

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 22 July 2022 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People from Councillor Tom Hollis

Do you think there is a link between educational attainment and school funding cuts?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Tracey Taylor

Thank you, Councillor Hollis for your question, for hypothetical question perhaps: 'Do I think there is a link between educational attainment and school funding cuts?'

The short answer to this closed question would be 'No', or most certainly not in the way that the question seeks to imply.

Whatever the per pupil funding level for schools across the country has been in any given year, we have seen pupils in some schools thrive and do well, while pupils in other schools have done less well with the same amount of funding.

In October 2021, the Government confirmed that it would continue to deliver year on year, real term per pupil increases to school funding, investing a further £4.7 billion in the core school budget in 2024-2025.

This is on top of the settlement provided by the 2019 Spending Review which provided the biggest increase in school funding in a decade.

It should be noted, however, that budgets in schools are strongly linked to the number of pupils on roll, so where schools experience a significant drop in numbers, or where pupil numbers are regularly low as in some of our small schools, managing the budget can be a challenge.

Establishing a robust, causal link between school funding and attainment is difficult because there are a wide range of other factors that influence pupil attainment. In 2017 in their 'School funding and pupil outcomes: literature review and regression analysis', the DfE stated that there were only a few research studies sophisticated enough to provide robust estimates of the impact of school spending on attainment.

They concluded that whilst it was not possible to establish a consistent link between funding levels and outcomes in schools, the weight of evidence from studies suggested that additional school resources did positively influence attainment, although the effects were relatively modest at all Key Stages.

The key factor in outcomes often seems to be the standard of leadership and teaching in a school. This is irrespective of whether the school is located in an area of relative disadvantage or affluence. There are many examples across the country where schools in disadvantaged areas have enabled their pupils to produce outstanding

outcomes relative to expectations, and there are schools from apparently prosperous areas where pupils have performed less well than expected.

Quality of teaching is now seen to be the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Being taught by a high-quality teacher can add almost half a GCSE grade per subject to a given pupil's results.

Quality of teaching and leadership is of course a major determining factor in Ofsted assessments, so I think it's good news that 86.5% of Nottinghamshire pupils attend a 'good' or 'outstanding' school in the County, as rated by Ofsted. We want this figure to rise further, which can only be beneficial for the educational attainment and future prospects of young people growing up and being educated in this county.

The last validated attainment data shows that there continue to be gains in children's attainment across Nottinghamshire:

- In Early Years Foundation Stage, 70.6% of children achieved a good level of development in 2019 which is an improvement on 2018 outcomes and the gap to national has continued to narrow over the last two years;
- By the end of Key Stage 2 the proportion of children achieving above the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths in Nottinghamshire is above national average;
- At secondary level, Nottinghamshire's standard pass outcomes for GCSE English and Maths were ranked 47th in 2019, that's up from 65th in 2018, compared across all 150 published Local Authorities nationally.

Some Nottinghamshire districts such as Mansfield and Ashfield face higher than average levels of deprivation and current attainment is below the national and county pictures. The DfE has allocated additional funding through the Education Improvement Area Grant to support improved attainment and outcomes for these children and young people. In his absence, I would actually thank the Leader of this Council for his petitioning to secure those improved funds

The DfE expanded the National Tutoring Programme in recognition of the potential impact of the Coronavirus and lockdowns on pupil attainment. The expansion of the programme was supported by £1 billion-worth of national funding, allowing Nottinghamshire schools to have greater flexibility to offer 15-hour tutoring courses that meet the needs of their pupils and help to support improved attainment where individual children most need it.

I'm watching your face, Tom, I've lost you already haven't I?

Additional funding continues to be available to support our most vulnerable learners through special educational needs funding and pupil premium.

Local and national systems of accountability are in place to hold individual schools to account for the attainment and outcomes of all learners, including those who are most vulnerable. DfE Performance tables, Ofsted and our Nottinghamshire County Council Educational Opportunities for All Performance Board continue to share data and relevant research with learning providers, delivering guidance on the most effective strategies to improve educational outcomes and holding key partners and teams to account for the impact of their contribution.

Whilst not the only factor, ensuring the effective use of available funding undoubtedly contributes to supporting pupil attainment, educational outcomes, and effective preparation for adulthood.

Councillor Hollis' question does not really define what he means by '*school funding*'. He may, or may not, also be considering the amount of money invested into improving school buildings in recent years. Generally speaking, I would argue that good leadership and teaching in a relatively poor quality school building is still more likely to improve educational attainment than poor quality leadership and teaching in a new or well-refurbished school building, but that certainly doesn't mean we shouldn't invest in new school buildings.

Nottinghamshire County Council has invested some £116.5 million in new and refurbished school buildings since 2017. If I was a pupil, I'd certainly prefer to go to school each day in a modern high-quality facility which, if *combined* with inspiring leadership and teaching, could only benefit my educational attainment.

In summary, Chairman, the amount of money we invest in our children's education will always be important, whether we're talking about funding per pupil or investing in school infrastructure. In terms of educational attainment, the limited studies available suggest that the amount we spend can have a modest beneficial effect, but only in tandem with other factors, especially quality of teaching.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Earlier this year, Trent Barton announced that from August 3rd they were cancelling evening buses on the 141 bus route that goes from Sutton-in-Ashfield to Nottingham. This bus serves over a dozen communities across Nottinghamshire along with Kings Mill Hospital and City Hospital.

On a post on their website – Trent Barton said it was "Due to the withdrawal of Nottinghamshire County Council funding." Last week, they announced that from September 4th, they were scrapping the service altogether. Close to 2000 residents have signed our petition against the scrapping of this vital service.

Can the Chairman please outline what discussions this Council have had with Trent Barton about the scrapping of the 141 bus service and detail how much funding has been withdrawn by this County Council?

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

This is a very serious question but marred by so much misinformation. Why spoil a story with giving the actual true facts?

It is frustrating that the printed media publish press releases that have been given to them without checking whether they are true, or consulting with the County Council first to check the facts. And thus, the media misleading the public.

The question starts by claiming, as Councillor Zadrozny iterated, [that] earlier this year Trent Barton announced that from 3rd August they were cancelling evening buses on the 141 bus route.

Was that this year Mr Chairman? No.

Was that last year? No.

Was that the year before? No.

That "August 3rd" was in 2014, eight years ago, as confirmed by Trent Barton!

So, I can confirm, Mr Chairman, that no County Council funding has been withdrawn from the 141 service during this administration or by the Council at all in relation to that 141 service, and also the Council's current £2,900 a month support for this route is still available, is still current, and continues to be paid. So there's been no withdrawal of funding from this Council at all, Mr Chairman, for that service, even though it was claimed in the media that that was the case.

As far as discussions with Trent Barton are concerned, as part of our bus network review required by the Bus Service Improvement Plan, officers have held regular meetings with all bus operators to help identify any at-risk services to ensure we are well placed to respond to any proposed withdrawals. However, Trent Barton informed us last Friday 1st July that they would be issuing a media release to withdraw the service - their decision - from September 4th as it is no longer commercially viable even with the continuing County Council subsidy.

Removing it will also from their perspective relieve some of the pressure caused by persistent driver shortages as far as Trent Barton are concerned. And of course, the reason for that withdrawal of the service by Trent Barton is because the Bus Recovery Grant comes to an end then, which obviously reduces the support that the Government is paying direct to Trent Barton, Mr Chairman.

I spoke with Tom Morgan, Group Director at Trent Barton on Monday just gone, and again on Tuesday and discussed the issue with him. He confirmed that the route is no longer commercially viable and he confirmed that that "August 3rd" was eight years ago - Trent Barton confirmed it. So, he confirmed it was no longer commercially viable and that Trent Barton wished to withdraw from the route in order to provide greater resilience to their other services.

Following the announcement, officers are working hard to develop a range of options to provide alternative bus services and officers will therefore be bringing forward tenders in the coming days to provide suitable alternative solutions in time for that withdrawal. It is worth restating that as a Council we do compare well with other authorities in terms of the funding that we prioritise for local buses. We have been successful in securing £31 million of Bus Service Improvement Plan funding and expect to be awarded £3.9 million for supporting Nottinghamshire bus services through the Covid recovery period. And, Mr Chairman, this is an addition to the £4.1 million per year core investment to supply local services that we provide.

However, it's an ongoing situation, Mr Chairman. I am arranging further discussions with Trent Barton and I've agreed to meet with the Managing Director when he returns from holiday. I'll meet with him on Monday and I'm inviting all divisional members through which the route runs to join that meeting as well, as they are all affected, but I don't envisage the situation to be changed as far as Trent Barton are concerned and the service.

I am also writing to all local members that are impacted by Trent Barton's decision and of course we'll keep them informed as we look to develop alternative service provision for the affected communities.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Finance from Councillor Lee Waters

Could the Cabinet Member for finance quantify the impact of inflation on this Council this year, the rise in National Insurance and the rise in energy prices?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Richard Jackson

Can I thank Councillor Waters for his question not least because it gives us the opportunity this afternoon to reassure the public of Nottinghamshire that we are well placed to weather the storm of inflation and to continue to deliver the services that they rely on.

The likely impact of inflation for the coming year is estimated in our Council Budget reports every February, and then on an ongoing basis by Financial Monitoring Reports. These reports were taken to Finance Committee prior to the changes in governance arrangements and are now received by myself and then published under the new 'Cabinet and Leader' model.

We know that inflationary pressures have been impacting this Council in several ways. These include:

- Higher prices for building and construction materials along with a shortage of these materials;
- Staffing costs, particularly in the social care sector, but also including catering, facilities management, drivers, and our own staffing, largely due to competition from other industries paying higher salaries;

and, of course

- We are facing large rises in both gas and electricity prices, for reasons that have been widely discussed and documented at the national and indeed international level, so I won't go over that issue again here this afternoon.

The County Council has taken steps when constructing this year's budget to set aside reserves to manage these issues in the short-term. This is the kind of careful and prudent management that our residents are entitled to expect from us.

One of the measures that has protected us from the harshness of the rise in electricity and gas prices has been our forward-thinking in buying energy well in advance and at fixed prices, providing us with some security about the levels of funding we will need, even though the cost of these packages will gradually increase.

Likewise, our continuing investment in the rollout of LED street lighting technology is paying off better than expected, with reduced energy consumption and reduced costs compared with what we would have been paying to maintain the old-style of lighting.

Inflation has an impact both on our revenue and capital programmes.

As far as capital is concerned, it is each individual budget holder's responsibility to ensure every effort is made to manage their programmes within the approved funding envelopes. Where this is not possible, issues with capital budgets must be raised as early as possible through our monthly capital monitoring exercises. Subsequently, if necessary, approval will be sought to vary the capital programme through a Latest Estimated Cost Report or through the usual capital approval channels. We saw some impact from inflation on our capital programme during last year. We'll continue to monitor this going forward.

In the case of our revenue budgets, the Council does not automatically provide inflation increases to annual cash limit budgets. An annual exercise is undertaken to review all cost pressures and inflation bids, with the expectation that budget holders will review all possible savings or other cost avoidance measures. Where necessary, additional costs such as material price inflation will be considered as part of the regular Medium Term Financial Strategy updates that will be included in the annual budget approved by Full Council in February each year.

The Financial Monitoring report that will be brought to Cabinet next week and was published yesterday, indicates that the forecast outturn may see an overspend of about £4.4 million, with inflationary pressures appearing in areas of Looked After Children; Highways; and Schools Catering.

We also face significant challenges in the Adult Social Care market, therefore plans will be brought to the next Cabinet meeting to use a combination of Central Government grant and our own reserves, set aside from last year, to implement measures in this sector. No overspend is forecast on Adult Social Care & Public Health budgets.

It's fair to say that the inflationary challenges facing Nottinghamshire County Council are similar to those facing councils across the country. The Local Government Association and the County Councils Network have both been vocal in recent weeks about the additional pressures being felt by their member authorities.

New figures based on research conducted by the County Councils Network (CCN) and the Society of County Treasurers reveal that the estimated cost of inflation in the current financial year for 40 of England's largest councils has risen by 92% in just three months since they set their budgets in March.

With the UK's inflation rate rising from 5.5% at the start of the year to 9% this Spring, and global costs rising, the research estimates that councils' costs from inflation have risen from £789 million as predicted in March when they set their budgets, to £1.5 billion as of last month, leaving a shortfall nationally of £729 million of additional unfunded costs. The CCN points out that County authorities are particularly exposed to these rising costs because of the nature of delivering services in large rural areas. Likewise, at the recent Local Government Association Conference, LGA Chairman James Jamieson said, and I quote:

"Soaring inflation, energy prices and National Living Wage pressures are putting council services at risk... Inflation is not going to come down overnight... Only with adequate long-term funding – to cover increased cost pressures and invest in local services - and the right powers, can councils deliver for our communities, tackle the climate emergency, and level up all parts of the country."

So, Chairman, the major bodies representing us local government, in which we play our part, are making very strong representations to central government about the cost pressures that we face, and this lobbying will no doubt continue in the coming months.

What we still need to remember is that any extra funding we receive comes ultimately from taxpayers, and central government departments face the same inflationary pressures themselves. It would be wrong to suggest that the challenges facing local government can all be solved simply by the new Chancellor of the Exchequer signing a bigger cheque.

At a local and national level, we need to find ways of absorbing these pressures through careful prioritisation and careful financial management. As I've pointed out many times, Nottinghamshire County Council's prudent and proactive approach to budgeting over the past decade has left us better equipped than many other authorities to chart a safe course through these turbulent times. We have sufficient reserves at present to cover any overspends in this current year's budget and we will continue to monitor the situation in our usual detailed and transparent way.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Kate Foale

Does the Leader agree with me that Nottinghamshire County Council should see a rise in Government funding to ensure staffing budgets can afford to rise in line with inflation; and if so, will the Leader, confirm to the Council today his intention to advocate for more Government funding for our hard-working Council staff?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Richard Jackson on behalf of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

The Leader was going to endorse my response to the previous question, so I'll endorse my own response to the previous question!

Can I thank Councillor Foale for her question, a lot of which as I say has already been covered in my previous response.

We obviously know that inflationary pressures will impact the Council in many areas including staffing costs as she points out. We've seen problems around recruitment and retention particularly in the social care sector and we're currently in the process of addressing these challenges through our Transformation and Change Programme, but as I've already mentioned these pressures are also likely to affect catering, facilities management, drivers, and own staffing largely due to competition from other industries who are able to pay higher wages.

The truth is that we're already lobbying for support from Government on this and we have been for some time. We're all in the same boat on this as inflation is having a knock-on effect across all aspects of life.

As I've already highlighted, all major bodies representing us in local government - the LGA, the CCN, the Society of County Treasurers, which we play a significant role in all of them - are already making very strong representations to Government about the cost pressures that we face. This lobbying will continue.

It's not down to any one area to find this funding, some may have to come from Government, but we must also investigate other areas and other sources of funding. This County Council has taken steps, as I have already said, when constructing the budget this year to set aside reserves to manage these pressures, often criticised by opposition parties who would have had us spend those reserves, Mr Chairman, as you know. This is the kind of careful and prudent management, as I've already said, that residents are entitled to expect from us.

Inflation has an impact both on our revenue and our capital programmes. It's in each individual budget holder's responsibility, as I've said previously, to ensure that every effort is made to manage their capital programs within the approved funding envelopes. Where it's not possible, capital budgets must be raised as early as possible through our monthly capital monitoring exercises.

We're well aware of the most significant challenges we face which are in the adult social care market, therefore plans are being brought forward to the next Cabinet meeting to use a combination of Government grant and our reserves set aside from last year to address pressures in this sector, and no overspend is forecast, as I've previously said.

We're obviously not alone, and it's fair to say that inflationary challenges facing Nottinghamshire County Council are similar to those facing others across the country, but, as I said earlier, we are better placed than many to cope with them. We need to find ways locally and nationally of absorbing these pressures and I will highlight again

that we have sufficient reserves at present to cover any overspends in this current year's budget and we'll continue, as I said previously, to monitor the situation in the transparent way that we always have done.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health from Councillor Paul Henshaw

What will be the estimated cost of implementing the Government's social care reforms and will we be able to mitigate any of these costs to ensure that the quality of, and access to, our care does not negatively impact upon our service users?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Councillor Matt Barney

I'd like to thank Councillor Henshaw for your question and for his preamble, and to inform the chamber that there was a preamble to the preamble because Councillor Henshaw in his kindness spoke to me before the session this afternoon to assure me of the opposition's support as we deliver what's going to be an interesting few months ahead. There's a lot going on in the country isn't there and we do need to stand together and work together to do our best for the residents of Nottinghamshire, so I really appreciate both your question, your preamble and your pre-preamble, long may they continue!

Anyway, to get to the point, and it's going to take a little while because it's actually quite a long answer that I've got for you Councillor Henshaw.

Like all local authorities with primary responsibility for adult social care, Nottinghamshire County Council must implement eight pieces of reform to the way it provides these services over the next couple of years.

A paper detailing these reforms, and here it is, it's quite a hefty paper, and the anticipated impact on budgets and staff resources, will be presented at the County Council's Cabinet on 14th July, so next week, so not to pre-empt that too much, and to summarise for the purpose of this question, I just wanted to quickly go through those eight pieces of legislation. The first one being:

- The introduction of a cap on care costs from October 2023, where we will see the introduction of an £86,000 cap on the amount anyone in England will spend on their personal care over their lifetime;
- Secondly, changes to the rates the County Council pays registered providers, such as care homes and home care organisations, through the Fair Price for Care mechanism;
- Thirdly, introduction of an Integrated Care Board and an Integrated Care Partnership – we've referred to it this morning - to deliver joined-up care for the population under the Health & Care Act 2022 and the Government's Build Back Better plan for growth;

- Fourthly, a new Code of Practice for social work in relation to Liberty Protection Safeguards, which were introduced in the Mental Health Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019 to replace the previous Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards or “DOLS” system;
- Fifth, changes to the detention and treatment of adults under the new Mental Health Act, which has implications for the Adult Mental Health Professional service;
- Sixthly, new models of care for workforce Social Care System Improvement in relation to Disabled Facilities Grants and supported housing, reablement, prevention, and outcomes-based commissioning, and improvements in knowledge and skills training to deliver a healthy, sustainable workforce;

I'm getting there. There's two more to come:

- Seven, Integrated Care Systems and Social Care within local authorities will be subject to assurance through the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which is in addition to the CQC inspection regime that has been in place for many years across local provider services, where the department has been rated Good or Outstanding consistently in its regulated services - Reablement, Short Breaks and Shared Lives'.
- And finally, you'll be pleased to know, eighth on our list of statutory things that we need to bring into this Council, as part of the Integration White Paper, we will be required to make improvements to the pooling of budgets, the digital sharing of care records and the development of joint roles within our workforce, in order to better join up care for the local population.

Councillor Henshaw asks what will the cost of implementing these reforms be?

Well Chairman, I don't wish to pre-empt completely the paper that will come to Cabinet next week, but I can say that in 2014 the Council published the potential capacity and cost requirements for Part 2 of the Care Act, which ranged from £40 million to £51 million depending on the number of self-funders that came forward.

Several planning assumptions have changed since then and these need to be considered in the modelling, namely:

- introduction of the Three Conversations approach within Social Care;
- the Asset Thresholds and Cap value have changed;
- the type of care cost that counts toward the cap has changed;
- the economic situation has changed, quite dramatically, with cost of living increases meaning that self-funders may come forward at an earlier stage than anticipated.

In the report 'Preparing for Reform' by the County Council Network and Newton – which is a UK based specialist in operational improvement – the authors conclude that the Government could potentially need to spend half of the Health & Social Care Levy funded by National Insurance increases on these reforms alone by 2032.

The report estimates that the total costs of the reforms could be between £5.6 billion and £6.2 billion a year by 2031/32. The levy will generate an extra £12 billion in annual revenue earmarked for both the health service and social care, but only £1.2 billion in each of the next three years has been committed to these social care reforms so far.

For Adult Social Care, £5.4 billion has been announced nationally over three years from which £1.4 billion has been allocated for market support, split over [those] three years.

Analysis has been carried out to plan for the financial impact of these reforms on local authorities. It is estimated that the potential costs for the East Midlands between 2022 and 2032 will be:

- £802 million for Fair Price for Care;
- £614 – 743 million for the over 65s means test and cap; and
- £100 million on Operational spend.

Nottinghamshire County Council is still in the process of modelling to establish an up-to-date estimate of cost for this authority. Based on our work so far, we estimate we could be something in the region of £90 million per annum short of the funding we need, from Government or any other source, to deliver these reforms.

The Leader of this Council, in his capacity as an MP, has spoken in Parliament and made strong representations to ministers regarding this financial challenge, while our Corporate Director through the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) has used these channels to make the same points to Government.

Of course, we have to be as innovative as possible in seeking to meet these costs through internal transformation. We are also working with other local authorities, again through ADASS, to reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale where we can.

That said, we do need to ensure that local authorities with primary responsibility for adult social care delivery receive a realistic amount of new funding to deliver these reforms, especially considering the proactive and effective role we play in reducing the cost burdens falling on the NHS.

The focus of funding discussions in the past has often centred on the health and NHS side of delivery rather than the excellent and often proactive and preventative work done by local authorities. It follows, therefore, that with a large amount of Health & Social Care Funding Levy money now becoming available, we need to ensure the 'Social Care' element receives a fairer share than perhaps it has in the past.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People from Councillor Michelle Welsh

As the Government have announced a plan to consult on increasing the ratio of children to nursery in England from 4:1 to 5:1, does the Cabinet Member agree with the Government's intentions to increase this ratio, and whether this will significantly impact the cost of childcare provision in Nottinghamshire?

Response from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Tracey Taylor

The Government announced on 4th July that a consultation will take place on the changes to ratios for children aged two attending nursery settings, as part of a wider package of measures to improve the availability and cost of childcare.

The consultation is available online on the GOV.UK website under the heading: Childcare – Regulatory Changes. It can be circulated to parents, providers and early years professionals. Our Early Childhood Services team will be publishing and promoting this to all providers in the coming days.

Currently, the ratios are:

- Children under two: one adult to three children;
- Children 2-3 year-olds: one adult to four children; and
- Children 3-5 years: one to eight, in non-school settings.

The proposal is to increase the numbers of two-year-olds that can be cared for by one member of staff from 1:4 to 1:5, with the belief that this will allow childcare providers to reduce staffing costs and pass that saving on to families.

Initial discussions have been held with the Nottinghamshire Early Years Consultation Group, which is made up of representatives from the Early Years Sector including Schools, Day Nurseries, Pre-schools and Childminders. Their responses to this proposal have been mixed.

There is concern that this proposed change could impact on the quality of the educational experience for the youngest children who need close supervision and support, and there is a consensus that most providers will maintain the 1:4 ratio in order to ensure quality.

The cost of running a Childcare business is increasing year on year and recent changes to the national minimum wage and pension contributions, coupled with recovery from the Pandemic, have hugely impacted the Sector. We have heard that most providers will be unable to reduce their charges. There is consequently little likelihood of this proposed change making a significant financial impact on the cost of childcare provision.

We should emphasise, however, that this is just part of the package of measures proposed, including:

- A proposal to encourage more people into the Childminding profession;
- Increased awareness and take up of Tax Free Childcare Accounts that have a potential saving to parents of £2,000 per year;
- Support for recruitment and retention across the Early Years sector; and
- Proposals to update the funding formulae for the early education entitlement for children aged 2, 3 and 4.

The point I would reiterate at this stage is that this is an ongoing consultation about a proposal. I will listen carefully to the feedback locally, and I'll be interested to hear the

views expressed from elsewhere around the country. The Government may well adapt its plans based on feedback, so I don't intend to draw any conclusions at this stage.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment from Councillor David Martin

At a visit to Bilsthorpe Depot last year as part of the Highway's Review Panel – we were shown the correct procedure for repairing a pothole. This took at least 5 minutes. On 29 June, a video lasting 4.13 seconds was posted on social media. It showed 2 workers from Via East Midlands (wholly owned by Nottinghamshire County Council) carrying out a pothole 'repair' in Sutton-in-Ashfield. The video showed the 'work' to fix the pothole lasting 44 seconds and involved chucking a bag of ViaFix into a pothole, levelling it off and then sitting in their van for 3 minutes and 29 seconds. Is this what you call 'significantly improving' the procedure to fix our broken roads and pavements? Do you feel that staff from Via East Midlands are following the correct procedure as demonstrated at Bilsthorpe Depot? Further to this, how many bags of ViaFix has the Council used to fix our potholes compared to this time last year?

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

I haven't seen the video to which Councillor Martin refers in his question. He doesn't give much away as to where he actually saw it. "Social media" is a broad term. I've asked officers and I've asked other colleagues to search for this video and nobody can find it, so therefore I'm not inclined to give any opinion on a video that nobody can actually find, so I haven't seen it.

What I can say is that following the work of the cross-party Highways Services Review Panel, there has been – as we all know - an additional £12 million of investment into highways, which includes the doubling of the teams delivering large scale permanent repairs.

I would like to thank Councillor Martin, and his colleagues Councillor Hollis and Councillor Purdue Horan for their input, support and agreement during the Highways Review. In fact, I did make a point of thanking Councillor Martin for his very constructive support and input into the Highways Review and I continue with that thanks. That Highways Review did reach a unanimous conclusion. I can't remember if I've ever mentioned that before, Mr Chairman, but the recommendations were unanimous.

It proves that Councillor Martin and his colleagues when they are in a constructive mood, rather than tabling attention-seeking questions like this, we can make some progress.

Our highways teams are now having a major impact on improving the quality and quantity of repairs delivered, and we are looking to see the equivalent of 20 miles of continuous road permanently repaired during this year – significantly improving roads in this county.

Throughout the review we have been clear that we will need to continue to make urgent safety repairs where necessary, and that's where Viafix will continue to come in. At no stage have I ever said Viafix would be ceased, eliminated completely. For safety reasons, emergency reasons, it's always going to be necessary.

All Via staff are properly trained to make repairs in line with best practice procedures. In fact there is, I know, another video online featuring one of the Construction & Maintenance Foremen at Via, talking about the work that Via are currently doing. That can be found on the Nottinghamshire County Council Twitter feed, Mr Chairman.

Of course, the safety of highways operatives is vital too, and as such there are some situations where it is not appropriate for them to spend any more time than absolutely necessary to place material into a road defect to make it safe. I don't know whether this was the case in the instance that Councillor Martin is highlighting, but if he is able to provide more specific details then I would be very happy to investigate and provide a further response to him.

So lastly, he did ask about the quantity of Viafix, and just to prove, Mr Chairman, that the Highways Review unanimous recommendations are proving their worth, I can report to you that we are now, since the Highways Review, using 57% less Viafix than we were prior to the Highways Review. In my view, that's a good achievement which shows continued improvement in the way we work.