

FULL COUNCIL MEETING – 15 JULY 2025

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

In accordance with Rule No. 3.3.3 the following question was submitted to the Council from Councillor John Lee:

Potential Impact of Boundary Changes on Health, Wellbeing, and Leisure Services in Nottinghamshire

“As Nottinghamshire considers transitioning to a unitary authority, concerns have arisen regarding the potential impact of boundary changes on essential services, particularly those under your portfolio of Health, Wellbeing, and Leisure. Given your extensive involvement in community health initiatives, including your role as Chair of the Friends of Newark Cemetery and your advocacy for improved healthcare access, your insights on this matter are invaluable.

Nottingham City Council has faced significant financial challenges in recent years. In November 2023, the Council issued a Section 114 notice due to a £23 million overspend for the 2023-24 financial year, primarily attributed to rising social care costs, increased homelessness, and inflationary pressures. The collapse of Robin Hood Energy in 2020 further exacerbated the Council’s financial position, resulting in a loss of £38 million.

In contrast, Nottinghamshire County Council has demonstrated prudent financial management. The 2024/25 budget reflects an increase in overall spending of over £47 million, with more than £160 million invested in capital projects across the county. However, the Council is projected to spend an additional £31 million on adult social care, highlighting the existing pressures on essential services.

Given your commitment to promoting healthier lifestyles and ensuring residents have access to affordable, nutritious food, as evidenced by your participation in initiatives like the Crop Drop scheme and cookery classes for young people, there is a valid concern that any division of the current County Council area could lead to reduced funding for Nottinghamshire’s unitary authority. This reduction could, in turn, impair the delivery of health, wellbeing, and leisure services, with detrimental effects on our residents.

In light of these potential risks, do you agree that maintaining the integrity of the Nottinghamshire County Council area during the transition to a unitary authority is essential to safeguard the funding and effectiveness of our health, wellbeing, and leisure services?”

Reply from Councillor Susan Crosby – Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Leisure

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Lee. Your questions are broader than my portfolio and I’m not entirely clear what you mean by the reference to “maintaining the integrity of Nottinghamshire County Council”. The County Council is set to be abolished along with the other 8 Councils in Nottinghamshire and if you think that there is any realistic prospect of there being a unitary Council based on the current County Council geography you are mistaken. That option has been independently assessed as the worst option for the people of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

I also think that your financial analysis of Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council is less than well rounded to say the least and also out of date. That's not a matter for our Council though so I'll leave that there.

The decision on how Nottinghamshire looks as one or more unitary authorities is a matter for the Councils and Government to determine.

Creating a whole new system of Councils will create a number of risks but also hopefully lots of opportunities too.

In health and wellbeing, our Council already makes many contributions. The examples you mentioned, like Crop Drop and cookery classes, were started by Newark & Sherwood District Council, not Nottinghamshire County Council. The Nottinghamshire County Council funded a food coordinator post in 2021, which helped us expand food schemes like Crop Drop and sustain community food clubs.

Our health and wellbeing projects are now fully funded in-house, including a 3-year food coordinator post funded by the Cost-of-Living response. We also coordinate initiatives like the Barbers Initiative, Community Alcohol Partnerships, and Breastfeeding Friendly. These are linked with NCC officers but don't have financial commitments from partners.

Looking to our partners in Health, there are also boundaries to navigate with the Integrated Care Boards and no doubt many others. Moving to a unitary arrangement will take a lot of time and planning and again, the details of this transition will be discussed and decided by leaders and executives across Nottinghamshire.

While social care pressures might appear to threaten the continuity of some of our initiatives, I think we'd all agree that aspects of the current two-tier system are inefficient and do not serve the public well. Closer integration of social care and housing; joined up waste and highways maintenance; closer co-operation of public protection and trading standards. These are just a few examples so let's not cling on to a system that we all know is no longer fit for purpose".

Note - the Chair ruled that the supplementary question put by Councillor Lee was not relevant.