

MINUTES OF THE FERNWOOD ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
held at 7.30pm on 11th May 2022
at the Fernwood Village Hall, Rubys Avenue, Fernwood

Present: Parish Councillors: R. Cullen, D. Harrison, J. Newton, J. Weale (Vice Chairman), M. Weale

District Councillors N. Mison, I. Walker, K. Walker

County Councillors J. Lee

Fernwood Community Church C. Meacham

Clocktower owner V. Khandge

Parish Clerk: Marion Fox Goddard

1. Welcome

Cllr Weale welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

2. Apologies for Absence

Parish Councillor Barry Smith.

3. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on May 13th, 2021

The attendees agreed to note and accept the minutes from this meeting.

4. Annual Reports

a. Fernwood Community Church (FCC)

Carl Meacham (Part time Pastor – FCC) gave the following report:

- The church has grown and is very mixed in terms of age and attendees
- The Sunday School has grown
- A Parents and Toddlers Group has started on Thursday mornings
- A 'Still Smiling' Support Group has started on Thursday mornings
- There is a young people's Bible study group
- Members of the church regularly visit Lancaster Grange
- Members of the Church visit Middlebeck school once a week for an assembly and after school activities

- Over the last year the church has organised a litter pick, activity trails for families and a summer sports event.
- FCC aims to have a full-time pastor for September
- Carl who is the part-time pastor at the moment will be still active in the church but doing more overseas work
- Thanked Malcolm (Caretaker - Fernwood Village Hall) and Marion for all their support and work over the last year.

b. Fernwood Parish Council (FPC)

Cllr M. Weale read a report on behalf of Fernwood Parish Council Chairman, Barry Smith. This is found in Appendix 1.

Cllr J. Weale thanked District Councillors Keith and Ivor Walker for all their work over many years for Fernwood and the local area, noting that this will be their last Annual Parish Meeting at Fernwood due to them both planning to step down next year.

c. Fernwood Residents Association (FRA)

Cllr Harrison read a report on behalf of Fernwood Residents Association. This is found in Appendix 2.

Cllr Harrison called out for volunteers to join and take on any of the roles within FRA to be able to take the Association forward. If anyone interested, please contact FRA by emailing info@myfernwood.org

d. Newark and Sherwood District Council (N&SDC)

Cllr Neill Mison (District Councillor representing Fernwood for 7 years, having previously served on FPC) gave the following report:

- Thanked fellow district councillors, Ivor and Keith Walker, for their many years of service to the community, having initially met them at Balderton Parish Hall when the Fernwood development was underway. They had all been behind getting the community of Fernwood together and Cllrs I and K Walker advised on the forming of the Parish Council.
- Outlined N&SDC's work over the last year
 - Involved with the setting up of the Fernwood Youth Club – having contributed financially and with officers' time.
 - Anti Social Behaviour Officers working with the police to tackle incidents of ASB in the area.
 - The Council is further ahead with the funding of the Southern Relief Road. Tenders will shortly be sought for the delivery of this project with a view to starting work towards the end of 2022.
 - The Council has been using the £25 million Towns Fund to work on various projects including the IASTI College which will be coming together over the next few years.
 - Working to regenerate the town centre including development of the old M&S building and look at ways to bring people into the town centre.

- National Highways have announced their preferred option for the reworking of the A46.

Cllr Keith Walker thanked Cllrs Mison and Weale for their kind words and recalled 30 years ago looking at what to do with the Balderton Hospital site. He had suggested a freight railway station and hotel but Cllr Maureen Dobson and her husband had suggested a new village leading to where we are today; there have been lots and ups and downs and with hindsight we can see things may have been done differently. Thanked Fernwood Parish Councillors and the Parish Council for all their work.

Cllr Ivor Walker said he endorsed what Cllr K Walker had said. His wife was born here and his father in law was an estates manager (for Balderton Hospital) here so had been coming here since he was 18. Gave thanks to the Parish Councillors, having always been treated with courtesy and kindness by FPC.

e. **Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC)**

Cllr John Lee gave the following report:

- This is his first Fernwood Annual Parish Meeting
- He has sent a speech by Councillor Jackson to the Parish Clerk for this meeting (see Appendix 3)
- People don't realise this is the third largest division of land mass in the County/District. When you are a County Councillor in a large area, different areas have different requirements.
- The County Council has a limited budget.
- Cllr Lee has asked for the refurbishment of the road between Coddington and Balderton to be pulled forward before the refurbishment of another road in his area.
- NCC are delivering services including Adult Care, Children's Care and Youth Services.
- NCC have received covid funds in from central government
- NCC have invested £778,000 in mental health services and changed the model
- A safer crossing point on near the Tawny Owl will be installed this year. He agrees with officer's plans but it will be reviewed if necessary.
- Cllr Lee has got speeding tubes down in Balderton and these will come to Fernwood so it can be investigated if there is evidence of speeding. '30mph for a reason' signs have been put up in Fernwood and temporary speed cameras on Goldstraw Lane.
- The Southern Relief Road should be finished in September 2024. In the long term this will be great but it will cause a headache during construction.
- Tomorrow night Cllr Lee should be appointed at the Vice Chair of the Governance and Ethics Committee at NCC.

f. **Fernwood Amateur Dramatic Group (FADS)**

Cllr Mollie Weale gave the following report:

- FADS has ran for 12 years

- The group was affected by the pandemic but recently they have seen a lot of new members of all ages.
- They have just finished a murder mystery and plan to do a pantomime.
- New members will be welcomed.

e. Clock Tower

Mr. Khandge gave the following report:

- He wants to bring the clock tower back to its iconic status.
- Bought the site in 2020.
- Plan to resubmit planning application that was previously approved by N&SDC (Lapsed so needs to be resubmitted)
- Will install a working clock.
- Would be happy to sponsor community events and would like to work with the community.

5. Open Forum for parishioners' comments and questions

Cllr I. Walker – As the President of the Nottinghamshire Association for Local Councils, thanked all the Parish Councillors for their hard work. Cllr Walker gave a fabric badge for Balderton Hospital to the Clerk for safe keeping. Cllr Walker told the attendees about Ron Dean who used to be the Secretary to Balderton Hospital – he is now 100 years old but would be able to tell people about this history of the site.

The Clerk, thanked Cllr Walker for the badge, noting that the timing of this gift was ideal as the Parish Council are currently petitioning for a Coat of Arms so parts of this badge could possibly be incorporated.



Cllr J. Weale thanked everyone to coming to the meeting.

Meeting closed at 20:15

Appendix 1: Fernwood Parish Council Chairman's Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

This is my fifth Annual Parish Meeting as Chairman and I am pleased to report on the highlights of the activities of Fernwood Parish Council since our last Annual Parish Meeting.

I am privileged to have a hardworking, committed team of Parish Councillors and Council Staff and to provide a report to this meeting.

Council Members

At the time of being elected Chairman, the Parish Council had seven councillors.

Councillors have represented Fernwood residents at several meetings throughout the past year including meetings with Local developers, Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils.

Council Staff

At the time of writing the Council employs two members of staff, the Clerk to the Council Marion Fox Goddard and the Village Hall Caretaker Malcolm Dickinson.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the council staff for all their hard work over the last year, especially post the COVID 19 pandemic, ensuring the safe return to use of the Village Hall and monthly Parish Council meetings.

A special thank you to Marion Fox Goddard for the support she provided, not only to the Parish Council, but to residents and the users of the Village Hall. Also, I would like to congratulate Marion in achieving the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). A qualification that means she is more aware of the law and procedures for local councils, the planning system, management of the council's activities, finance, and community engagement.

A would also like to congratulate Malcolm Dickinson, our Village Hall caretaker, who in February of this year was recognised for his ten years of service for Fernwood Parish Council. I would like to thank Malcolm for all his hard work in the Village Hall and when completing tasks in other areas of the Parish.

Fernwood Parish Council

Fernwood Parish Council's Action Plan has recently been updated for 2022/23 and has been published on our website. Any Fernwood Parish resident who would like any clarification of any of the actions listed, can contact the Clerk to the Parish Council.

Central Fernwood Public Open Space

As reported previously, discussions between N&SDC, BDWH and the Parish Council regarding land ownership are continuing and the Parish Council looks forward to communicating updates to residents, as the situation develops over the coming months. Currently, most of the public open spaces that make up Fernwood Central are privately owned by BDWH and managed and maintained, on their behalf, by Firstport.

As part of the Parish Council's five-year strategic plan, the council has continued to promote their desire to take over the freehold of the land. Having the Freehold of the land would enable the residents' of Central Fernwood, via its Parish Council, to have an input into the way the land is managed and maintained. This can only be done if BDWH hands over or sells the freehold of the open spaces to N&DC who would subsequently, devolve responsibility to the Parish Council.

Having read several comments on Facebook regarding this transfer of ownership, residents of Central Fernwood who pay the service charge need to be aware that transfer of land ownership does not mean the removal of the management company. Each resident who pays the service charge has signed a binding contract, their TP1, that states when and how a management company can be replaced. Central Fernwood service charge payers also need to be aware, that it is through their Residents Association that change would need to be discussed and implemented.

I can not stress enough the importance of having an active Central Fernwood Residents Association and more volunteers are needed to take up roles within the committee.

Once ownership is transferred to the Parish Council, a review of amenities in the area can take place and an improvement plan developed. Something the Parish Council can not currently do whilst the land is in private ownership.

Ruby's Avenue Woods and Open Space

The Parish Council is close to completing the purchase of the land at the end of Ruby's Avenue and will update residents on completion via the Council website, minutes of council monthly meetings and the Fernwood Gazette.

Once ownership has been transferred, the Parish Council will seek to develop the area promoting its natural beauty and wildlife habitat.

Youth Provision

Last month and in collaboration with NCC and N&SDC, a youth club opened in Fernwood. As with any new provision there are always going to be teething problems and comments on social media have been noted and will be investigated.

The provision will be reviewed on a six-monthly basis to ensure that it meets the requirements of the local community.

Village Hall

As reported in February the Parish Council took ownership of the Village Hall.

The future of the little-used changing rooms and the construction of an extension to the Hall to enable us to offer more facilities, has been an ongoing project and discussions have taken place on the various options available. Further information will be made available to residents as the project develops.

Future and ongoing activities

The Parish Council have a number of other ongoing projects including the planning for the jubilee celebrations in June, support for Ukrainian refugees and the families hosting them, a Coat of Arms for the parish and lobbying for rights of freeholders on a managed estate.

Concluding Remarks

Fernwood Parish Councillors are all volunteers from the local community and are aware of how we are all impacted on due to developments in the area and the unique issues associated with living in Fernwood, especially those residents who pay the service charge, which includes most of the Parish Council.

I would like to thank all the residents of Fernwood who have supported the Parish Council in our desire to improve the lives of residents who live in the area.

I would also like to thank my fellow councillors, who give up their time freely and provide input and guidance as we navigate through the various issues and problems associated with the daily running of a Parish Council.

I would also like to thank again; the Parish Council staff for all their hard work in supporting the Parish Council and the residents of Fernwood.

I would also like to thank Cllr Keith Walker, Cllr Ivor Walker and Cllr Neil Mison for all their advice and guidance to the Parish Council over the last year. We hope that future support from NCC and NSDC elected representatives continues to be offered, at the level of quality that we have become accustomed.

Barry Smith

Chairman Fernwood Parish Council

Appendix 2: Report from Fernwood Residents Association (FRA)

The Fernwood (central) Residents Association is currently comprised of four residents, David Heath and three members of the Parish Council, myself, Barry Smith and Henry Micah.

We have taken on interim roles within the Residents Association, after the previous committee stepped down, as we did not want FRA to fold. We decided to do this because, as residents, we believe that, firstly, it would be counterproductive to the residents' of central Fernwood not to have a Residents Association, due to the arrangements within our deeds of having a management company for the maintenance of the open spaces. As we know Freeholders have no rights in law to challenge unreasonable service charges and as management companies only liaise with residents associations' and not with Parish Councils, it is important that those channels remain open for the good of the residents' of Fernwood who pay the service charge.

David Heath, who is a former chairman of FRA, currently holds the position of Treasurer and has been ensuring the bank accounts are in order. He also liaises with John Jeyes and Firstport in relation to maintenance matters.

The second reason that it is important to keep FRA running, is because it is a fantastic way for residents to engage with other members of the community and take a lead in organising and running activities and events within the village, for the village.

We are calling out for volunteers to join and take on any of the roles within FRA to be able to take the Association forward.

If you are interested, please do attend our monthly meetings and please do contact us by emailing info@myfernwood.org

Appendix 3: Nottinghamshire County Councillor Lee's Report to the Fernwood Parish Meeting

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE REPORT TO FERNWOOD pc 2022
2021_2022

As well as my monthly meetings to the parish council where I outline my local aims and outcomes to the parish council as well as I have just delivered my yearly update to Fernwood parish outlining the work I am doing.

I thought I would add a full report from the county council set out in-part at the budget meeting this year presented by Cllr Richard Jackson portfolio holder.

I have added in some but not all his speech at the full council meeting Feb/22

This will outline the council's aims for the next year as well as the difficulties from COVID the council has faced over the past year.

COUNCILLOR RICHARD JACKSON BUDGET SPEECH 2022

"The Government had just published its Roadmap out of the COVID-19 lockdown and some 17 million people had received their first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine. Since then, we have seen an extensive vaccine rollout with around 140 million vaccines now having been administered in the UK.

This represents huge progress in the fight against COVID, but the financial and practical challenges presented to this Council by the pandemic, most recently by the Omicron variant, have been immense.

In extremely difficult circumstances, Nottinghamshire County Council has performed exceptionally well, and I believe the ability of this authority to withstand the pressures presented by COVID can be attributed to four things.

Firstly, before COVID struck, Nottinghamshire County Council was in strong financial shape after a decade of modernisation that saved more than £300 million. We released large amounts of money from administrative bureaucracy and reinvested it in frontline service delivery. That's a big reason why we are NOT one of at least 20 Councils reported to be in 'active discussions' with Government seeking extra money to avoid bankruptcy.

Secondly, Nottinghamshire County Council has received excellent additional financial support from central Government to cope with the pandemic. Since March 2020 we have received some £165 million in COVID-related grants and funds, thanks not least to some very successful lobbying by the former Council Leader, Honorary Alderman Kay Cutts MBE, and our current Council Leader, Ben Bradley MP, whose presence in Westminster means that the voice of this County Council is now heard louder than ever before in Government circles.

We've seen proof of this success with this Council receiving a very good Local Government Settlement helping towards an improvement of 8.7% in our Core Spending Power.

This ranks as the third highest increase for shire counties across the country. In fact, the only shire councils to receive a greater increase in their Core Spending Power were our neighbours Lincolnshire and Derbyshire, which suggests that this Government is firmly committed to 'levelling up' the East Midlands with the rest of England, compared with the underfunding this region has received in the past.

We now await the outcome of the Fair Funding Review delayed by COVID. I hope it will deliver a new formula that will see these improved settlements continue for Nottinghamshire long into the future. We also need a return to multi-year settlements that give us more certainty when preparing our Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Right now, we can plan our budget around a very encouraging one-year settlement. In 2022/23 we will be receiving:
A confirmed Revenue Support Grant allocation of £7.3 million, which is £200,000 more than in 2021/22;
A £33.5 million share of the national £636 million Social Care Grant, which is an increase of £9.2 million on the current year;

£7.5 million from a new, one-off £822 million Services Grant to spend on front-line services;

An Improved Better Care Fund allocation of £30.9 million, an increase of £900,000 on the current year;

£2.4 million from a new £162 million Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care Fund;

£2.5 million from the Government's latest Supporting Families Grant, which replaces the previous Troubled Families Grant; and

£1.6 million from a total £554 million in New Homes Bonus funding.

, this represents significant extra money for Nottinghamshire, adding to the financial resilience of this authority. The third reason this Council has been able to withstand the impact of the pandemic is that we have a truly outstanding group of employees who have gone beyond the call of duty to keep serving our residents. This administration and this Council Leader were pleased last September to grant our employees an extra day of annual leave, to be taken by March 2024, in recognition of their immense dedication and effort.

The fourth reason this Council is so resilient is that we've had the patience and financial support of the Nottinghamshire public, who clearly do understand the huge challenges facing the council at this time. They appreciate why a Conservative administration has needed to levy more in Council Tax and Adult Social Care Precept in recent times than we would normally wish to do. In fact, courtesy of Nottinghamshire voters, Conservative representation on this Council increased at the County elections last May, meaning we now have an outright majority and a clear mandate to continue the good work we first began in June 2009.

We have transformed this authority from an oversized, outdated relic of 1970s local government into a modern, efficient, effective operation delivering better outcomes for residents.

It is because of this financial resilience and Government support that, despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID, we have been able to maintain services and provide more than £15 million for organisations, charities, households and individuals through a range of funding streams. This includes:

- Almost £5.7 million in Household Support Funding
- Over £3 million in Covid Winter Grant
- Over £2.5 million in Covid Local Support Grant
- £1 million in Community Funding
- Over £850,000 in Emergency Assistance Grants;
- £800,000 for food and essentials; and
- £1.5 million in Social Recovery Funding, which includes an extra half a million approved through the Communities Committee just last month.

But of course, there is still plenty more to be done in what are very far from 'normal' times.

The additional costs and lost income to Nottinghamshire County Council directly associated with the COVID pandemic over the last two financial years amounts to around £138 million and those costs will continue to accumulate.

I want to highlight some of the most difficult challenges facing our Children's, Adults and Place department services in the current and forthcoming financial year, some being COVID-related. But on a positive note, I will also explain how we plan to meet those challenges through our Transformation Programme, building on the success of the past decade.

Children & Families

It makes sense to start with our Children & Families department where the financial pressure on the Council is perhaps most obvious, in view of the forecast £1.7 million overspend on the Children & Young People's Committee budget reported to Finance Committee earlier this month.

Nottinghamshire saw an 8.7% rise in the numbers of children in care from 2019/20 to 2020/21, driven partly by the number of older adolescents coming into our care, although we are still below the average rate for England and slightly below the rate of our statistical neighbours.

Last June, the ongoing Independent Review of Children's Social Care, chaired by Josh McAlister, published their 'Case for Change' report, which stated, and I quote:

"With increasing demand at the acute end of the system, the costs of children's social care are spiralling and shifting towards crisis management. Spending on statutory children's social care has increased by 26% in real terms between 2012/13 and 2019/20, with a year-on-year increase in real terms."

As difficult as the national picture may be, this administration will not accept overspends on our children's services as an ongoing inevitability. We are working hard to find solutions, guided by best practice from elsewhere.

In recent months the Council's senior political leadership have led a series of meetings with the Chief Executive, the Corporate Director for Children Families & Cultural Services, and other senior officers, to identify ways to break this cycle of continuously emerging in-year budget pressures.

We owe it to vulnerable children and taxpayers alike to achieve a more predictable, sustainable children's services budget position. That said, we will never seek to achieve this at the expense of a vulnerable person's safety. We will always ensure sufficient funds are available to identify and care for vulnerable residents who need our help, even if that means overspending.

Our recently agreed Nottinghamshire Plan might appear to be stating the obvious with its commitment to 'Keeping children, vulnerable adults and communities safe', but these are far more than well-intentioned words.

The recent appalling cases of 16-month-old Star Hobson in West Yorkshire and 6-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes in the West Midlands demonstrate why we must get it right - every time - when assessing the vulnerability of a child and deciding who is safe to look after them.

That's why, as a key part of this Council's new Transformation Programme, we are investing an initial £1.1 million in what is known as a 'Whole Family Safeguarding' approach, approved by Children & Young People's Committee last December.

We aim to avoid future cost demands on our services by reducing the number of families and children whose lives deteriorate to a point where they need intensive help from us.

And let's be clear, 'Early Help' doesn't just mean focusing attention on young children. The earliest form of intervention to prevent a child becoming vulnerable is to identify and prevent emerging behavioural problems with vulnerable adult parents, such as substance abuse, so we stop the problem escalating to a point where their children are at risk.

We are learning from the best new practice elsewhere and have specifically commissioned Essex County Council to act as a critical friend due to their role as a Department for Education Partner in Practice; their Ofsted rating as an "outstanding" authority; and the fact they are one of our statistical neighbours.

Our £1.1 million investment over the course of this administration will combine with existing budgets to fund several strands of work. For example:

We will create a more stable social carer workforce by growing the number of social work apprenticeships we employ through the Apprenticeship levy, and we will provide more support for newly qualified social workers so we can recruit and retain more of these professionals and reduce our reliance on agency social work assistants;

- We will invest in 'Strengths-based practices' with better collaboration between vulnerable families and the professionals supporting them, with a particular focus on adolescents judged to be on the edge of coming into care;

We will intensify our multi-disciplinary approach to children and family support, bringing together all relevant professionals into one cohesive team, increasing direct contact with families and removing any duplication, delivering more services through our roll-out of community-based Family Hubs; As recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, we will place greater priority on Kinship Care, investing in improved support to carers who are looking after the vulnerable child of a relative or friend, thereby keeping the child closer to their birth family, but in a safe place, rather than taking them into foster care or residential care;

We will protect and in due course look to increase our in-house fostering capacity as much as we can when the current challenge of COVID begins to subside, so more children who need our care can be found a local, family-based home, and to this end we are collaborating with other councils across the D2N2 footprint to develop our recruitment packages and protect ourselves better against fee inflation by Independent Fostering Agencies;

We will also continue investing in new, modern residential care properties which accommodate smaller numbers of children and deliver good quality care compared with the discredited, large-scale institutions of the past.

Through this work over the course of this administration we expect to deliver:

- A de-escalation of need, with more families receiving early help and fewer children requiring child protection plans or care proceedings;
- Fewer older adolescent children needing to come into care;
- Less reliance on procuring high cost external residential care at a distance; and
- More children having consistency of relationship with their social worker and less reliance on agency workers.

We forecast that this can ease the pressure on our committee budgets – not least our Children & Young People's budget - by between £2 million and £7 million. This may seem a broad-ranging projection, but that's because our primary focus will be on outcomes, not on money. The savings - be they at the lower or upper end of this scale - will be a bonus ... but a welcome one in terms of budget sustainability.

Of course, we are also just emerging from the COVID pandemic, so it will take time for the full benefits of 'Whole Family Safeguarding' to become evident, but this will be a key part of our Transformation Programme.

Adult Social Care & Health

Speaking of the impact of the COVID pandemic, Chairman, in recent months the Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee has approved the investment of almost £6.5 million over two years in staffing costs and support services to deliver the Local Outbreak Control Plan, and over £3.3 million in staffing resources for our Ageing Well and Living Well services to manage immediate demand at a time of extreme pressure.

The Omicron variant of Covid is considered to be far less severe than previous variants, but it has a very high transmission rate, meaning a lot of people living in Nottinghamshire caught the virus and had to self-isolate. This saw a significant percentage of the working age population - including Nottinghamshire County Council staff - forced to take sick leave. The number of days' sickness absence per employee is significantly higher for the Adult Social Care & Health department than any of our other departments.

Our front-line staff face a particularly high threat of catching COVID during their daily work, which means we have fewer available staff, getting stretched even further, because colleagues are off sick.

The resilience of our services was tested to the extreme over Christmas, with fewer staff available to meet huge demand on Home Care services, support to Care Homes, Supported Living, Mental Health Services and Community Social Care.

Our Ageing Well and Living Well services are well managed and have not previously accumulated waiting lists across our Care & Support Assessment, Occupational Therapy and Community-based services. Unfortunately, this changed during the winter due to the intense disruption caused by Omicron, aggravated by staff retention and recruitment difficulties.

The most recent Financial Monitoring Report to my committee shows a £2.9 million underspend [£1.7 million when excluding Public Health services] against the current year's Adult Social Care & Public Health budget, but rather than indicating any slack in this budget, it is in fact an illustration of the COVID-related problems we are facing. The main reasons for the underspend include reduced outlay on Ageing Well care packages as a result of delayed demand arising from COVID, and underspent staffing budgets across the department due to difficulties recruiting people into temporary and permanent vacancies, even though our need for staff is greater than ever.

Last November the Government published its adult social care winter plan including a commitment to provide £162.5 million of Workforce Recruitment and Retention funding, ring-fenced to support councils and providers to pay for sufficient staff. This Council was allocated £2.3 million of this funding and has targeted it on sustaining Home Care services which represent our greatest area of pressure. We now have a short- and medium-term Home Care Action Plan in place where we are working with providers to increase capacity, and we are examining internal options to support the market.

The County Council's Quality and Market Management Team are leading this work and have launched a recruitment and advertising campaign through the Council's own channels to attract people to work in social care in the County. We are focused not only on building Home Care capacity but also supporting the recruitment needs of Care Homes as we work to prevent further closures. In the last 18 months, there were eight care home closures in Notts, an increase of five on 2020.

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing has also seen an increase in the number of people with complex and severe mental health issues requiring our support, and of course our own staff are not immune from these pressures.

As a proactive response to the local mental health challenge, we have invested an extra £778,000 in our Mental Health Support Services over the past year and have changed our model of delivery to provide 24/7 support. We are working with partners to deliver a co-ordinated, timely response for people experiencing mental health crises. This investment is essential, given that we received 1,150 referrals to our mental health services in the last six months of 2021.

Last September with the Government's 'Build Back Better' policy paper, the Prime Minister announced plans to substantially increase spending on health and social care over the next three years funded through a new, UK-wide 1.25% Health and Social Care Levy from April 2022, based on National Insurance Contributions and an increase in dividend tax rates. When implemented, this will raise around £36 billion over the next three years, from which £3.6 billion will be used to reform how people pay for care - including the introduction of an £86,000 cap on individual care costs.

In December, the Government released a further policy paper - People at the Heart of Care - with associated financial commitments including:

- £1.4 billion over three years to help local authorities offer a fairer cost of care to providers;
- £300 million extra for workforce recruitment and retention;
- £500 million to ensure that the social care workforce have the right training and qualifications and feel recognised and valued for their skills and commitment;
- at least £150 million of additional funding to drive the adoption of new technology and widespread digitisation across social care; and
- more than £70 million to assist local authorities to better plan and develop the support and care options for service users.

The specific share of all of this national funding that will end up in Nottinghamshire is still to be determined, but coming on top of a good Local Government Settlement and the prospect of Fairer Funding, this should represent good news towards the longer-term sustainability of our adult social care service.

Two weeks ago the Government published another White Paper presenting their proposals for health and care integration. These seek to bring together the planning, commissioning and delivery of co-ordinated, joined-up, seamless services to support people to live healthy, independent, dignified lives and improve outcomes for the population as a whole. The aim is to ensure everyone should receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time. The Government is pledging that NHS and local government organisations will be supported and encouraged to do more to align and pool budgets, to ensure better use of resources to address immediate needs, and also to support long-term investment in population health and wellbeing. We will learn more in the coming months.

Investing in Nottinghamshire

In March 2019, Members approved an ambitious Investing in Nottinghamshire Programme promising a network of modern, fit-for-purpose County Council office buildings to deliver local services and boost the county's economic prospects.

A report to Policy Committee stated that the programme would 'enhance opportunities for more flexible working, reduce travel and down-time and improve access to office accommodation through sustainable public transport and better parking provision'.

What we could not have anticipated in March 2019 was that exactly one year later, the COVID lockdown would enforce the rollout of flexible home-working solutions at a far quicker pace than was originally planned or even thought possible!

Our move towards smarter working was originally intended to be a process of evolution with a strong emphasis on saving taxpayers' money and protecting the environment by reducing employee travel, thus reducing vehicle emissions. In 2020-2021, the Council undertook around 3.5 million fewer miles of travel than the previous year equating to a reduced spend of £1.6 million and reduced carbon emissions of 1000 tonnes, or equivalent to the annual emissions from 112 average households.

However, what began as evolution has now become more of a revolution, driven by the pandemic. This was confirmed last July when Policy Committee agreed a Hybrid Working Strategy as part of our Smarter Working Approach.

We have since moved rapidly to implement this hybrid working model, with buildings re-designed and new equipment being provided to our staff. In 2022/23 an extra £5.4 million, funded by COVID-19 grant, is being invested in updating ICT devices to ensure our employees can work in the most efficient and effective manner. The effect of this revolution - combined with the new administration's decision last May to declare a Climate Emergency - is that we can now make much bolder assumptions about our reduced need for physical office accommodation. We have already almost halved our office estate, saving over £1.2 million per year, reducing our impact on the environment.

We have been able to reduce our intended capital spend on the Investing in Nottinghamshire programme from £28 million to just under £21 million, and yet it remains an ambitious project which will attract new investment, create more than 1,000 new jobs, deliver 1,000 new homes and still reduce further the county's carbon footprint.

We will still be investing in a new development at Top Wighay; a new-build Contact Centre at Worksop, refurbishment of part of a post-16 centre in Retford to provide accommodation for child support and foster support

staff, and a building refurbishment in Beeston Central that will provide better-quality space for front-facing social care services.

Of course, we already have a strong presence across Nottinghamshire, for example through our network of 60 libraries, managed by Inspire, which will continue to be protected this administration.

We need to maintain good quality, energy-efficient buildings to support service delivery, but what we must remember is that it is our employees, not buildings, who ultimately deliver our services. As we move towards a hybrid model based on a combination of new, modern, energy saving accommodation and remote working, we cannot afford to retain old, under-used, expensive premises for no reason other than sentimental attachment. The Investing in Nottinghamshire programme has therefore included a review of our wider property and land estate, managed through the Economic Development & Asset Management Committee, identifying opportunities for joint working, cost-saving arrangements with partners, and the release of some of our assets, meaning we can bring certain sites to market in a phased way.

We have already managed to cut the number of vacant properties, gradually reducing security and maintenance costs, and we will continue to re-purpose, sell or demolish more of these properties in the coming year.

Our capital receipts for the current year stand at £5.5 million, well on the way to our target of £8.4 million, and we aim to deliver almost £93 million more capital receipts by 2025/26. We will use some of our current receipts to pay off future years' borrowing, thereby reducing the pressure on our revenue budget by some £1.5 million in 2022/23. This leads me to recall that when our latest Investing in Nottinghamshire decisions were taken, certain Independent councillors from Ashfield labelled our Top Wighay proposals 'a sham' and alleged that this County Council was 'drowning in debt' to finance such plans. These claims got them their desired headlines in the local press, but perhaps those living in glass houses should not throw stones?

My attention was drawn to a table in Ashfield District Council's own Treasury Management Strategy which revealed that by 2023/24, some 35% of their revenue stream will be spent on servicing debt, driven by borrowing for commercial investments.

This represents more than THREE TIMES the amount Nottinghamshire County Council forecasts spending on servicing its borrowing in the same year.

Place - Highways

Certain Ashfield Independent members are equally keen to chase headlines and make mischief regarding the condition of Nottinghamshire's roads and pavements, but we will not allow their political opportunism to deflect us from the task at hand.

The previous Conservative administration invested an extra £24 million over three years to begin the immense task of tackling the road maintenance backlog we inherited from the previous Labour administration, or to be more precise, the previous eight Labour administrations.

Overall, our expenditure on Nottinghamshire's Road Maintenance and Renewals Programme has exceeded £120 million since the Conservatives took control in 2017, and despite the considerable practical challenges of COVID, 193 of the 250 highways capital programme schemes scheduled for 2021/22 have been completed, with the remainder to follow as soon as possible.

Members are aware that the new administration has undertaken a cross-party Highways Review that has produced a detailed set of more than 50 recommendations, which have now been developed into a new Highways Improvement Plan.

That's why this administration is recommending today to establish a £15 million earmarked reserve to fund works associated with the Highways Review, and to support our Environment Strategy. This means that - for the second Conservative administration running - we will have boosted the basic highways budget with significant additional resources, showing our commitment to improving Nottinghamshire's roads.

Place – Investment in Net Zero Projects

As I've said, this £15 million reserve will also help fund our Corporate Environment Strategy. Nottinghamshire County Council declared a 'Climate Emergency' last May as we work towards our target of Net Zero carbon emissions in the Council's activities by 2030.

we agreed investment of £200,000 per annum to put a new staffing structure in place to respond to the Climate Emergency and deliver on the Net Zero target.

The Council's thirteen strategic environmental ambitions have been broken down into a 61-point Action Plan, an update on which was taken to Transport & Environment Committee last month, as well as a progress report on our £600,000 Green Investment Fund. Our plans include, to list just a few examples:-

Continuing our programme of replacing streetlights with more energy efficient LED lighting, with a total budget of £4 million included in our Capital Programme;

A Carbon Management Programme and Energy Saving Scheme with a total budget of more than £2 million

to deliver various green 'invest to save' initiatives, and then recycle those savings into further such projects;

More Flood Mitigation Projects, continuing previous and current good work such as the £5 million flood mitigation scheme in Southwell which is scheduled for completion this year and will benefit approximately 240 properties and 60 businesses;

Ongoing community tree planting and biodiversity initiatives; and

Green fleet, transport and travel programmes.

Protecting the environment and reducing our carbon footprint is one of the key ambitions set out in our Nottinghamshire Plan, alongside:

Attracting investment in infrastructure, the economy and green growth;

Strengthening businesses and creating more good quality jobs;

Building skills that help people to get those good jobs;

Improving transport and digital connections; and,

Making Nottinghamshire somewhere people love to live, work and visit.

The previous Conservative administration already boasted a long list of achievements in pursuit of these aims, for example:

We delivered new schools at Bestwood, Hawthorne Primary, Orchard Special School in Newark, Hucknall Flying High Academy and Rocliffe, Spencer Academy in Edwalton, with new schools forthcoming at East Leake and Bingham;

We increased Superfast Broadband coverage in Nottinghamshire from 76% in 2011 to 98.7% today, 2% higher than the national average, cementing our position as one of the top 3 digitally connected counties in the UK;

We began the creation of the world's first 5G Connected Forest within the Sherwood Forest area, due for completion in March;

We are delivering the 5G Digital Turbine project, thanks to our success in securing £592,000 from the Government's Getting Building Fund, which will boost the productivity of more than 40 businesses already on the Turbine site and create more new highly-skilled jobs; and

We were successful in securing £9 million of external funding from Homes England which, combined with £4.5 million of match-funding, is helping our borough/district partner authorities to deliver new housing sites and increase the supply of new homes in Nottinghamshire.

Devolution

This progress continues under the new administration and we are now well on our way to securing the devolution of more powers and resources from Central Government that will enable us to take such work and investment to another level.

Working with Nottingham City Council and borough and district council partners, through the re-vitalised and aptly-named Economic Prosperity Committee, we have been able to ensure that Nottinghamshire & Nottingham is one of the Government's first nine Pathfinder sites invited to begin negotiations to agree a devolution deal. The aim is to agree a number of these deals by Autumn 2022.

Such a deal would involve extra powers and money coming from Government to deliver a county, city and regional approach to:

- education and skills;

- transport and the environment;
- the economy and infrastructure;
- land and housing;
- health and social care;
- youth services;
- community safety; and
- tourism and heritage.

We have already received good news through the Integrated Rail Plan that Nottinghamshire will be on the route for HS2, with associated benefits including a new station at Toton, and improvements to the Maid Marian and Robin Hood Lines.

We have also had confirmation of the electrification of the Midland Main Line.

Adult Social Care Precept & Council Tax

, the benefits of Devolution are now within reach, but in order to secure them, Nottinghamshire County Council must continue to be in good, sustainable financial shape, especially when some of our partner authorities are in a more precarious financial position. Put it this way, if I was the Secretary of State looking to devolve significant resources and control to a certain area of the country – like Nottingham & Nottinghamshire - I would want to be confident it is going into safe hands!

The Government stated last year that it would ensure local authorities had access to sustainable funding for core budgets through the Spending review, but it also stipulated that councils would be expected to meet demographic and unit cost pressures, I quote, ‘through Council tax, social care precept and long-term-efficiencies’.

In practice, this means that in 2022/23 the Government gave Nottinghamshire County Council permission to raise Council Tax by 1.99%, and to raise a total of 3% Adult Social Care Precept. This would mean a total increase of 4.99%. However, Chairman, as the Council Leader stated in this Chamber a month ago:

- this administration notes and recognises that residents across Nottinghamshire are facing rising costs of living;
- we believe we should do everything we can to mitigate the impact of the rising cost of living on those residents;

and therefore,

- we have carefully considered the impact of the cost of living when determining our budget and tax recommendations for 2022/23.

we have had to remain realistic and responsible.

This Conservative administration cannot recommend to freeze council tax as we did for four years between 2010 and 2013. Back then, this Council was a bloated, antiquated, unwieldy organisation ripe for streamlining. There were many opportunities to make sustainable savings without increasing council tax, and of course we were not having to manage the local effects of an ongoing global pandemic.

Today, the picture is different.

There certainly are not another £300 million-worth of savings to be found over the next ten years, and as well as the service pressures I’ve already described, we face inflationary and pay pressures that are detailed in the budget book today.

Therefore, in light of the significant funds likely to be required, today’s budget proposes to create a Pay Contingency of £10.2 million for 2022/23, separate from the general Contingency.

We are also maintaining a specific COVID reserve of £7.1 million in the coming year, which is prudent and sensible in order to manage the ongoing, unpredictable pandemic situation where we do not yet know what type and severity of COVID variants could emerge.

There was a time – for about 28 years to be precise – when this Council would simply have dumped its extra costs onto residents with council tax increases running into double digits. But as I’ve explained in previous budget presentations, this Conservative council now engages in a process of year-round budgeting where we never stop reviewing our services and looking for efficiencies.

Thanks to this work, which dates back to June last year, this administration has managed to identify £11 million of potential efficiency savings over three years, of which we are looking to achieve around £8 million in the coming

year. Most of these savings will need to be reinvested in front-line services, Chairman, but this still gives us a little more flexibility than we would otherwise have at this time.

As a consequence, I can propose that Council Tax is only increased by 1% for 2022/23, alongside the 3% Adult Social Care Precept increase, most* of which was already assumed in our current Medium Term Financial Strategy.

This modest increase will mean the total tax increase for Nottinghamshire residents for 2022/23 is in line with many other shire authorities across the country and is less than the full 4.99% increase being charged for example in Liberal Democrat/Labour/Independent-controlled Cambridgeshire and Liberal Democrat/Labour/Green-controlled Oxfordshire.

For the majority of Nottinghamshire households this means a bill increase of 86p a week, in return for which I can promise that this Council will continue to deliver and indeed improve the services that matter most to our residents. Future Council Tax increases of 1.99% per annum have been factored into today's Medium Term Financial Strategy, with annual 1% Adult Social Care Precept increases to 2024/25.

Of course, the Chancellor of the Exchequer also intervened earlier this month by promising that residents living in properties in council tax bands A to D will receive a £150 rebate to help alleviate the cost-of-living crisis. The £150 rebate will be implemented directly by local authorities and households will not need to repay it.

This means almost 90 per cent of Nottinghamshire homes will now pay less council tax from April than they did last year. Properties in bands A to D make up 88.4 per cent of all homes in the county, with 330,959 Nottinghamshire households to benefit from the rebate.

The Government's measures also include discretionary funding of £144 million to be provided to support vulnerable people and individuals on low incomes that do not pay Council Tax, or that pay Council Tax for properties in Bands E-H.

it is due to the Conservatives' long-term, prudent management of this authority that we do not need to levy the maximum possible council tax increase "

yours cllr johno lee