

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2022 QUESTIONS TO CHAIRMAN OF THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE AUTHORITY

Question from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Can the Chairman please explain why the Authority are having to deliver efficiencies across the service?

Response from the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority, Councillor Michael Payne

Given that I have a series of questions about the Fire Authority today, please allow me a moment to say that my heart goes out to the family and friends of Fatoumatta Hydera and her two daughters, three year old Fatimah Drammeh and her little sister Naeemah Drammeh, all of whom were killed in a flat fire last Sunday in Clifton. This is such a devastating loss of life. Our communities across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire are grieving for the heart-breaking loss of this young and precious family.

As Chair of the Fire Authority, I want to thank our Notts Fire Team for their heroism and courage, I know just how devastated personally, having spoken to them, they are by this incident. Thank you also to our colleagues in Notts Police for their ongoing work investigating this horrific incident which is now being treated as a triple murder. And thank you to East Midlands Ambulance Trust and Nottingham University Hospitals where our good friend Anthony May is, for doing all they could to try and save Fatoumatta, Fatimah, and Naeemah's lives. Our Notts Fire Team are working with our partners and community leaders and we will offer whatever support and assistance the family and local community needs at this deeply saddening time.

Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is the seventh worse affected Fire and Rescue service in the country in terms of cuts from this Conservative Government. That's seventh, Mr Chairman, out of 29 Fire and Rescue Services across the country.

In 2019/20 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has seen a 13.21% cut in their budget compared to 2010/11 as a direct result of decisions taken by this Government. In the same year, Mr Chairman, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service received a 3.92% increase, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service received a 3.34% increase and Shropshire received a 1.32% increase. Even the Tories, Mr Chairman, couldn't call this a fair deal for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and disappointingly, some of whom sit in this Chamber, our Conservative MPs in Nottinghamshire have consistently voted for these cuts and for our local fire and rescue service to be on the receiving end of, as I have just elucidated, blatantly unfair treatment by this Government.

If they don't agree with cuts to Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service my question to Nottinghamshire Tory MPs is simple, why did you vote for them? And if you wondered what the position for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is as at today, since 2010/11 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has seen a 5.26% cut

by this Government in its overall funding, and that comes from official government figures. It is still the seventh worst effected fire and rescue service in the country.

Since 2010/11 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has seen its budget slashed by this Government, supported by our Tory MPs, by £9.6 million in cash terms and that figure, Mr Chairman, is considerably higher when considering other factors, such as inflation.

In recent years, you'll be pleased to know that the Fire Authority under Labour control has been able to set a balanced budget but it is now anticipating a shortfall in funding in the region of £3 million in 2023/24. This is as a result of Conservative cuts, spiralling inflation and the impact of pay awards that are not being matched by funding increases from this Conservative government.

That's right Mr Chairman, in case you didn't hear it clear enough, this Conservative Government is refusing to fund a decent pay award for our fire service heroes. Happy to clap them during Covid, now turning their back on them despite hollow promises of building back better.

Notts Fire Service has identified £1 million of reserves that can be used to temporarily cushion the blow, but this still leaves a shortfall in the region of £2 million that needs to be met. Our Fire Service, Mr Chairman, has been rated good on every single measure, by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Fire and Rescue Services and that's thanks to the outstanding staff, but we are being held back from doing so much more by this Conservative government.

Question from Councillor Jason Zadrozny

Could the Chairperson of the Fire Authority to take this opportunity to update members on a midway position of the fire service review?

Response from the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority, Councillor Michael Payne

As at 23 November 2022, 1,251 completed questionnaires have been submitted, of which 63 submissions are identified as employed by Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, this comprises about 5%. However, it should be noted that the declaration of being a member of staff for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is not a mandatory question within the consultation questionnaire.

Once the consultation closes, detailed analysis will be completed and reported to the Fire Authority for consideration.

And let me just say very clearly on the public record at this junction Mr Chairman, because there have been several accusations made including by lead members who sit here in this Chamber today, through your doors in Rushcliffe, decisions about fire service cover review in Nottinghamshire are the result of an evidence based risk assessment. I repeat, an evidence based risk assessment and analysis. Not, Councillor Clarke you might want to listen to this, political choices. This is an emergency service saving and protecting people's lives. Labour councillors on the Fire

Authority base their decisions on the advice of Fire and Rescue professionals including our senior most professional the Chief Fire Officer, who I trust any day of the week against some of the people sat opposite me. They are not political choices and let me finish by saying this, the Conservatives in Rushcliffe have been distributing a flyer titled, and I quote, "Labour are trying to cut our fire service". It's a better work of fiction Mr Chairman, than Harry Potter and the characters are even worse. The leaflet might be better entitled 'sorry for slashing your fire service since 2010'. And you know what I am talking about Councillor Clarke, you're a former leader of Rushcliffe Council and you put your name to that leaflet. We're talking about an emergency service here, we're talking about people's lives and the falsehoods that you've peddled through doors in Rushcliffe do a disservice to the emergency service, the outstanding emergency service that is Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, you're not fit to wipe their boots.

Question from Councillor Jim Creamer

How have Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service budgets been impacted since 2010 and how does this compare with other Fire Authorities in the East Midlands and nationally?

Response from the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority, Councillor Michael Payne

Since 2010, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, as I have already said, have seen budget reductions of £9.6 million in real cash terms and significantly higher when considering other factors such as inflation.

Other regional services are facing similar issues next year. Last year, the Conservative Government gave flexibility to eight out of the 29 fire and rescue services, to increase their council tax by £5 for an average Band E property instead of the referendum limit that was much lower. This was to help with funding pressures. But the self-same Conservative government, who are now crowing against proposed cuts locally as a result of their own government, blocked Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service from levelling a £5 council tax precept, that's even though Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service last year was the seventh worst effected fire service in the country.

Conservative government cuts to fire services across the country are having devastating impacts Councillor Creamer, the total firefighter head count across 46 English fire and rescue services has fallen 20.4%, one fifth since 2010. We're 35,279 in 2021 compared to 44,307 in 2010. These Conservative cuts have led to a reduction of nearly 10,000 firefighters across the country. And this comes, Mr Chairman, at a time when the Tory government has failed to adequately deal with building safety, cladding and flooding issues, all of which are placing significantly increased pressure on our fire and rescue heroes and services.

More than a decade of Conservative government cuts has led to a 28% drop in the number of firefighters across Nottinghamshire. The simple truth Mr Chairman is this, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is being forced to do more with less by this Tory government. And Conservative government cuts and mismanagement of the UK economy have now left Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service with a budget deficit

gap in excess of £3.3 million and Conservative councillors, Councillor Clarke, Councillor Wheeler, Councillor Lee, Councillor Upton, on the Fire Authority have presented and I repeat, no credible alternative plans as to how to deal with the budget gap created by their own government's cuts.

In fact Mr Chairman, every single, for the residents of Rushcliffe, every single one led by Councillor Jonathan Wheeler, of the Conservative County Councillors on the Fire Authority voted for the budget in February 2022, which clearly showed a budget gap of £2.1 million now rising to £3.3 million. That's right Mr Chairman, we've seen it before haven't we? Conservative County Councillors voted for the budget but are now campaigning against the consequences of a budget they voted for and a mess of their own government's making.

And let me also say this, if you're a resident in Rushcliffe, watch back the tape of the Fire Authority meeting a few short weeks ago and you'll see the mask of this Tory party slip, Labour actions on the Fire Authority are protecting every single fire station across Nottinghamshire and the City of Nottingham from closing. Conservative Councillors showed their true colours at the Fire Authority meeting. Councillor Upton said, and I quote, "well there are all these other stations aren't there out there that aren't being used, why don't we just close them?". That's right, their strategy if they got their hands on the Fire Authority, would be to close fire stations. You won't see that in their leaflet being put through doors in Rushcliffe.

And let me just end by saying this on this question, if Conservative Councillors in this Chamber and their fellow MPs don't want to see any further cuts to Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, they should be forcing their Conservative Government to significantly increase grant funding to Nottinghamshire, not planning yet more cuts as were announced by the Chancellor in their Autumn Statement just last week.

Question from Councillor Mike Pringle

What has the effect of several years of reduced budgets had on levels of resources and service personnel in the Fire and Emergency Services?

Response from the Chairman of the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority, Councillor Michael Payne

I referenced the heroes of our fire service earlier, previous budget reductions have predominately been from the dedicated staff who serve the communities of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire across operational and non-operational roles, but have also seen the removal of six fire appliances completely as well as further changes to crewing arrangements over the 24-hour period.

Conservative government cuts have very real consequences for our communities here in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. Between 2016 and 2021 our fire service saw a 10.65% decrease in its total workforce compared the national average of 1.6% decrease and over the past 12 years there's been an overall reduction in Nottinghamshire of 136 whole time operational posts.

There's nothing new Mr Chairman about Conservative government cuts decimating our local fire service here in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, just listen to the appliances we've lost since 2010 as a result of Tory cuts - an on-call appliance fire engine at Highfields; a whole time appliance at Highfields; an on-call appliance in my own area of Arnold; an on-call appliance in Councillor Creamers area of Carlton; an on-call appliance in my good friends from Mansfield removed and the relocation of a whole time appliance from West Bridgford to Edwinstowe and the removal of an Edwinstowe on-call fire engine.

I'll just conclude by saying this Mr Chairman, as I'm not going to have time to answer the final two questions, these guys are charlatans. If you really want to stand up for Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, as you've said in your political literature, get on your feet and start arguing with your Tory MPs and your Tory Ministers to turn round the austerity you've levelled against our fire service since 2010 and get on your feet and argue to give the fire and rescue service heroes the decent pay award that they deserve. You clapped them during Covid, and now you've turned your back on them. Shame on the whole lot of you.