

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 27 MAY 2021 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Kate Foale

On behalf of the Labour Group, I'd like to congratulate you on your election to the Mansfield North Division and your new role as Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council. Given your existing responsibilities as MP for Mansfield, what assurance can you provide of your ability to serve all of Nottinghamshire's residents fairly and equitably over the next four years?

Response from Councillor Ben Bradley MP, Leader of the Council

Thank you Councillor Foale for giving me chance to talk about it again. I think we have discussed this a lot in the media over the last few weeks and tried to put across the potential benefits, I imagine the journalists in the corner at the back could probably tell you the answer as clearly as I could at this stage, so I do think we have explained this quite openly and quite publicly. I think there are opportunities in time to get the new roles to build on both local and national priorities for us to be able to go and paint a case both for my residents in Mansfield and for the whole County in Westminster and we have seen already examples of those things tying together.

To answer your point directly, I think, around the challenge of representing Mansfield and working for the whole County, I don't think that's unusual in that every single one of us and every leader of a council represents a small area or division within the whole and so I don't think that's a unique situation or anything new to be honest.

I have, clearly, a challenge of dividing my time, but there is a lot of crossover between the two roles. A lot of the issues, macroeconomic issues for us as a county and East Midlands are things that I pick up and work on in both of my roles for example, and I think we have already seen, and colleagues who have been involved in discussions and briefings over the last few weeks will have already seen some of the benefits that we can bring to the people of Nottinghamshire by tying these two things together. I know that my group will hold me to account on delivering on that representation, I know that this Council will as well, and we will do our best to deliver on that opportunity.

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

One of the ongoing concerns for our residents when changes to Nottinghamshire County Council services have been proposed is a lack of meaningful engagement and adequate consultation with those affected. Can the Leader outline his vision for inclusive consultation ahead of any policy or service changes which may come under this new administration?

Response from Councillor Ben Bradley MP, Leader of the Council

Thank you for your question which again is a good opportunity for me to talk about some of the proactive work we have been doing already in the first few weeks of our Administration, to try and get closer to communities which is one of the things I certainly feel and recognise that perhaps the County Council hasn't always been seen to be engaged directly with local communities in the way that districts sometimes have, for example.

That's something we want to change. To help and engage with our residents over the services that are important to them and that engagement, as part of their democratic rights is something they rightly expect from us.

So, as we come out of the challenges of coronavirus, as we look at our key priorities over the summer, we intend to launch a huge consultation, one of the biggest the Council has ever done, over the course of the summer to put together our council plan and long term priorities which will be overseen by Councillor Laughton and we want to invest some significant time and energy in having those conversations about the way forward. It will be available for everyone. It will work alongside engagement with elected representatives here and we are looking at all sorts of different methods as to how we might do this, both digital and face to face and any opportunities to go out there and speak to our communities.

I have asked officers to explore how we can engage more consistently with people on issues that matter to them. It is early days as we try and do that, whether that is online, whether its forums we can pull together, we now have a huge database of people who have contacted us to volunteer over the course of the last year to 18 months and people who are clearly engaged with our communities and issues that we can now talk to. So, there are opportunities for us to go and do that and I am confident that we will be able to engage effectively with residents.

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

The recent Queens speech outlined this governments plans for the upcoming year yet failed to mention any Social Care funding reforms. How does the Chair of Finance see this impacting on the ability of Nottinghamshire County Council to continue providing the same high quality services across Adult Social Care?

Response from Councillor Richard Jackson, Chairman of the Finance Committee

In the Queen's Speech on 11th May there was a promise that proposals on social care reform will be brought forward. On 19th May just a week after the Queen's Speech, in reply to a question put directly by the Council Leader Councillor Ben Bradly MP in his other capacity as a member of parliament, the Minister for Health Ed Argar stated that, I'll quote:

"The Prime Minister and my Right Honorable Friend [the Secretary of State] have been absolutely clear in their determination that we will bring forward our proposals for

reform of social care this year, so that everyone receives the dignified care they deserve within a system that is sustainable.'

So, Chairman, it is incorrect to say that the Queen's Speech did not mention social care reform. In fact, we have a commitment that they will come forward this year. Therefore, we should await the announcement and the details within it, in order to determine exactly what the impact will be on social care services in Nottinghamshire.

And, I would add that we are the best placed local authority in the country now, through our leader, to make sure that we lobby and get the best for this County and for the people that rely on Adult Social Care services from us.

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

It is very encouraging to finally see the issue of climate change being given the necessary weight by this authority. Will this enthusiasm extend to agreeing to review the existing recycling contract in order to streamline and simplify arrangements and improve recycling rates across the County?

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

What a great question! I say that because it is almost as though I had planted the question with Councillor Gowland, or alternatively she's been listening in on my conversations with officers over the last few weeks. Whichever it is, the answer to the question is yes. I am pleased that this Council is making carbon reduction a priority, more of that later on in the agenda.

This Council has taken the issue of climate change very seriously for many years and introduced a range of green initiatives over the last four years. Not only agreeing to do it, but I am already discussing with officers to actually initiate it. It has now been 15 years since the start of the contract. Perceptions, public opinion and demands and modern methods have changed since the start of the contract. They were not known then, so now is the time to ask the question whether the contract is actually still fit for purpose. So, I repeat, the answer is yes.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor Michelle Welsh

This government have placed significant emphasis on the development of Family Hubs, with the associated tagline of 'Growing up Well'. Could the Chair articulate how these will differ from the Surestart Children's Centres that commenced under a Labour government?

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

Children's Centre Services have developed significantly in Nottinghamshire over recent years. Last year, they returned to the direct control of this local authority, having previously been commissioned from an external provider.

Services are now targeted in particular at the parents of very young children considered most at risk of poor outcomes, using early, strong, evidence-based interventions. They are designed to reach out into communities, rather than only being based in buildings that some families had previously struggled to access.

I am pleased to announce that the service has very recently received the UNICEF Gold Award for being baby friendly, making it only the third local authority service to have achieved this honour.

Whilst we already have well-developed models of early help and protection for school-aged children and those approaching adulthood, we are now examining potential models for the introduction of Family Hubs in Nottinghamshire.

Family Hubs offer an opportunity for public and voluntary sector services to become better coordinated at a local level, serving children right up until the point of adulthood. This is different from SureStart, which was more firmly focused on pre-school children and building-based, universal services.

Options for the Family Hub model are under consideration by a group that includes our strategic partners in health and the voluntary sector. This will dovetail with the work on early help, led through the strategies overseen by the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Best Start Strategy.

I would just add, having been at the Children's Safeguarding Board earlier this week that the refresh on that partnership document should be coming through to Children and Young People's Committee in the next cycle.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee from Councillor Anne Callaghan

The Department of Education have recently agreed to 5 councils having their SEND deficits written off, a sum totalling some £100 million. Could the Chair of Children and Young People's Committee update Members on any plans or discussions to comprehensively evaluate the real SEND need in Nottinghamshire in order to ensure that as an authority we have sufficient funding from government to properly meet the needs of all our children and young people?

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

Nottinghamshire County Council provides detailed annual statistics to Government each year on children with SEND, and we review these through our SEND

Accountability Board. This, alongside our direct engagement with children, young people, and families, informs the strategic action plan of that Board.

We estimate that there are some 11,000 children with disabilities and additional needs in Nottinghamshire, the majority of whom receive all of the support they need in a mainstream school or college. There are some 3,500 children and young adults aged 0 to 25 who have higher level needs and an Education, Health and Care Plan. Our priority is to understand the needs of this group and how we can most effectively provide support to them and their families.

A detailed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has been commissioned through the SEND Accountability Board and is expected to be completed in the next 6 to 12 months. This should help us to predict future requirements in far more detail.

During the previous administration, the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, Councillor Owen, and the current Council Leader Councillor Bradley MP in his capacity as MP for Mansfield, made strong representations to Government regarding the Higher Needs Block funding formula. This work included a personal meeting with Nadhim Zahawi – a Children and Families minister at that time - to lobby for extra resources. This was successful. The amount of SEND money available to the County has increased significantly by 39% - that £25 million per annum – between 2018 and the current financial year.

As a result, we are not in the same position as some areas who have had to roll deficits forward over a number of years. Some of these areas are receiving additional help with those deficits, but there are requirements attached to this funding, including following a strict recovery plan. This is not without consequence as they will be required to bring their spending back into line with available budgets swiftly.

The High Needs budget in Nottinghamshire remains a challenge and we continue to press Government for further funding. However, we are not carrying a deficit, and OFSTED and the CQC have inspected the local area provision for children with SEND and found services to be generally well delivered, with no need for written statements of action prescribing immediate improvements.