly, providing direct support to our businesses.

The Council's Business Advisers have continued to engage with Nottinghamshire businesses. In partnership with the D2N2 Growth Hub, an average of 200 Nottinghamshire businesses are being supported every month. Of these, 500 individual Nottinghamshire businesses have been the subject of intensive and on-going professional advice over the past 12 months. A further 400 Nottinghamshire businesses have participated in at least one of the webinars available via an extensive programme over the past 12 months, gaining knowledge and direction from over 2900 hours of expert input. Additional support has been offered via the various partnership-based programmes.

Bringing this to life, the feedback is extremely positive, and I'd like to offer members the following testimonies from those who received help (pick as many as required). Comments included:

- "Thanks for today's session, I feel very lucky to have you as my business coach. You always encourage me to step out of my comfort zone and look at myself and the business in a more strategic way. I always feel brighter and more focused after your coaching and mentoring."
- "Thank you once again, your help and advice is invaluable. Just got your information, as you advised we did apply for the bounce back loan and we were successful."

- "I just wanted to give some positive feedback on my experience working with you. You have been so very positive, helpful, knowledgeable, prompt during such a short period of time. This is what a small business needs at such a difficult and challenging period in manufacturing."
- "Thank you so much for everything you have done for us this year. It has been amazing to work with you, we appreciate all the challenging questions, and keeping us focussing on our achievements and clarity of our direction. You truly have been an integral part to our success this year."

Chairman, the Second area of work I want to highlight is the support we have provided to individuals to access work and skills, and to enable businesses to meet their employment needs.

I'm very excited that we have commissioned a new Employment and Skills Brokerage Platform that will be the "go-to" place for Nottinghamshire job seekers, returners, those looking to increase their skills, and for employers looking to recruit.

Feedback already suggests this will be a valuable partnership tool, supporting Nottinghamshire residents to get back into work and training, and helping employers address their skill shortages.

This work builds on a range of support already in place. We have commissioned Futures to provide a suite of online resources called 'What Next?' which provides information on: study and progression routes, labour market information, and access to employers. It will also be an opportunity for employers and recruiters to engage with Nottinghamshire schools and students. I am determined that there will be no 'lost generation' in Nottinghamshire. Schools across the County are feeding back how important this resource will be, for example:

- The Joseph Whittaker School has commented that this is a great resource, stating: "...we have directed students to view [these resources] and are going to be using them in lessons in the future to support the schemes of work we have in place"
- The George Spencer Academy has commented that: "...so far we have used the application and CV elements with Year 11 students who needed specific support in preparation for transition to post-16. The Nottinghamshire jobs section will be used with Year 12 as part of their transition preparations for life beyond Year 13."

In addition, our cultural and learning services provider, Inspire, has delivered courses to 220 young people and to 2,991 adults. In order to create new jobs and tackle unemployment, particularly youth unemployment:

- Inspire a Kickstart Gateway employer, providing employment opportunities to over 50 young people aged between 16 and 24;
- Inspire is also providing a number of 19 to 24 Traineeship placements, with plans to deliver 45 additional Traineeships for this age group over the course of this next year;

- They are working with a range of partners and employers to provide Supported Internships, which provide young people aged between 16 and 24 who have learning and physical disabilities with access to employment opportunities; and
- Support is being provided to the Miner 2 Major Project, with a focus upon providing courses and provision that will help learners to enhance their wellbeing. Courses including habitat walks, mindfulness and heritage awareness have been particularly welcome during the COVID-19 period.

Thirdly, Mr Chairman, in order to maintain this County's strong economic position in recovery, we are providing a 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure through digital investment.

As evidenced during the three COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the Nottinghamshire network has proved not only to be resilient but fast and effective for both home-based and business use. Throughout the pandemic, the Council has worked with private sector network operators to continue delivering a world-class digital infrastructure across Nottinghamshire, now at 98.7% coverage.

Successive waves of innovation and investment recently saw Openreach supporting the Council's ambition for growth in Nottinghamshire as they outlined plans to build and connect ultrafast, ultra-reliable full fibre broadband to 107,000 more homes and businesses. City Fibre also has plans to reach circa 95,000 premises in Nottinghamshire, mainly in the County's urban areas.

With the support of £900,000 from the Government's Getting Building Fund, the 5G Digital Turbine Centre has already started supporting local students and business innovators. This investment is being used to improve digital infrastructure within business accommodation and to support skills and career opportunities.

Building the skills and careers opportunities of our young people is a key part of the new Centre's role. An early success was the piloting of a new 5G careers programme with more than 200 students at Mansfield's Vision West Notts College participating, with planning underway to roll out the programme across the County.

Councillor Adair referenced the challenges ahead. My discussions with business groups across the County, and an assessment of various business surveys alongside feedback from our business advisers, all suggest we have some way to go towards full recovery. I would draw this Council's attention to the following:

- The labour market is volatile, with a mix of hugely encouraging signs but with particular pressures already building. As restrictions are lifted across the UK, the labour market has already bounced back to around 80% employment levels pre-pandemic. The test will be whether those having been on furlough right up until the cessation will be back at their workplace - or looking for alternative work – and how the support agencies respond. I am confident that we have the support and the businesses at readiness to cope;
- The increase in the number of businesses taking on sometimes new and sizeable loan finance heralds a new scenario of debt management for many. This will be a key challenge to the business advice community going forwards;

and

- Increased costs from various sources will provide a challenging context for our business community.

That said, the most recent East Midlands Chamber and Federation of Small Business surveys illustrate a growing confidence amongst Nottinghamshire businesses that they can emerge from the pandemic safely and with opportunities to invest and grow.

Mr Chairman, I would conclude my response today by reflecting on what comes next for Nottinghamshire. The County Council is positioning itself at the forefront of the new economy, with new opportunities being brought forward through the Development Company, the proposed Freeport and key innovative developments proposed right across this County. We are leading the charge on securing a better deal for the County through its ambitious plans for a County Deal and together with our partners I have the hope – no, the *expectation* – that all members in this Chamber will work with us to achieve the best for Nottinghamshire.

#### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor David Shaw**

In answer to my question about the future of the HS2b Eastern Leg to the Policy Committee on 2<sup>nd</sup> September – you stated that you “...had a meeting about it with Number 10” on Monday, September 6<sup>th</sup>. What was the outcome of this meeting? Who attended this meeting? Was it in 10, Downing Street and how confident are you that the Eastern Leg of HS2b will stop at Toton?

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

You are correct, Councillor Shaw, that I did meet with officials in relation to HS2, among other regional economic priorities, on September 6<sup>th</sup>.

As the Chair of the HS2 East Delivery Board, a role I inherited from my predecessor Councillor Cutts, I’ve obviously taken a great interest in the outcome of the Integrated Rail Plan which has the potential to be of great benefit to our area. In addition, I’ve met the HS2 Minister on this subject on several occasions since May, I’ve met the Rail Minister, I’ve discussed it with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I’ve raised it on numerous occasions in the House of Commons, emphasising the importance of including Toton as a key part of our plans for the region and the County, and worked with Parliamentary colleagues from across Nottinghamshire to hold a debate on the East Midlands Economy in Parliament, where we all, in unison and cross-party, called for Toton to form a key plank of whatever future HS2 proposals come forward in the coming weeks and months. In short, whatever the outcome, there’s little more we could have done to make the case.

In relation to this specific meeting, it’s not normally considered good practice to name officials, because of course it is Ministers who ultimately decide, in the same way that I wouldn’t expect Members here to name individual Officers when raising issues in the public domain, except in very specific circumstances. Normal practice and protocol is



for me to say what I have said, which is that I met with officials at Number 10. I did this at the Prime Minister's own request, having met with him directly back in June on the same subjects. It was a productive meeting.

On September 6th, I took the opportunity to make the case not just for HS2, but for investment in our region, in infrastructure and in levelling up. I was delighted to share the progress we've made with our new East Midlands Development Corporation and explain how this will deliver 84,000 new jobs and £4.8bn in our regional economy. Importantly, there is Government commitment to bring forward the necessary new legislation for the Development Corporation this autumn.

I shared the progress we've made with our East Midlands Freeport, which at the time was developing at pace towards the submission of an Outline Business Case. More evidence that we are delivering for our businesses and communities with 55,000 new jobs and £8bn GVA for the regional economy. We will receive feedback from Government later this autumn.

We discussed the progress we're making together with our District and Borough partners to negotiate a County Devolution Deal to secure the powers, tools and resources we need to build on these examples and level up our economy.

And of course we discussed HS2 and the Integrated Rail Plan, in one of many productive meetings as I have explained, and conversations are ongoing with a whole variety of Ministers and officials.

You ask for 'outcomes', well of course Government is announcing outcomes as part of its Integrated Rail Plan announcements in due course, and that's as much direct answer as anybody gets at this stage, including me, so we'll all have to wait and see on that one. At County Hall we are working with regional partners like Midlands Connect and Transport for East Midlands to make the case for our priorities, not just in Notts but in the region, and it's perhaps one of the most obvious examples of where my dual role here has enabled us to dive much deeper in to this conversation that most authorities.

In terms of confidence, it's fair to say – understandably – that discussions around plans for the Integrated Rail Plan are framed by the context of COVID and the huge cost of protecting the economy and people's incomes over the last 18 months. It's been important to make clear exactly what our priorities are here in terms of unlocking job creation and growth, and we've missed no opportunity to make clear that Toton is vital for us in terms of those plans. I'm far more confident now that I was after initial conversations back in May, I'm very confident that the work we've been doing in the intervening period has made a difference in that regard – in ensuring that we get what we need at Toton - and I'm confident that we are better off than we were, but obviously I have to wait for the outcome of the IRP the same as everyone else does.

**The following 2 questions were answered together**

**Question to the Chairman of the Finance Committee from Councillor Lee Waters**

During 2021/22, the County Council will spend £379million on adult social care services - around 34p in every £1 of expenditure. This is the largest part of the County Council's overall expenditure. This financial year, the County Council raised an additional £3.9million from the adult social care precept. The adult social care precept costs taxpayers a year in this county an additional £99.76 for Band A properties and ranges all the way up to £299.28 for Band H properties. This is set to increase next year by 2%.

From 2022/23, National Insurance contribution payments will rise 1.25% via the Health and Social Care levy. Putting to one side the breaking of another manifesto pledge not to raise taxes by the Conservative Government – does the Chairman think it's fair for Nottinghamshire residents to pay twice for a service they may not receive? Will he commit to this Council cutting the adult social care precept part of Council Tax from 2022/23 and lobbying the Government for our fair share of Health and Social Care payments to make up the shortfall?

**Question to the Chairman of the Finance Committee from Councillor Jim Creamer**

At the County Council Network Conference last week it was made clear that County Councils would not be receiving any extra funds from the new increase in NI contributions until 2023 at the earliest. The government assumption is that the additional funds needed until then will be met by a likely increase in the Adult Social Care levy at an extra cost to residents at the same time as many are paying the increased NI rate.

Is the Chair concerned about this and, if so, is he making his concerns known to the Secretary of State?

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

I hope that all members here recognise the increase in demand and costs for adult social care services. The Government recognises this as well. Hence, they provided the County Council with additional grant of £3.9m for 2021/22 at the last settlement together with the ability to raise the precept for these services. This is not to mention additional national funding that has been made available to support care providers in recruiting, training, and employing social workers.

We can further expect that, whilst the first set of funding received from the increase to national insurance will be used for NHS Covid recovery, we will be working closely through the local Integrated Care System and with the Clinical Commissioning Group to look at how that will be used to commission social care, housing and community support to enable people to recover from mental health and physical health treatment successfully and maintain their independence.

In December 2020, the Government announced the Provisional Local Government Settlement for 2021/22 which included the potential to increase the Adult Social Care Precept by a further 3% in 2021/22, but with an option to defer all or some of this increase until 2022/23. The County Council approved a Council Tax increase last February, applying a 1% increase in this Precept and deferring 2% of the increase to the following year. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy indicated an assumption that the deferred 2% would be applied in 2022/23, but this remains to be decided at the February 2022 Full Council meeting.

At the Budget meeting in February 2021, Full Council recognised the shortfall in funding over the medium-term of £47.7m, even after assumptions on increases in council tax and the precept.

There is a reality that we all must accept, that the pressure on our social care services is increasing, both from rising demand and through increasing cost pressures, and the ability to raise funds through council tax and additional government funding is limited. Yes, we will continue to lobby the Government for additional finance, as we have always done, but it is naïve to believe that this will result in 100% of our wants being met and it is naïve to believe that money from Government comes from society for free. It comes at a cost to the taxpayer.

Thanks to the dual role of our new Leader, I know that the voice of Nottinghamshire County Council is being heard by ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care, in the Treasury, and even at 10 Downing Street. We have already seen the benefit of this with our CCG boundaries being made coterminous with the county council's, allowing us to deliver better care to our vulnerable residents that is also more financially sustainable and better for the NHS. I know that our Leader was instrumental in influencing the Government on this decision, and I am sure that Councillor Bradley will continue to play his part in this place and the other chamber in which he speaks to put our views to the Government and deliver for the people of Nottinghamshire.

#### **Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment Committee from Councillor John Wilmott**

Last year, dozens of Remembrance Sunday parades were cancelled due to the impact of the pandemic. This year, many of them across Nottinghamshire are under threat due the prohibitive cost of road closures. Will the Chairman agree to review this in consultation with the Armed Forces Champion and Armed Forces advocate?

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

Chairman, our approach to Remembrance Sunday parades is straightforward.

The Council does not charge for the staff time or advertising costs involved in making the necessary legal arrangements for the roads to be closed for each Remembrance parade request where a closure is needed, and our support in this regard is agreed annually by Committee. This is the case for armed forces and charity events generally, of course. The commercial charge, if we did apply it, would be £535 + advertising costs, so this represents a significant but worthy concession.

In relation to the physical signs and other measures needed for such Parades, well that of course is for the organisers to put in place, although we do offer advice about which traffic management companies are available to assist. Often, as I know from my own experience, this cost is funded by local civic organisations or from Councillor Divisional Funds.

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

Now that the Prime Minister has finally proposed the tax mechanism which will fund social care, can the Chair enlighten Members on the detail of the reforms?

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

Councillor Richard Jackson has already done a good job explaining where we stand as far as the new arrangements for social care are concerned. We do not as yet have the detail of the reforms to social care beyond the outline proposals. The announcement from Government was clear that further plans and legislation would be brought forward, and the Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee is the place where that will be progressed.

Reforming social care is not an easy thing to do, and we should welcome the Government's efforts to grasp the nettle and do what Governments of all colours have failed to up to this point. These reforms will require a strategy that cuts across Government and enables people with care and support needs to live a good life. It is not just what the Department of Health & Social Care can do through a longer-term funding settlement, but active input from the Cabinet Office; the Treasury; the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy; and the Department for Work and Pensions.

I am sure that this council will be an active part of the dialogue with Government when these proposals are brought forward – not only through my committee, which I am sure will robustly consider the proposals - but by way of our Leader who I know will be knocking on the doors of ministers in each of those departments that I have mentioned.

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

We welcome the news that the Prime Minister has finally proposed how the government intends to fund social care, a proposal which he claims will address the crisis in underfunding that is causing so much distress, suffering and hardship to so many. Does the Leader believe that the way money is being raised through a rise in NI contributions is fair?

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

The short answer is, in my view, that there is no such thing as a popular way of raising more money from residents, and that I am – in principle – no fan of tax rises of any kind. I'm a conservative politician, with a small 'c' as well as a big one, which means I would like to live in a country with a small state, less intervention and lower tax... that's why I'm on this side of the chamber. That said, we're not in that place are we, so there is no sense in me pretending that we are.

Regarding the council's responsibilities when it comes to Adult Social Care, we have a process in place to ensure our budget meets the needs of local residents, and I would welcome a constructive conversation with the Labour Party when we get to that time of year. However, the pressure on our social care services is increasing whilst the opportunities to fund these services are ever more limited. I will personally continue to lobby Government, building on the constructive conversations I have already had with senior ministers including the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care, but there is not a 'silver bullet' that will solve all our problems.

There has been no end of research and polling into public perceptions of social care funding, and for every report that shows people agree with the principle of a dedicated tax to stop the money being diverted elsewhere, you could point to another that shows this to be deeply unpopular and, in many ways, flawed. Nevertheless, options that included the possibility of people selling their homes to cover care costs, as exists now, are always found to be deeply unpopular, and I am yet to see a credible alternative put forward by the Labour Party nationally that resolves this impasse.

What has been needed for a long time is an honest conversation with the public about what we can afford and ultimately how we pay for the care we want and need, so I welcome the PM's announcement as a significant step forward. Many people have believed social care to be more generous than it actually is, with a widespread lack of awareness about how adult social care is funded, and there remains considerable confusion about where NHS services end and social care services begin that needs to be made clear.

We've known for a very long time that the rising cost of social care in its current format would need to be paid for, and we've been waiting a long time for potential solutions. The additional money has the potential to make a difference, but we don't know yet what the system will look like because, though we've had information about the funding, we've not yet had a clear picture of what practical reforms might take place to services. We're waiting for a White Paper that I understand is due this Autumn, which will lay out those reforms. So in answer to 'is it fair' – I can only say that really it depends on the outcomes off the back of that White Paper. I don't know what will be in it.

What I can tell you is that the Government has supported this Council – as it has supported councils up and down the country – with funding which has helped us to support our most vulnerable residents. This has included:

- Making £5.4bn available nationally for social care over 3 years;
- Providing £500m nationally over 3 years for workforce, training, and recruitment
- Implementing a cap on care costs of £86k from Oct 2023

- Raising asset thresholds from just over £14,000 to £20,000, so anyone beneath this won't contribute at all, and
- Increasing Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) rates from April 2022, which will increase in line with inflation, so people can keep more of their income.

Yes, of course I would prefer a long-term solution, but we all know that the situation is more complex than it is often made out to be. If these changes, supported by temporary funding, allow us to continue to support vulnerable residents – which, at the end of the day, is what really matters – then we should welcome this.

If, through a combination of this increased funding and further reforms, we see a better, fairer, more sustainable delivery of social care services in years to come, then yes I'd say it was a good outcome for people. So, we wait to see.

### **Question to the Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee from Councillor David Martin**

In a Health Committee Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> September – the extent of the GP crisis across Nottinghamshire was laid bare. Figures released by the local Clinical Commissioning Group from June revealed that 26,906 residents in Nottinghamshire had to wait more a month for a GP appointment. It also revealed that nearly 4 out of every 10 resident who 'saw' a GP did so via phone or online. Government advice at the start of the pandemic directly led to reduction in in-person consultations that has left thousands in Nottinghamshire struggling to access the care they need.

Whilst COVID is being blamed for the healthcare crisis in Nottinghamshire – would the Chairman agree that the real issue here is not about face-to-face consultations, but the chronic shortage of GPs caused by a decade of under-investment in the family doctor service by successive governments and the failure of Government to deliver on its election manifesto promise of 6,000 additional GPs and 26,000 extra members of the wider practice team and the failure to reduce bureaucratic burdens and prevent more GPs from burning out and leaving the profession? What can this Council do working with the CCG to reduce the burden on GPs and practice staff instead of blaming GP staff?

### **Response from Councillor Sue Saddington, Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee**

Thank you, Councillor Martin for your question which, intentionally or not, bears a striking resemblance to sentiments expressed in a particular article last week in the British Medical Journal.

Members may be aware that at the most recent Health Scrutiny Committee meeting, we commenced a review regarding Access to Primary Care.

The purpose of the first report to this committee on 7<sup>th</sup> September was to provide an initial briefing on issues of concern to Members in relation to Access to Primary Care Services.

Within this review, we will examine current primary care contracts and the experience of local residents seeking to access the 125 GP practices across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, ranging from single-handed practices to large practices with multiple sites.

At this stage, we are gathering information around this whole topic including:

- the level of resources being provided for primary care service delivery;
- the effectiveness of the use of those resources by the service providers;
- the experiences of staff and service users on the front-line; and, of course,
- the extent to which COVID has impacted all of these factors and perhaps distorted outcomes compared with what might be considered 'the norm'.

At the end of this review, the Health Scrutiny Committee will publish its findings and any recommendations for improvement that it wishes to make. This could range from actions we believe are required by Government, to actions that could be taken by this Council working with CCGs, through to actions that could be taken by individuals at the point of service delivery.

Councillor Martin's question attempts to draw pre-emptive conclusions and asks whether I agree with them. My response is that I do not wish to pre-empt the evidence we are yet to receive, or the outcomes and conclusions we might eventually draw from it.

Reading between the lines of Councillor Martin's question, I believe he is implying that some of the comments I made at the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> September – which were then reported in the media - are increasing the burden on GPs and '*blaming GP staff*' in the way the British Medical Journal article implies. I am not responsible for what the media chooses to report or not report, nor for the way they decide to present or use the sentiments expressed. The fact of the matter - overlooked by many media reports - is that I was reflecting opinions expressed to me by residents in my division. As the elected councillor for Farndon & Trent, I am entitled to report and indeed represent the strength of those views, and in doing so, I appreciate that sometimes those on the receiving end of such views might not like what they are hearing or think it fair. This should not mean certain views are watered down or not articulated.

Whatever views some of our residents might hold, and however we as councillors reflect them, the outcomes of the Review into Access to Primary Care will not be based on one particular opinion. Far from it. The recommendations will reflect a view taken, on balance, by the whole committee after all opinion and evidence has been considered. That's how the scrutiny process works, and we will be seeing a lot more of it after the decision taken earlier today.

As Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee, I will promote and articulate the evidence-based findings of the whole committee, and with reference to Cllr Martin's question, if those recommendations include sending a message to Government calling for further investment or a change of approach regarding any aspect of Primary Care services, then I will do so.

### **Question to the Chairman of the Finance Committee from Councillor Jim Creamer**

How will the increase in energy costs effect the medium and long term finances of this council?

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

Thank you, Councillor Creamer, for your question on a subject that is very much at the forefront of my mind as Chairman of the Finance Committee as we move towards setting out our 2022/23 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy plans.

The short answer to your question is that the increase in energy costs will put extra pressure on the finances of this Council, though the precise extent of this pressure will only become clear over time. I won't deny it's an uncertain situation for public and private sector organisations across the country. Potential future increases in the Council's utility costs next year could be in the region of 10 – 25% due to movement in the wholesale energy markets. However, this Council is better insulated against such pressures than some other organisations both because of the proactive way we manage our energy purchasing, and our overall policy to minimise energy consumption in line with our environmental commitments. This was true even before we formally declared a Climate Emergency.

We are somewhat cushioned from short-term price rises by the early, forward purchasing of both our gas and electricity through our purchasing partner Crown Commercial Service (CCS). We benefit from the bulk-buying power of CCS, and we buy our energy in what are technically called "V30 baskets". The V30 baskets mean that CCS traders can purchase or sell energy from the wholesale markets up to 30 months before and during the supply year in order to maximise the opportunity to secure good prices and mitigate against volatile markets. That energy is then supplied to us through energy companies appointed to the relevant CCS framework.

We do expect to encounter price increases next April, but I can confirm that our existing Medium Term Financial Strategy already includes some assumed pressures relating to future energy cost increases, so at least a proportion of any new increases will be offset.

The council has also seen a rollout of wide range of energy efficiency measures designed to cut costs and reduce our carbon footprint across our corporate highways and property estate in recent years. Two 'big ticket' examples are of course the rollout of LED street lighting across Nottinghamshire, and our investment in energy-saving measures when new estate and building upgrades have been undertaken. This has reduced energy usage from 83 million kWh in 2014/15 down to 49 million kWh in 2021. The impact of these changes, and of our property rationalisation programme, is a reduction of 25% in energy costs over the past 7 years across property and highway assets, which helps protect us from some of the impact of future energy price rises.



Regular update reports on energy price pressures, as well as all other pressures on our budget, will be brought to Finance Committee in the usual way in the coming months. The spike in energy costs is a developing, volatile situation which may or may not persist, so our pressure estimates will be subject to continual update and change, but our finance officers will make assumptions based on the best available evidence as they produce reports up leading to our budget-setting meeting next February.

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

Nottinghamshire County Council is now forecasting that Gedling Access Road is facing an overspend of £5.4million. Will the Chairman guarantee that this money will not come from the Highway's Maintenance Scheme allocations for this and subsequent years?

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

Thank you, Councillor Hollis for your question.

The money will not come from the Highways Maintenance Scheme allocations for this and subsequent years.