

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2022
QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

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

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Helen-Ann Smith

Who would the leader of Nottinghamshire County Council prefer to be recruited to serve residents of Nottinghamshire? Carers, social workers, foster carers or Nottinghamshire County Council communication specialists?

Response from Councillor Ben Bradley MP, Leader of the Council

I'm assuming that Councillor Smith – who is an intelligent person who has been around Local Government for some time – already knows perfectly well that linking these two issues is inappropriate and incorrect.

There is a major issue and shortage of staff in the social care workforce nationally, no different in Nottinghamshire, though I would like to thank all of our staff who have worked so hard over Christmas to keep the show on the road and support local residents. This is a national issue, and as a Council we are working very hard on recruitment and retention of care staff. Cllr Elliott has already spoken at length about these challenges. Similarly, we are doing a huge amount of work to try and attract and incentivise foster carers, which is another national issue rather than something specific to Notts, and again it is not something that can be solved with money alone.

It is totally wrong to somehow suggest that there is a binary choice between communications staff or social care workers, or that this Council has actively chosen one over the other. That is simply false. The care staff shortage is not something that can be solved by shifting a few grand of Council Budget from one column in the spreadsheet to another. In fact, when we run campaigns to try and promote care work and recruit people into our organisation, it is communications colleagues who put together and manage those efforts. They are integral to our efforts to improve recruitment. That is why I make no apology, for investing in improving our communication and engagement with local residents.

When we undertook the Big Notts Survey in the summer, one of the outcomes from that survey was that local people didn't feel connected to our services or to the Council. We've discussed in various public meetings in the Council, that we need to do more to show the public what we do, particularly where our services like social care or children's services are utilised by just a small part of the population at any one time, and ensure that people are able to see and understand where their council tax goes. We need to be closer to our communities. That is what Nottinghamshire residents told us. Her party has called, time and again, for us to do more to justify and explain our position on numerous issues, such as pensions for example, to do more to promote and garner responses to our Big Notts Survey even, and we are happy to do so, but that requires resources and expertise, and it is a little rich to then complain when we provide that resource.

Our communications department is not an external marketing exercise. Our staff are working on supporting public health messaging, on signposting residents to vital support services, on developing our online presence so that it is simple and accessible to residents, and on supporting our wider collaboration with partners around the region. They convey important internal communications with staff, as well as external ones, and as I've said they support vital campaigns like recruitment to key areas of service like social care. Communications colleagues have a wide and varied role that is very important for our service delivery. There is no point in having good services if we are not telling residents what is there and how to access it.

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

Will the chair of the Adult Social Care and Public Health committee take action to rectify the crisis in the Adult Care sector, including the key challenges in recruitment and retention, by using existing resources including the government's allocated £300 million pound fund for care workers?

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

Thank you, Councillor Henshaw, for your question, and highlighting the challenges we are currently facing in the Adult Care Sector. There have been a number of factors impacting on social care, as you heard in my response to Cllr Eddy earlier. The rapid increase and high rates of transmission for Omicron have significantly disrupted care and support services and our staff have worked incredibly hard to manage this.

In terms of recruitment and retention, as you have heard from Cllr Bradley, staff shortages are not just something that can be sorted by moving our budget around – it's true we have seen a number of our care staff leaving for a better paid position in other sectors, there is a lot of competition out there. But funding is just one of the issues - we are also facing challenges such as those not wanting to have the *mandatory Covid vaccination required to work in care, or those who have left due to the stress of working in care throughout the pandemic.

We have been working closely with our provider partners to offer support and have listened to them regarding steps we can take to try and mitigate this. We have also made efforts to promote the wellbeing initiatives available for care staff as there are specific mental health services available and we want to ensure that these are easily accessible for those who need them.

While much of the country continues to work from home, this has not been an option for those providing care and support, they are a vital lifeline to people most in need.

I think it is important that we all recognise the dedication and commitment shown by all our care workers to keep those with care and support needs safe during these unprecedented times.

The Department for Health and Social Care have given one-off grants throughout the pandemic to support Providers.

As a Council, we made sure we administered all the available funding as quickly and efficiently as possible. This has supported them to put into place Infection Control Measures, support for residents to communicate with relatives, pay costs for staff absence, and to look at incentives for both recruitment and retention.

We are currently in the process of collaborating on a recruitment campaign, this is between the Council communications team and our Social Care providers – this is being developed using the workforce grant we received from Government.

Providers rarely have the budget or time to invest in such a campaign so doing this as a collaborative piece will make sure it is of high quality, has maximum reach, and targets potential care staff in the right places.

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Environment from Councillor Kate Foale

Will the chair of the Transport and Environment Committee acknowledge that significantly more resources and commitment will be required if we are to seriously address the climate emergency declared by the leader in May 2021, and can the chair demonstrate this by outlining what level of commitment to tackle climate change we are to expect in the upcoming budget?

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

Nottinghamshire County Council agreed in May last year that we would declare a Climate Emergency, and in the months since we have announced a number of initiatives which will contribute towards our promise of being Net Zero by 2030.

I fully agree that if we are to meet our aspirations as a Council to be Carbon Neutral in all our activities by 2030, then we will need to resource and commit to a whole range of new actions and changes in our working practices.

That's why Transport and Environment Committee on 5th January approved the resourcing of a new staff team to drive forward our climate change activities, and it's why we are giving positive consideration to further investment in our substantial "Green Investment Fund", which this year will see us invest in a range of carbon reduction projects across the Council, following the unanimous support of Committee members for our proposals.

We also agreed at Economic Development and Asset Management Committee back in November to move our electricity to a renewable tariff from April 2022, and I expect to be able to report our Carbon Reduction Strategy to Committee in the spring which will set out the next steps in our Net Zero journey.

Whilst it is undeniable that additional resources are likely to be needed in the short term to deliver a step change in environmental performance, I'm confident that establishing low carbon thinking in all our decision making - to the point where it becomes second nature - will ultimately make this part of 'business as usual'.

Soon we will of course be bringing forward our first Annual Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy since the County elections, and since we declared a Climate Emergency. When they have read through our proposals, if Councillor Foale and her colleagues believe that a different amount of funding should be allocated towards tackling Climate Change, then they will have an opportunity to table an Amendment to our budget, at the budget meeting, setting out how they would deliver this.

I appreciate the sentiment of Councillor Foale's question, but with respect, it's easy to make the broad statement that "*significantly more resources are required*" for addressing the Climate Emergency, or indeed other work undertaken by this Council. The critical question is how would you fund that extra resource? Would you transfer it from other areas of the budget, or would you raise the money through council tax or by charging more for certain commercial services?

If Opposition Groups table amendments setting out a proper, costed alternative budgets then we can have a proper discussion with each other, and most importantly with the Nottinghamshire public, about the best way forward in responding to the Climate Emergency.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Do you think all the adverse publicity created by alleged parties at 10, Downing Street will impact this Council in the fight against COVID-19?

Response from Councillor Ben Bradley MP, Leader of the Council

I'm pleased to say that the Prime Minister has announced the lifting of most of the remaining restrictions, including an end to working from home and mandatory facemasks among others. I'm grateful that he made the right call before Christmas to avoid the kind of very draconian restrictions that were seen around much of the rest of Europe, and I'm pleased that now, with confirmation that the Omicron variant is less severe than previous versions of the virus, we're able to lift these restrictions and – let's hope – move forward with our freedoms and liberty restored.

In the absence of any restrictions, of course, then the issue of whether people are happy to comply with restrictions in light of national events is no longer applicable.