

APPENDIX A

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23 JULY 2020 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Steve Carr

At the Council on meeting on 10th June 2020, the Leader of the Council said the following in relation to the investigation into allegations about Cllr Steve Vickers that "the Group has received a full apology" and "the Party has received a full apology and the matter is now closed."

Would the Leader of the Council provide the following information;

1. Why were many councillors in her group not aware of the apology that had been made to them;
2. Has the national Conservative party finalised its investigations? If that is the case can the decision document be shared with the residents of this county;
3. Is Cllr Vickers still a member of the Conservative and Mansfield Independent Group.

Given that at the meeting you gave your unqualified support for Cllr Vickers in his role as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board and that your support caused huge offense to many up and down the county, will you now concede that you exhibited poor leadership and judgement as Leader of this council.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Alan Rhodes

The Labour Group welcomes the resignation of County Councillor Steve Vickers who had previously expressed Islamophobic views on social media for which he was suspended by the Conservative Party, from his recently appointed post of Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The appointment of Councillor Vickers caused widespread anger and offence among partners in other local authorities and within the health community, and members of the public were outraged.

Will the Leader of the County Council take this opportunity to apologise for the offence caused by her appointment of Councillor Vickers and for the subsequent damage to the reputation of Nottinghamshire County Council?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

At the Full Council meeting, on Thursday 11th June I explained the reasons why I and my Group had chosen to accept the apology from Councillor Steve Vickers for any offence caused by comments he made in a social media post before he became a County Councillor.

I recognised that he had made those remarks in the immediate aftermath of a sickening attack in Nice in France where a lorry was deliberately driven into families enjoying a day out on a French Bank Holiday. This caused the death of 86 people and injured 458 others. Steve has a number of French friends and therefore he felt especially shocked at this appalling event.

It was Councillor Vickers' own decision to write to the Chief Executive and step down from his position rather than become a distraction from the business of the Council. In light of the resignation I asked the Chairman of the Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee to assume this task, as much of the work he does is closely aligned with the Health & Wellbeing Board.

There has been no decision by the Conservative Party and I can only assume the investigation is still ongoing. Steve Vickers remains a member of the Conservative Group.

I will inform the Council if this situation changes and at this stage I have nothing further to add.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Muriel Weisz

Given the very broad recommendations emerging from the government's review of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the BAME community, what are your own current priorities for exploration and consultation, to improve matters in the County?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

From early in the Covid-19 emergency, national and international research and data has identified the potential additional impact of the pandemic on people from black, asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds as well as those with certain long-term health conditions.

The Council has met with the recognised trade unions weekly and the self-managed groups supporting BAME and Disabled employees fortnightly and held discussions through the Corporate Equalities Group to ensure that there is a consistent understanding of the impact across the Council's workforce and services and emerging evidence in relation to the potential underlying causes of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on certain groups.

The Council has taken a number of specific actions aimed at supporting BAME colleagues as well as those with additional vulnerabilities. These were recently reported to Personnel Committee and received unanimous support from Members of that Committee. These actions include:

- The development of a specific risk assessment for people with additional vulnerabilities, including those from BAME communities.
- Increasing the number of mental health first aiders, including training an additional 6 colleagues nominated by the Black Workers Group.

- Extending the existing counselling provision to operate telephone support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as part of the Council's extensive employee health and well-being support package available to every employee.
- Commissioning additional trauma counselling in response to a request from the Black Workers Group.
- Introducing specialist bereavement training for colleagues experiencing death in their professional capacity.
- Updating the Council's learning and development offer to give renewed focus to equality matters and to ensure managers are effectively supporting all their team members, including BAME colleagues.
- Undertaking an employee survey to understand how our workforce are feeling about working for the Council and the support they were receiving. This received an overwhelmingly positive response from across the Council's workforce. I will repeat that; they received an overwhelmingly positive response from across the Council's work force.

The Adult Social Care and Health Department has recently launched a programme of service improvement to consider the adverse impact of COVID-19 on social care staff from BAME communities and the wider population from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

This work is being led by the Principal Social Worker and Chair of the Black Workers Group involving practice leaders, staff and people who have experienced social care to better understand the impacts and co-produce solutions to improve the working environment and culture and improve outcomes for people receiving support from the Council.

The Corporate Leadership Team is working with our partners in the Local Resilience Forum and Integrated Care System to implement the recommendations contained within Public Health England's latest report on the disparities in the impact of COVID-19 on particular groups.

This includes:

- The Director of Public Health commissioning the Data Cell of the LRF to undertake more detailed local analysis of the impact and underlying reasons and working with local Universities to use this information to develop solutions.
- Through the recently established Health Protection Board, chaired by the Director of Public Health, work is also being undertaken to develop and implement education and prevention campaigns involving BAME and faith communities; to target health promotion and disease prevention programmes and to ensure that recovery strategies reduce inequalities and bring about sustainable change.

- Working across the ICS to improve equity, access and experience of services and improve outcomes.
- Developing additional culturally appropriate occupational risk assessment tools for a variety of occupations.

I think I have covered all of the point raised in the question very fully, because the question was only four lines long, but Councillor Weisz if there are any further questions I am happy to try and answer them for you.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Mike Pringle

Despite the Conservative MP for Newark and Sherwood being in post for 10 years, and expressing frequent claims to be pursuing the issue of reinstating the Robin Hood line, it appears that very little has been achieved in this regard, and in fact the only action to date has been a feasibility study undertaken in 2016 by the then Labour administration at NCC.

Can the Leader update Members on the current state of progress with regard to reinstatement of the Robin Hood line?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

Given that my administration has vocally and proactively advocated for infrastructure investment in our county throughout our term of office, I am surprised at Councillor Pringle's suggestion that 'very little has been achieved' since the Labour Group went into opposition. Nevertheless, the situation has changed considerably since they called for a feasibility study into the Robin Hood Line's extension, and I am happy to update the opposition on how this Conservative-led administration has worked hard and hand-in-hand with a Conservative Government to bring forward these long-deserved changes.

In August 2019, the Robin Hood Line was refranchised to East Midlands Railways. This Council actively contributed to the refranchising process, pressing the Department for Transport to require that whichever company assumed control of the line would update and enhance the work which we had previously undertaken. As a result, when East Midlands Railways took over the franchise, they were obliged to put together and fund a business case to Government outlining their plans by August this year, which – if accepted by the Department for Transport – would be funded by the 'Restoring Your Railways' fund.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has unsurprisingly delayed this process, we have maintained the pressure on East Midlands Railways and the Department for Transport through both the franchise's steering group, as well as regional bodies including Transport for the East Midlands and Midlands Connect, in which I play a leading role and am a member of both those boards.

Councillor Pringle is right to note the support of our Members of Parliament, which should be valued by all members of this Council. It is not only Robert Jenrick who has

supported us in this matter, but also Mark Spencer, Lee Anderson, and our very own Ben Bradley – each of whom have met with ministers, raised debates in Parliament, and championed our communities in Westminster after years of being overlooked by their Labour Party predecessors. I have no doubt that, without their intervention, we would have had a much harder task on our hands. I would like to thank them for the work they have done on our behalf – true working in partnership.

I have made the case throughout my time as Leader of the Council that Nottinghamshire deserves its fair share of Government funding, and that we should unlock the potential of those communities left behind by years of Labour rule.

Though extending the Robin Hood Line is an important part of this ‘levelling up’, it must be taken alongside other measures such as the improvements to the A614/A6097, increased capacity of the Ollerton Roundabout, and development of sites such as Top Wighay Farm. This is to say nothing of the regional investment we will see from HS2, and the wider work that is being done to maximise the benefits of that flagship project.

Our Nottinghamshire communities deserve an ambitious council that will champion their needs, and I am pleased to say that this is exactly what this administration does.

Question to the Chairman of Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee from Councillor Joyce Bosnjak

The Prime Minister said recently and I quote *“too many care homes have not been following procedures”* effectively blaming the care home owners, their management and staff for the COVID-19 deaths that have occurred in care homes.

Does the Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee agree with the comments of the Prime Minister or should the Prime Minister apologise for the extreme offense that his comments caused to people working in the care sector?

Response from Councillor Tony Harper, Chairman of the Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee

Councillor Bosnjak, I know you’re very passionate about care homes and I know that you do visit them regularly.

But virtually every day there is a debate about what one politician or another at national level has said on a particular matter, what did the mean, whether it has been misinterpreted, and how people are reacting.

That is a matter for them to deal with, not for me.

I’m happy explaining or answering for things I’ve said with regard to my responsibilities in Nottinghamshire, but I’m not here to judge, justify or clarify the comments of others.

Councillor Bosnjak has selected a quote from one sentence from the Prime Minister. I’ll quote another sentence which came out of Downing Street, stating that

“throughout the pandemic, care homes have done a brilliant job under very difficult circumstances”.

As Chairman of Nottinghamshire County Council’s Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee, that’s the description I believe applies to the care homes across Nottinghamshire, and that’s where my focus is and I am happy to be quoted on that.

I have spent a great deal of time during this COVID-19 outbreak focusing on the needs of the residents of this County, including those living and working in care homes.

As Members will be aware from the regular bulletins that have been circulated to them, there have very sadly been deaths in Nottinghamshire care homes due to COVID-19 and my deepest sympathy goes out to those families affected.

I am proud, however, of the preventative work this authority has done with care home providers to keep the number of cases and deaths as low as we can. We have built our local response with partners to prevent outbreaks and respond rapidly when these occur, helped by increasing amounts of national support becoming available.

Our care homes have been outstanding, supporting people who are ill, relatives who are stressed and bereaved, and making sure staff are confident in managing infection prevention.

Since the start of the pandemic, Nottinghamshire County Council’s Quality and Market Management Team (QMMT) have been working to support care homes in every way we can.

As well as providing a daily bulletin updating them about guidance from central government, we have also backed them financially. Care home providers have received a set amount per bed at their home from the Infection Control Grant fund provided by central government, as well as being able to claim for additional costs from COVID-19 on a monthly basis.

Following a local Webinar which was attended by almost 100 people we also made a 5% payment of two weeks’ fees to assist providers with their cash flow. This was in addition to the annual fee increase that we paid in April 2020. Members may wish to note that a number of local authorities have not had the same proactive approach to fees as we have in this County.

We were especially concerned about infection in care homes and early on worked hard to supply Personal Protective Equipment to providers free of charge when there was an issue sourcing supplies nationally. To date, we will still have a healthy supply of PPE and we make that available when it is needed. We have also worked with Health Partners to support care homes to make sure they were well trained in infection control.

The department have also worked with partners, including from public health, through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF), a Cell of which is chaired by the Group Manager of the QMMT. They have been able to recruit relief staff and deploy them to support a local care home that had a shortage of personnel following their staff group being

swabbed for the virus. The staff team was able to support the service until their own staff were fit enough to return to work.

We even had a contingency plan to be able to use the military should it be necessary, by way of a MACA, which means a Military Response to a Civil Authority. There is currently a shortage of nurses in care homes, that's nationally, so to mitigate any such problem occurring locally, our officers worked with partners to establish a contingency plan. Thankfully that has not been necessary to date.

Without exception, social care providers across the County have worked tirelessly to support people living in Nottinghamshire, whether that be in a residential or nursing care home or in their own home environment. We are very grateful to all of them. That's the message coming loud and clear from me on behalf of the members of my committee and this authority. It's a local message for local people.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Keith Girling

Regarding the proactive Nottinghamshire COVID-19 Community Fund launched in March, would the Leader of the Council state the total number of bids received from organisations in each district area, including voluntary organisations. Would she please list the total amount of money paid out in each district area, and how many bids came from countywide organisations?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

The current total number of applications received from each district area is as follows:-

Ashfield	46
Bassetlaw	48
Broxtowe	34
Gedling	35
Mansfield	37
Newark & Sherwood	63
Rushcliffe	48

Some were also received from Nottingham City outside our boundary.

This amounts to 450 bids with a total ask of just over £2.72 million (£2,724,927)

All applications have gone through a rigorous assessment process in line with the criteria of the Fund, after which funding support totalling £605,494 has been issued. This figure includes £197,104 of funding for countywide projects.

In order to calculate the total amount of funding awarded to each district, the amounts awarded to countywide projects have been equally divided between the districts to which the service is being provided.

The total amounts of funding awarded to each district are therefore as follows:-

Ashfield	-	£93,125
Bassetlaw	-	£92,201
Broxtowe	-	£82,471
Gedling	-	£59,172
Mansfield	-	£73,537
Newark & Sherwood	-	£115,217
Rushcliffe	-	£89,771

Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Steve Carr

Nottinghamshire County Council was able to bid under the Government's Emergency active travel fund. The bids had to be ambitious for the reduction of carbon emissions by encouraging less motorised traffic and greater use of bicycles and walking.

Given this information will the Chair explain;

1. Why given our indicative allocation in Phase 1 was £573,000, did we only receive £263,250 i.e. 45.94%
2. What plans are in place to identify projects to utilise the £2,039,000 Phase 2 monies.
3. What discussions have taken place with District and Borough Councils to identify projects
4. What projects have been identified on a district by district basis including the cost.

Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Andrew Brown

Would the Chairman of the Communities & Place Committee explain the reasons why Nottinghamshire County Council did not receive the maximum allocation from Tranche One of the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund and provide some context, regarding how councils with similar transport and highways infrastructures fared with their bids?

Would the Chairman further explain what measures are being taken to secure as much funding as possible through Tranche Two and what type of schemes we will be prioritising, in broad terms?

Question to the Chairman of Communities and Place Committee from Councillor Liz Plant

Does the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee appreciate the disappointment felt by many residents and community groups due to the fact that Nottinghamshire County Council received approximately half the amount they were eligible to bid for in the first Tranche of the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Travel scheme?

Response from Councillor John Cottee, Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee

The Emergency Active Travel Fund is divided into two tranches.

Tranche One, with a total allocation of £45 million, is for temporary changes to the highway, to be in place between 12 weeks and one year from receiving the funding. These changes are to be removed when no longer required for social distancing, when traffic levels return to pre-lockdown levels, or if they cause congestion or safety concerns on the network.

Allocations of the first tranche were announced early in July, through which Nottinghamshire County Council received just over £263,000 of the maximum £573,000 available.

As an authority we were disappointed to receive only a proportion of the indicative allocation but we were not alone in this. In total, 24 authorities received less than their indicative allocations and of those, 16 were Counties. The amount received by Nottinghamshire was actually the average allocation for a shire authority within the East Midlands.

Feedback from the Department suggested some parts of our Tranche One bid did not score sufficiently in terms of value for money and deliverability, which is perhaps not surprising given the scale and complexity of the highway in such a large, rural county.

Our programme to allocate the first round of funding was debated by the COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal Committee last week and includes a detailed breakdown of schemes and costs, including by district and town.

Authorities who received less than they were indicatively allocated in Tranche One are welcome to reassess their proposals and put forward revised bids for those schemes as part of Tranche Two, providing those proposals meet the criteria. We intend to work closely with the Department for Transport to this effect.

The guidance for Tranche Two was only published on 10th July and includes prescriptive guidance that will require significant work ahead of the deadline for submission on the 7th August. This tight timescale leaves insufficient time for detailed discussions with districts, but the County Council as the highways authority is after all responsible for this policy area.

We recognise that some parts of our community have a strong desire for comprehensive schemes to improve cycling, but it will be challenging to offer for example, segregated schemes that include cycling infrastructure improvements on a constrained rural network.

It is also worth noting that £2.3m will not provide extensive new facilities. Typical national costs of cycle super-highways can be up to £1 million per kilometre and Nottinghamshire maintains 4,853 kilometres of road network, so nobody should be under the illusion that this will be a 'wish-list for cyclists.

I am inclined to be just a little bit critical of the ministers - or is it the Civil Servants - for being so ideologically prescriptive in their distribution of this funding. I've had first-hand

experience of how enthusiastic the cycling lobby can be, and maybe they currently have the “ear” of Government more than the walkers, but in my view, elected local authorities are better placed to judge the cycling and walking priorities in their particular area than Whitehall mandarins, especially at this time.

We will make our Tranche two bid as strong as possible, but we will only bid for schemes where we have strong evidence that these will be beneficial to significant numbers of walkers and cyclists and will contribute positively to our local infrastructure and economy. Whether public money is raised locally or nationally, this is not an administration that will spend public money just because it is there. We will not build white elephant routes that would rarely be used. I sincerely hope a good Conservative Government would not expect us to do that at a time of local and national challenge.

Thank you, Chairman, I will provide further updates in relation to both tranches of the Emergency Active Travel Fund at the appropriate time.

Question to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Alan Rhodes

Given the increased revenue deficit that Nottinghamshire County Council have incurred since this crisis began, and the Chancellor’s assurances that all COVID – 19 associated costs to local government would be met, can she demonstrate to Members how much pressure she has been putting on her own government to ensure that this Council’s additional COVID- 19 costs are covered?

Response from Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts MBE, Leader of the Council

On 6 July myself, the Deputy Leader and the Chairman of the Finance & Major Contracts Management Committee received a briefing from the Chief Executive and our Section 151 Officer on the new financial challenges facing the Council as a direct result of Coronavirus.

We agreed that the contents of the briefing should be shared with the Leaders of the Opposition Groups, and that the information should then be published in a report to the Finance & Major Contracts Management Committee, which met on Monday this week.

The report is available on the Nottinghamshire County Council website for all to read, but to summarise, the estimated additional cost of responding to the Coronavirus crisis across all of our departments amounts to a total £49.5 million, a figure that is likely to increase given that the impact of COVID-19 is still ongoing.

On that basis, and given the fortunate coincidence that the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government happens to be one of our local MPs, I have taken the opportunity in my discussions with him to emphasise the pressure we are under, and to insist that the Treasury must honour its previous commitment to reimburse our councils for the costs of the COVID-19.

I have also taken advantage of speaking to the six other Nottinghamshire **Conservative** MPs, urging them to make the same case not just to their fellow politicians but also to the senior civil servants.

I have been fully supportive of the lobbying by the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association, whose members sensed in mid-May that some of the messaging coming out of the Treasury was becoming more equivocal than it had previously been regarding COVID-19 funding support to Councils. Regardless of political control, all Council Leaders heard the original message and acted upon it. We are therefore absolutely entitled to expect those commitments to be honoured. I have not been remiss in rattling the cage of the MHCLG or the Treasury to reinforce that message.

The situation with COVID-19 is constantly developing and the Government is reviewing the Delta returns it receives on an ongoing basis. Some councils have not helped their cause by inflating their cost projections by including factors that should not have been included. The Treasury is sifting out those errant claims and this could prove beneficial in due course for those like ourselves who have played it straight down the line.

The current situation is that the Council has received a total of **£37** million in **two** tranches of funding from Government towards our additional costs and lost income. An initial tranche of £1.6 billion of additional funding was announced in March 2020 of which the Nottinghamshire County Council share was £22.3 million. A second tranche of a further £1.6 billion was announced by Government on 20th April, of which this Council received £14.6 million.

The Government has also announced a further £600 million to support infection control in care homes, this Council's share of which is £11.4 million, but this must be passported to care homes based on Government criteria and cannot be used to fund additional costs.

This distribution of the second main tranche of funding was determined on a per capita basis, with a 65/35 per cent split between county and district authorities, reflecting the current local government system in which we operate. This does compel me to point out that if we create a unitary council for Nottinghamshire, at least £27 million per year currently tied up in the bureaucracy of the two-tier system would be released to spend on services.

You cannot artificially separate the issue of the quantity of funding we receive from the issue of the system and structure through which it is deployed. This point holds true at any time, but even more so at the current time.

On 16th July Councillor Rhodes tweeted, and I quote:

“We need local councils working together for the benefit of our communities during these very difficult times rather than arguing about their own future structures and ignoring the needs of Nottinghamshire people.”

First of all, this administration is not ignoring the needs of Nottinghamshire people, as evidenced by the amount of money we are currently spending on services to them, and frankly Councillor Rhodes is capable of a better level of debate here.

But more importantly, that Tweet either betrays an astounding level of financial naivety, or an incredibly cynical level of political expediency, and knowing you as I do Councillor Rhodes, I know full well that you are not financially naïve.

Contrary to his claim, there has never - ever – been a more important time to review the structure of local government, precisely because we need to make every pound and penny we have count for the benefit of our local communities in Nottinghamshire.

Councillor Rhodes' perpetual "go to" line is that we must press the Government for more money, and at this moment I do not disagree with him, but he needs to remember that whether that money comes from central government or local government taxation it ultimately comes from the same place and that's the taxpayer's pocket.

It is therefore incumbent upon this County Council and the borough and district councils in Nottinghamshire to get together and behind a local government reorganisation project that would see at least £27 million redirected from bureaucracy into services, making taxpayers money go further, whether it raised locally or nationally.

The case has never been as strong before, but it is now irrefutable in light of the new financial pressures that have emerged, and if Councillor Rhodes or any other colleagues refuse to acknowledge the reality, then I have to conclude that they are prioritising the interests of someone other than the Nottinghamshire public and the services that they are elected to serve and elected to protect and I look forward to you supporting Councillor Rhodes on this and not the constant complaining that we can't make any changes to the system, because we can. It lies in the will of the Councillors elected to this Council.