

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2023
QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON THE EXECUTIVE REPORT

WRITTEN RESPONSES PROVIDED AFTER THE MEETING AS THE TIME LIMIT OF 15 MINUTES FOR QUESTIONS WAS REACHED

Question from Councillor Penny Gowland

Discussing transport priorities at the Business and Trade Select Committee, you said:

“Everybody uses buses, to be honest.”

Given that “everybody uses buses”, have government cuts to public services since 2010 led to a higher frequency of bus services in Nottinghamshire?

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

Nottinghamshire has a proud record on supporting our bus services, which have obviously been under huge pressure, particularly since Covid as passenger numbers have not returned to their pre-Covid levels. However, as a County we have some of the highest levels of financial support to protect bus routes of any County Council in the country, we’re investing in new flexible On Demand Transport to ensure that we have viable and sustainable services, even in our rural areas, and those pilots have gone really well so we’re expanding that provision. Thanks to additional Government investment we’re able to invest a further £5m in supporting routes, further developing NottsBus On Demand, and taking over I believe 12 routes where commercial operators haven’t been able to make them work.

Question from Councillor Mike Pringle

Having attended the CCN conference, does the Leader agree with the comments made by the Vice Chair of the CCN in relation to the Autumn Statement?

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

As you haven’t told me what the specific comments were, I am unable to answer this in more detail. You’re very welcome to come and speak to me in person or send over what it is you are referring to in an email and I will get back to you with a fuller response.

Question from Councillor Paul Henshaw

The Leader acknowledged pressures in adult care at the CCN conference.

Can the Leader tell us more about the impact these pressures have had on recipients of care services in recent weeks?

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

Our providers who support and care people have in the main, faced pressure well in Nottinghamshire, and have been able to recruit and retain staff. We have supported

with workforce support and development, and for providers this has included us working with the Nottinghamshire Care Association to provide a robust network of support. Despite this support, several services have closed or been closed by the CQC in recent weeks, and this has created pressure for people themselves who have had to be supported to move home, for our colleagues working under emergency conditions, and for our teams coping with additional unplanned work.

The Council has funded inflation and living wage increases in Adult Social Care is confident that our costs of care and support to providers are enough to ensure continuity of care. This has created financial pressure for the Council which we are meeting through underspend in staff and making the most of Market Sustainability Grant given by DHSC.

Within the Council we have made progress in reducing our waiting times for Assessment and Reviews. We do not have waiting times for Care, but we are still working through the impact of the pandemic and the increasing activity that supporting the NHS has on our social care service such as working to support discharge at the earliest point and multiple assessments that Discharge to Assess creates as we focus on people and supporting them at home during their recovery.

Lastly, we continue to see increases in work through our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and our Approved Mental Health Practitioner Service. Particularly in Mental Health we see the impact of pressure on community mental health and large increases in the numbers of people being assessed under the Mental Health Act. We certainly share the experiences expressed at CCN that our work in partnership in health continues to be an area of pressure.

Question from Councillor John ‘Maggie’ McGrath

The Leader notes the devastating impact of the floods across the county, including in areas like Stapleford.

Communities cannot ‘Level Up’ when they are not protected from flooding.

Do you believe Nottinghamshire communities have got the funding they need to fortify them against these horrific floods in future?

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Ben Bradley MP

Flooding across the county has been unprecedented over the last month and has devastated many communities. Over 1200 properties have been internally flooded in 80 different locations countywide. This flood event saw more internal flooding than all the last 10 years events put together. We are very aware that the ground is currently saturated and more bad weather is very likely.

The investment and response from the County has been significant. Over 100 roads have been closed, 2500 sandbags distributed, 120 operational staff deployed in response and recovery and the flood team have visited over 1100 properties offering advice and collecting data to inform the 34 Section 19 Reports which will be taken to Place Select Committee on the 29th March.

The top 4 areas currently impacted by internal flooding all fall under the Environment Agency to lead on as the main cause of the flooding is believed to be main river flooding. These include Stapleford with 137 internals.

The County Council activated its hardship fund for residents and businesses receiving well over 1000 calls and administering the associated payments.

As a County Council we currently invest £600k per annum in our flood risk management capital programme and £80k per annum in our revenue programme. We have attracted £179m of external investment to improve our blue/green infrastructure, invested £5.4 million over the last 5 years in capital flood mitigation schemes and £500k revenue.

Our £1m countywide individual property flood resilience programme has provided funding to install measures such as flood doors and waterproofing of brickwork at over 140 properties across the county over the last two years. These properties are ones which would not qualify for any grants or capital schemes and are home for some of the most vulnerable residents, who have experienced multiple internal flooding events.

Helping communities to be more resilient is a priority. Empowering and training those community volunteers of which we have over 200 now to be able to close roads when necessary to prevent bow wave flooding and providing support to set up reliance stores is fundamental to moving forward and helping communities to prepare not repair.

If you can help with the recruitment of Community Flood Warden volunteers in areas you know would benefit, please get in touch with the Flood Risk Management team.

We are continuing to work with our partners at the EA, STW and District and Boroughs to understand and investigate the flooding and to move forward with the development of resilience measures. Community drop in sessions are ongoing and will continue to enable us to get an insight and understand first hand from communities how they have been impacted.

Flooding is not a quick fix. Its complex and crosses several boundaries and responsibilities. Mitigation measures and the development of schemes to reduce the risk and consequences of flooding to our communities is a priority, but it takes time. We continue to improve and review our education programme offer which has been delivered to over 1000 students and the use of new technologies including drones and telemetry is a great asset to the increase the speed of our data intel.

For the future a more targeted focus will be placed on riparian responsibilities and the enforcement of these responsibilities. Consideration will be given to area based approaches, for both highway and property flooding, to help coordinate flood prevention measures including gully emptying, private watercourse responsibilities and communication plans.

No single agency has the solution to the ongoing flooding and the associated challenges we are facing across the county, but we're working in collaboration to try and make a difference.

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

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

Question to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health from Councillor Tom Hollis

How many times have children in our maintained schools been served venison in the past 5 years and in what form?

Response from Councillor Scott Carlton, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health

We estimate that Venison, supplied by our Schools Catering Service, has been offered in the maintained schools we supply on 175 separate occasions over the last 5 years. Venison is served in the form of venison burgers on the Service's autumn/winter menu. Some schools choose not to serve venison.

All of our venison is sourced from the UK, including locally from north Nottinghamshire. It represents a cost effective, healthy, and sustainable meat option, and of course our sourcing policy benefits local and UK businesses.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS REQUIRING A WRITTEN RESPONSE

Question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management from Councillor Kate Foale

Given the alarming news that the Council is now facing a £60.2 million budget deficit, with the cost of the new County Council offices near Hucknall (Top Wighay) rising from £15.7m to 18.4m as of July 2023, in addition to further infrastructure costs of £4.4m approved earlier this year in May 2023, can the Cabinet Member provide the latest projected cost estimates for the new County Council offices near Hucknall (Top Wighay), and the deadline which the programme is planning to deliver the building for its intended operational use?

Response from Councillor Keith Girling, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Asset Management

Thank you, Councillor Foale, for your question.

The new Council offices at Top Wighay and the wider 'Investing in Nottinghamshire' programme provide a direct mitigation to the financial pressures facing the Council, and will enable a shift to more modern, energy efficient and fit for purpose office accommodation. The 'Invest in Nottinghamshire' programme will reduce office accommodation by approximately 50%, enabling a flexible, hybrid working approach to be adopted by relevant staff, and the programme is on budget.

In respect of Top Wighay, the new office work has commenced on schedule and a sod cutting event was held in December. With construction underway, we will continue to closely monitor costs as would be expected with a project of this scale, and the regular cabinet member briefing cycle will enable me to receive progress and cost updates.

Updated 'Invest in Nottinghamshire' capital allocations will be included as part of the annual budget report to Council in February.

We look forward to occupying the offices in early 2025 and officers will keep all members up to date on progress.