

## **QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN NOT ANSWERED IN THE MEETING – 10 MAY 2018**

### **Question 7**

#### **QUESTION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMUNITIES AND PLACE COMMITTEE**

Can the Chair of Communities and Place Committee provide the criteria required for inclusion which establishes the threshold and process which VIA are now using to prioritise and manage the resurfacing work, surface dressing, potholes and micro asphaltting?

**Councillor Kevin Greaves**

**Reply from the Chairman of the Communities and Place Committee, Councillor John Cottee:**

Thank you, Councillor Greaves, for your question.

I am sure all fellow councillors from the Communities and Place Committee that attended the excellent workshop last year on highway maintenance will be able to tell you the merits of life cycle planning for maintenance, and adopting a risk-based approach to ensure that the Council is keeping Nottinghamshire roads as safe as possible, given the £143.7 million maintenance backlog that exists.

The County Council has to try to increase the lifespan of its roads and reduce the percentage of roads in need of repair, which is a challenge. A combination of technical assessments, professional judgement and information supplied by residents and elected County Councillors enables us to develop the correct programme each year to balance all of our maintenance needs and gradually make a real difference to Nottinghamshire's roads.

The criteria for a road to be included in a maintenance programme cover several factors, but the main intervention levels have not changed. As this is such an important topic for everyone, I have already asked Highways officers to re-run the maintenance briefing for Members, to ensure all councillors have a full understanding of the maintenance process, the national requirements, and the implications for the authority if we fail to support this process.

Thank you, Chairman.

### **Question 8**

#### **QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There are 7,530 people employed by NCC (Nottinghamshire County Council), 73.4% of which are female. There are 19 individuals in senior leadership posts, of which 6 are women. Over the last 12 months, the senior staffing sub-committee has appointed to 5 posts, all of the successful candidates were men. What action is the Council taking

to enable more women to apply for senior positions from both inside and outside of the organisation?

**Councillor Kate Foale**

**Reply from the Chairman of the Personnel Committee, Councillor Neil Clarke:-**

Chairman, I have a slight query with the words “enable more” in the question, as that infers there are mechanisms to restrict or not enable more women to be recruited, and there are no such mechanisms. However, I wonder if Councillor Foale really means “encourage more”, so I will answer on that basis.

Over the last twelve months the Senior Staffing Sub-Committee has appointed to six posts in total – five men and one woman were successful following interview by a cross-party panel of members.

The Council reported its Gender Pay Gap data to Personnel Committee in March 2018 prior to publication on the Council’s website and the Government’s website. This information is supported by annual Workforce Profile Reporting on the Council’s website, and the approval of the annual Pay Policy Statement at Full Council.

These reinforce the Council’s commitment to ensuring that pay, pensions, reward and employee recognition schemes are open, fair and transparent. The Council has already undertaken an extensive job evaluation exercise and implemented Single Status to ensure our pay and grading systems remain “equality proofed”.

The most recent report to Personnel Committee set out a number of further actions which the Council is already taking, or intending to undertake, to close the Gender Pay Gap. This includes three priority areas:-

**Area One is ‘Recruitment’.**

Work will be undertaken to raise awareness of any potential for unconscious bias at the point of recruitment, and to ensure that gender neutral language is used in order to encourage women to apply for more senior posts. Women will also be supported and encouraged with their applications through coaching and mentoring.

**Area Two is Flexible Working.**

We will continue to ensure most vacant posts are open to flexible working where appropriate. We will promote the wide range of flexible working provisions already available at the Council, and we will act to remove any real or perceived barriers to working flexibly, especially at more senior levels.

The Council is working with the independent flexible working experts, Timewise, to review the Council’s overall approach to flexible working and become an accredited flexible working employer.

**Area Three is Career Development and Progression.**

We want female employees to aspire to move into senior or managerial roles and have access to a diverse range of role models and coaching, mentoring and networking opportunities to support them in their careers.

We will provide access to appropriate development opportunities including the next phases of the Council's Management and Leadership Development Programme, and wider training and development opportunities, for example secondments and on-line career management resources.

We will also make sure that managers have structured programmes of support in place to ensure women returning to work after maternity leave do not suffer a detriment to their careers in the longer term.

We intend to involve managers, employees and the Trades Unions in this work - as well as working with Timewise.

We will bring a further report to Personnel Committee in January to update members on progress made.

So, I hope you will join me in welcoming the steps the Council is taking on this important issue. We seek to strike the right balance. We very much want to increase the number of female applicants for senior positions, but we would not want to patronise anyone with a suggestion that they are in need of favourable treatment. The Council should continue to appoint on the basis of merit.

I realise this question is primarily about employees, but it is worth noting that in Councillor Kay Cutts and the newly-elected Councillor Susan Saddington, this Council already boasts female incumbents of surely the two most senior Member positions - Council Leader and Council Chairman.

As Councillor Saddington has already stated, she wishes to be called 'Madam Chairman' rather than any other title... so thank you, Madam Chairman.

### **Question 9**

#### **QUESTION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF FINANCE AND MAJOR CONTRACTS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Given that this Conservative government's grants to this authority have reduced by 46% since 2013/14 from £238m to £129m, and Council tax income has increased by only 28% from £274m to £351m, we still have a significant funding gap in NCC, made worse with rising costs, especially for adult care.

When is it going to be a good time to inform your government that this situation is financially unsustainable?

**Councillor Mike Pringle**

**Reply from the Chairman of the Finance & Contracts Management Committee, Councillor Richard Jackson:-**

Thank you, Councillor Pringle, for your question.

I am very surprised if you are not aware that this Council has already expressed concerns about central government funding for local authorities, through various channels.

My budget report in February made no attempt to hide the fall in Central Government funding, setting out the same figures you quote, and acknowledging that funding will fall further to £114 million by 2021/22.

It is no secret that the Government is seeking to give Councils greater freedom to raise their own resources, rather than relying as heavily on central government grant as they did in the past. This feeds in to the Localism idea that locally-elected authorities should be less beholden to the centre, which many agree is good in principle, but the extent and speed to which this transfer can be achieved and funded is not an exact science.

In January this year, the County Councils Network (CCN), of which Nottinghamshire County Council is an active member, sent a detailed response to the Local Government Settlement consultation. The CCN pulled no punches in stating that the latest settlement would raise just £105 million, compared to the £1 billion reduction in budgets by 2020 for the 37 county councils across the country, which serve some 26 million people and 86% of England.

The CCN response further stated that due to what it called an '*outdated and unfair*' funding system, residents in counties will receive just £161 of core funding per head by the end of the decade, compared with an England average of £266.

You should also be aware that Councils in the East Midlands have gone further than this, making the point that even within the aforementioned '*outdated and unfair system*', East Midlands authorities such as Nottinghamshire are especially disadvantaged. Last November, Policy Committee received evidence from East Midlands Councils, based on data directly from HM Treasury, showing that this region is losing out in terms of public expenditure.

That's why Councillor Cutts brought a report to the subsequent Full Council meeting setting out this position, and sought the support and signature of ALL members – regardless of political group – to write to the Government highlighting the inequalities in funding for Nottinghamshire County Council and underinvestment in the East Midlands generally.

The use of the phrase "*your Government*" in the question suggests this is all about trying to pin blame on the current incumbents. If that is the aim, I will remind Members that levels of public spending grew to unsustainable levels during the Blair and Brown years, so a significant degree of re-balancing was inevitable.

In truth, we need to see beyond party political blame games. As I said in February, we need to be influencing the Civil Service number crunchers as much as the ministers of whichever Government is in power. It is, after all, the current Conservative Government which has launched a Fair Funding Review, to consider a range of

options for developing an updated funding formula, examining the factors that drive costs for councils.

Members approved Nottinghamshire County Council's response to the Fairer Funding Review consultation at Finance and Major Contracts Management Committee in March. We stated that whilst the Review is primarily concerned with how central funding is *distributed*, rather than the *amount* of funding available, we still believed that without enough total resource, fairness will be impossible to achieve.

As the question correctly states, adult social care is the biggest cost pressure for this Council, and whilst we have taken up the so-called "freedom" to levy the maximum Adult Social Care Precept permitted by the Government, there is no appetite from this administration to place any greater burden than absolutely necessary on local taxpayers. We are very conscious that after spending 32 of the last 36 years under Labour control, this authority only this year ceased to be the highest charging shire county council in the country.

I am concerned that under the present funding system, Nottinghamshire taxpayers are indirectly subsidising the services of those living elsewhere, and that is something we will not accept. We will continue to work with colleagues across the country, such as CCN, the LGA (Local Government Association) and the Society of County Treasurers, to bring about a change.

Thank you, Chairman.

### **Question 10**

#### **QUESTION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE**

National research from Oxford University and other independent organisations has evidenced the effectiveness of inclusive Children's Centres in avoiding the scenario whereby more vulnerable and disadvantaged parents are isolated and stigmatised by attending them, and additionally demonstrated the value of having an appropriate range of professional's under one roof.

Therefore does the Chair of CYP (Children and Young People's) Committee think that the decision made at a recent CYP Committee to withdraw Children's Centre staff from running universal services and to remove £1m in funding over the next 2 years from the Children's Centre budget will have a detrimental effect on hard to reach families accessing Children's Centres services?

**Councillor Muriel Weisz**

**Reply from the Vice Chairman of the Children & Young People's Committee, Councillor Boyd Elliott:**

Thank you, Councillor Weisz for your question.

The 2015 Oxford University report warns about the possibility of stigmatising families with needs if building-based services are used only for targeted work. The same report also makes the point that Children's Centres were always intended to assess local needs by studying the characteristics of local communities and undertaking outreach to attract and serve the 'most needy' families.

The revised model of operation in Nottinghamshire will see building-based services co-located with early years education and childcare provision and volunteer-led open access services alongside the use of more outreach and community venues.

Professional workers time will be focused on those at risk of poor outcomes according to the evidence. In Nottinghamshire, we currently spend £223 per child aged 0-4 compared to an average of £138 per head amongst our statistical neighbours.

Thank you, Chairman.

### **Question 11**

#### **QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Rail expenditure in the East Midlands is just £91 per person compared to £746 per person in London. Does the Leader agree with me that this is unacceptable and is a failure of regional Council Leaders to lobby this Conservative Government. Can Councillor Mrs Kay Cutts please give this Council an update on the campaign to reinstate the electrification of the Midlands' Mainline and inform this County of any meetings and correspondence she has had since May 2017 to ensure that all of Nottinghamshire benefits from HS2?

**Councillor Jason Zadrozny**

**Reply from the Council Leader, Councillor Kay Cutts**

Thank you, Councillor Zadrozny, for your question.

As you will know, this Council has always supported the case for electrification of the Midland Main Line, and was extremely disappointed when the existing proposals were shelved.

What the Council, in conjunction with Midlands Connect, has been and still is pushing for is not necessarily electrification but whatever can provide the equivalent benefits that electrification would have offered.

I agree that rail expenditure in the East Midlands is insufficient, and for that reason we should not be in the business of rejecting any proposed additional expenditure and improved service, be that bi-modal trains, electrification or whatever.

HS2 offers a real opportunity to this County and we need to maximise the benefits across the region. To this end, the Council is examining a range of options to improve accessibility to the new facility by all modes of transport. This includes dedicated rail

feeder services, access to bus services, and direct access to car parks and the strategic road network.

I am a member on both the Midlands Connect and HS2 Strategic Board, and will continue to press Nottinghamshire's case on behalf of all our residents.

Thank you, Chairman.

### **Question 12**

#### **QUESTION TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE**

Can the Chairman please outline whether the introduction of Universal Credit will have a positive or negative impact on school finances in Nottinghamshire Schools?

**Councillor Samantha Deakin**

**Reply from the Vice chairman of the Children & Young People's Committee, Councillor Tracey Taylor:-**

Thank you, Councillor Deakin, for your question.

We are not anticipating a particular impact on school finances from the introduction of Universal Credit.

I am aware that there has been a degree of political scaremongering based on incorrect claims around free school meals that garnered some media attention, but this has been widely discredited.

If you wish to expand further on the meaning or concerns behind your question, I shall note your comments and ask the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee to provide a reply in due course.

Thank you, Chairman.

### **Question 13**

Withdrawn by Cllr Alan Rhodes