

## **APPENDIX B**

### **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2023 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

#### **Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Penny Gowland**

With the Prime Minister's recent decision to water down the UK's Carbon Reduction commitments by pushing back the ban on buying new petrol and diesel cars to 2035,

Does the Leader agree that this will have a negative impact upon business investment here in Nottinghamshire, particularly in renewable energy sectors which this Council have stated are necessary to delivering its stated ambition for Green Growth in the County?

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

There seems to be a real desire to give me a full hour to say whatever I like today, which I'm very grateful for, and grateful for the work we're doing in this space actually. I'm looking forward to some of the questions that are coming forward, but generally you won't be surprised to hear, Councillor Gowland that my answer is "No, I don't agree".

I was absolutely delighted with the Prime Minister's change in approach, it's something I've been calling for over several years, so no, I don't think it will have a negative impact at all, in fact I think the change in emphasis is really good news for Nottinghamshire.

First, you mention the ban on petrol and diesel cars specifically, so let's touch on that one first. It's great news for the security of jobs and investment in the automotive industry in our area. We have one major car manufacturer nearby, that's Toyota at Burnaston at Derby, who welcomed the change and welcomed the recognition that the future of car manufacturing and fuels isn't just electric, it's broader than that. It's a whole range of potential options, and I mentioned earlier today that I was at the Hydrogen Summit at Toyota just last week, as one example. Next closest to here, and to our constituents, Jaguar Land Rover, backs the Prime Minister, and says it's a 'pragmatic' approach in line with what the rest of the world is doing. So as a region, the East Midlands, the whole Midlands in fact, the sector is supportive of the move. One senior auto industry executive was quoted in the Financial Times as saying: "Some people will be cross in public, but the general view will be a collective sigh of relief" from the industry.

What needs to be recognised is that these are private businesses. If they've made business plans to shift to fully electric vehicles by 2030, there's absolutely nothing stopping them from doing that. Fair play to them if they want to do that. Nissan, for example, have said they still plan to do it by 2030. Good for them. The Prime Minister's not telling them not to, or that they can't. It shouldn't be Government's place, quite frankly, to tell private businesses what they can and can't make anyway, if I'm totally

honest. But if they think there's a strong market there for electric vehicles and that's the way forward, then they can build and sell them, regardless of this announcement.

What it has done is given a bit more flexibility to the sector, and recognised, as Toyota have said, that electric is not the only route forward in terms of the UK exploring clean fuels. Most importantly, it's brought our deadline in line with most of the rest of the world, who have already set 2035 as their aim, or moved to 2035 before we did. That's really important, not least for jobs in Derby, 2,500 people employed at the Toyota Burnaston site, because if the market disappears for petrol and diesel cars in the UK in 2030, but is still active everywhere else in the world until 2035, then guess what? Manufacturers will go and make petrol and diesel cars everywhere else rather than here, and those jobs will be lost, and our economy will suffer as a result.

So quite the opposite, Councillor Gowland, to your suggestion, I think this announcement is really good news for the security of 2,500 jobs in our region, and for Toyota's continued commitment and investment in creating more jobs and growth through that hydrogen research as well as other things.

The other key bit, the second part of your question regarding clean and renewable energy. You're right that the County Council has said this is important, it's what we want to see in terms of that growth in green jobs and clean energy in this and other sectors, like for example hydrogen at Toyota, at Chinook in Nottingham and High Marnham, but not just hydrogen. As a region we're into modular nuclear at Rolls Royce, we're into fusion energy at West Burton, we're into clean fuels, again Rolls Royce, Toyota, East Midlands Airport involved in that work – aviation fuel in particular, can make a huge difference – and a tonne of research and expertise at the University of Nottingham in particular, with further expansion of the skills and training that's needed in that space, and more and more investment coming our way.

I think the Prime Minister's announcement refocusing the national energy onto this stuff too, and there's a huge amount of national focus on fusion and hydrogen in particular, benefits our County in a big way. He's not backed away from any of that, in fact he's embraced it even more in what he's said: that Britain will focus on these things – on clean growth, on investment that creates jobs, boosts skills, focuses on tech and innovation to tackle these climate challenges, and not to get stuck on arbitrary deadlines, on banning stuff, like petrol cars that would cause prices on the second hand market to rise and price people out of their ability to drive, on charging people more through Labour's ULEZ schemes or Workplace Parking levies, on forcing people to buy new boilers they can't afford. Many of my constituents still get coal allowance, never mind heat pumps, Chairman, they're struggling to get by, and so they have been concerned that Government is expecting them to buy a new car, to buy a new boiler, fit a new heat pump, and all the rest when they can't afford it. That has been a huge cause of stress that crosses my desk on a regular basis. They've had that pressure lifted, and all the evidence suggests that people are very happy with the Prime Minister's announcements.

Since last week the gap between Labour and Conservatives reduced by 8 points in the polls in the wake of those announcements, and it shows, I think, that the public overwhelmingly agree with what the Prime Minister has said, and so do I.

**Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Tom Smith**

Councillor Clarke, as you are aware, our announcement that we have secured the future of the 141 bus service was major news for communities along this lengthy bus route, particularly for my communities of Rainworth and Blidworth.

Would you be able to detail what support Nottinghamshire County Council has given to secure the future of the 141 bus service?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE**

This item was also detailed in the Leader's Executive Report, but I'm really pleased that Nottinghamshire County Council has been able to support the continuation of the 141 bus service. This route is so very important to many communities through the centre of Nottinghamshire. The bus provides essential links to other public transport options and enables residents to access a range of commercial and recreational services.

That's why we awarded a contract to Stagecoach to operate the full service in September 2022 following the withdrawal of the previous operator. Since then, the service has seen increased passenger levels and greater reliability, and I must commend Stagecoach for all the work they have done to increase the reliability so that those passenger levels can increase.

I am therefore delighted to report that, in partnership with Stagecoach, we have now extended the 141 service contract. The extended contract reduces the cost to this authority of subsidising the route, with that increased patronage, with Stagecoach taking a greater commercial stake in the future operation and growth of the service. They are keen to improve the service further, for example by increasing the range of ticketing options available to passengers.

The County Council will subsidise the route with £450,000 per annum sourced from bus support grants and its local bus support budget. Costs are expected to reduce in the future as passenger growth and income increases, but in terms of support right now, this represents a massive commitment by this authority, ensuring that we are doing our best to provide excellent bus services for our communities.

Many other local authorities do not provide financial support to protect services like the 141, and it is a mark of this administration's commitment to promoting public transport that we still set money aside for this purpose.

**Question to the Chairman of Governance and Ethics Committee from Councillor Steve Carr**

The minutes of the Full Council meeting on 31 March 2022 Page 6 item 7 state:

“That the Members Working Group, reporting to Governance and Ethics Committee as appropriate, be authorised to maintain an overview of the operation of the new arrangements during the first year of executive arrangements and to make any suggested proposals for change to the Governance and Ethics Committee for recommendation to Full Council.”

Proposals from the Members Working Group were not discussed at Governance and Ethics Committee but went straight to Full Council. Why?

**Response from the Chairman of Governance and Ethics Committee, Councillor Philip Owen**

The minutes of Full Council on 31 March 2022 are written and recorded as he describes.

The Members Working Group did indeed ‘maintain an overview of the operation of the new arrangements during the first year of executive arrangements’.

I appreciate, however, that Independent Alliance members might not be aware of what was discussed at the Working Group meetings in question, because they weren’t present, even though all groups, and the non-aligned member of Council, were invited to have representation on this Working Group.

The Working Group over the last 12-months examined the new Executive Arrangements in considerable detail, focusing especially on Council Procedure Rules, Scrutiny Review, and Financial Thresholds on Key Decisions.

Regarding Council Procedure Rules, the Members Working Group considered and endorsed several changes. These were designed to improve the smooth running of the Full Council meeting; to update and clarify current arrangements and practices; and to provide greater equity between the Groups.

The terms of reference for Governance and Ethics Committee refer to ‘Oversight of the Constitution’ and making ‘recommendations to Full Council’. However, this is always subject to the overriding authority of Full Council as the sovereign body. It is not a requirement or pre-requisite for this to happen before Full Council exercises its authority to make changes to the Constitution.

The minutes of the Full Council from 31 March 2022 state: ‘That the Members Working Group, reporting to Governance and Ethics Committee as appropriate, be authorised to maintain an overview of the operation of the new arrangements’.

‘As appropriate’ are obviously important words in that minute.

In practical terms, the reason it was deemed appropriate to take these proposals from the Working Group directly to Full Council was because it seemed sensible and fair to give every Member the opportunity to read, comment and vote on changes to procedures which would affect all of us.

As Governance and Ethics Committee Chairman, I was perfectly comfortable with this approach. Taking the Working Group's proposals to Governance and Ethics Committee first would only have delayed the process, bearing in mind all Governance and Ethics Committee members are Full Council members anyway.

I understand why Members would be concerned if important proposals and decisions on the future conduct of Full Council meetings had been debated and finally approved only by a restricted group of members, but that was not the case here.

On the contrary, we simply expedited the process by which all members would have the opportunity to comment and vote on these proposals, ensuring that the decision we took was both fair and transparent.

**Question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management from Councillor Sam Smith**

There has been a lot of coverage in the media over the last few weeks about school buildings that were affected by RAAC. Could the Cabinet Member please give some reassurances and explain how this matter has been managed and dealt with in Nottinghamshire?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management, Councillor Sam Smith**

I really welcome this because I know people will be concerned about this in Nottinghamshire. This is not about the theatre of this building here and this place, it's about reassuring people out there and that's why I welcome this as a question. In 2019, the Government issued an alert regarding RAAC planks, setting out concerns over this specific building material. They also provided a date range within which it was thought this construction type was used.

In response, Nottinghamshire County Council commissioned Arc Partnership to undertake a review of all Council maintained properties and maintained schools constructed during the date range in question: 1960 – 1980.

Desk-top investigations allowed the presence of RAAC to be ruled out across most Council buildings, with visits required to a handful of sites to confirm that no RAAC was present.

More recent guidance revised the dates that the RAAC planks were used in construction, now covering the period 1930-1980. In response to this, Arc Partnership were further instructed to review buildings built between 1930 and 1960, the period not previously considered.

Arc have completed the desk-top assessment and have undertaken physical inspections of any sites deemed necessary, and as this task now nears completion, again no RAAC has been found.

The Council's estate is managed and maintained by a combination of Council officers and Arc partnership, using commissioned contractors as necessary. The building

stock is widely understood, with technical experts and contractors active across the estate on a daily basis, undertaking projects and maintenance work, so the monitoring of our sites for emerging risks of this or any other type is part of our standard approach.

**Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Michelle Welsh**

In relation to the Council's recent statement on RAAC in schools, published on 1 September 2023;

Since becoming Leader of this Council in 2021, when were you first made aware of the previous survey work undertaken by this Council alongside the DFE, which would have helped identify serious building concerns in Maintained Schools and Academies, such as RAAC?

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

As Councillor Girling has already said, work to investigate and tackle RAAC in school buildings in Nottinghamshire began on DfE advice back in 2018/19.

No RAAC was identified in maintained schools – which are the ones within our responsibility – so there has been no need for me, up until the point of the national guidance changing in the summer, to really get involved in this, although I can assure you that Councillor Taylor I know was sending emails backwards and forwards in the Spring of this year in advance of that national conversation, trying to seek assurances within her own remit that we had tackled this to the best of our ability.

When the [national] guidance did change, I myself had conversations with officers and was informed that there are no issues within our maintained schools, and that we've had this in hand in effect since 2019 when that guidance was first issued.

Forgive me, and I don't mean this to be political at all, I'm a little bit confused by the second part of your question, and I mean this genuinely in terms of a question back to you perhaps for the supplementary question. You ask when I found out about the work, accepting that it happened, but then suggest that the work could have made a difference, but obviously it did happen, and there was no RAAC, so I'm a little bit confused about what you're asking, and I'd just ask you in your supplementary [question] to clarify that and I'll come back to you.

**Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Anne Callaghan BEM**

On 8 June 2023 the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership published a Review of safeguarding practice in response to events at Harlow Academy.

Last week, in interviews with parents of children who went to Harlow academy, the BBC reported that their children were 'left traumatised' by the abuse they experienced.

How confident is the Leader in the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership in overseeing the changes recommended by this Review?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Councillor Tracey Taylor on behalf of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP**

The Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, which is a partnership of the local authority, Police and the Integrated Care Board, chose to commission an independent author to write a report examining lessons to be learnt from the serious issues at Harlow Academy. This was not a report that had to be produced under any guidance or legislation, but the Partnership felt strongly that there were areas that needed investigation.

Parents and carers of children at the former Harlow Academy were directly involved with the independent author in the writing of the report, as reflected in the report itself. The report did not find that failings in the local authority or the safeguarding partnership were directly responsible for the issues at Harlow Academy, but there are lessons about how such concerns can be identified and acted on in a more timely way.

Many of the recommendations extend beyond the Partnership and indeed beyond Nottinghamshire, and the Independent Scrutineer for the Partnership, Dr Mark Peel, is corresponding with both Ofsted and the Department for Education to monitor their response to this report. Those recommendations that are directly for the Partnership are subject to an action plan and progress will be actively monitored through the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group, on which I and Councillor Anderson both sit.

Given that approach, I am confident the partnership will deliver on the independent author's recommendations.

**Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Pringle**

There is currently an ongoing industrial dispute between Nottinghamshire County Council's recycling contractor Veolia and the workers at Mansfield's Materials Recycling Facility, Ashfield's Welsh Croft Close site and Bassetlaw's Claylands Avenue site, represented by the GMB Union.

What actions have you taken as Council Leader to intervene to maintain continuity of Council Services and what actions are you taking to support those involved to resolve the dispute?

**Response from the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, Councillor Neil Clarke MBE on behalf of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP**

Yes of course, I am well aware of the ongoing dispute between the GMB union and Veolia regarding the reopening of their existing local pay agreement.

Whilst this is fundamentally an issue for Veolia and the GMB to resolve, the Council as Waste Disposal Authority has been working closely with our partner borough and district council Waste Collection Authorities, and Veolia, to maintain essential kerbside collection services for residents throughout any disruption caused by the industrial action.

Relevant officers have met almost daily to put together a set of operational contingencies with Veolia to minimise the impact on residents and assist Waste Collection Authorities where their own collection staff have been unwilling to cross the GMB picket lines. Indeed, I have been in constant contact with our officers, receiving regular updates about the situation on the ground, sometimes many times a day. In fact this morning, Mr Vice Chairman, it was on at least three if not four occasions even before this meeting started.

Whilst the majority of Veolia sites have been operational during the strike, including all the Household Waste Recycling Centres, I am aware that some collections have been delayed due to the actions of GMB in hindering and in some cases blocking access to facilities. We continue to provide alternative sites to Waste Collection Authorities for the receipt and transfer of waste should they need to use them.

Just to be clear again, this dispute is a matter between Veolia and the GMB and not for the County Council to intervene. However, we continue to monitor events and take any action necessary to ensure that our residents receive the best possible waste management service, so we do monitor the actual operations to ensure the smooth running, as much as possible, of the operation, whilst the dispute continues.