

From the Leader of the Council

Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State for Local Government and
Homelessness
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London
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Sent via email: alison.mcgovern.mp@parliament.uk

11th February 2026

Dear Minister,

Proposed Directions under Section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 – Nottingham City Council

Thank you for your letter dated 4th February inviting the authority to make representations to the Secretary of State regarding the proposed intervention package, following receipt of the Commissioners' latest report and our letter dated 5th December. We write to set out our thoughts on the next steps and future governance of our improvement journey.

We welcome the Secretary of State and the Minister's recognition of the significant progress made over the past two years. Since the appointment of the Commissioner team in February 2024, the Council has made steady and sustained progress, embracing the need for change, and working constructively with all three Commissioners. The Council now has strong foundations in place which strengthens our commitment to driving continuous improvement. We also acknowledge the Commissioners' assessment that, while meaningful improvements have been achieved, the Council remains at an early stage of its recovery. We recognise that and our focus must now be on embedding these changes across the organisation.

Overall position

The authority accepts the Secretary of State's assessment that further assurance and targeted support is necessary to ensure that improvements are sustained and translated into consistently improved outcomes, specifically in relation to Continuous Improvement and Service Delivery. In that context, we have already implemented a revised governance model to support our continuous improvement, developing a Continuous Service Improvement Plan which will be presented to the Council's Executive Board for approval in April 2026.

The Council supports the Secretary of State's intention to bring the current Commissioner-led intervention to an end on 22nd February, withdraw the Directions issued and move to a proportionate and targeted model of support linked to our continuous improvement goals.



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This will support the restoration of local democratic accountability while retaining the necessary external assurance to the Minister.

Ministerial Envoys

In our letter dated 5th December, we outlined our commitment to accelerating improvements through access to external expertise, to provide lighter-touch support, challenge and assurance. We consider this approach to be appropriate and proportionate, and consistent with both the Commissioners' recommendations and our own request for targeted sector expertise.

Throughout the period of intervention, we have sought to actively learn from best practice by working with other councils, such as Liverpool, Sheffield and Barnsley. This learning informed our proposed model for continuous improvement which is appropriately targeted towards our improvement. In our letter, we outlined how this might be achieved, a position supported by the Commissioners in their final report. With the return of all decision-making powers, we are keen to work in collaboration with the Government. It is, therefore, our view that the Council must play an active role in the selection process, including the opportunity to make recommendations regarding suitable candidates to ensure a constructive arrangement informed by local context. Specifically, the opportunity to make recommendations on suitable candidates for individuals with relevant local government political experience.

Whilst we particularly welcome the proposal that the Envoys will not hold decision-making powers, we would appreciate further clarity on how the role of Envoy would be distinguishable from the current Commissioner model. Given that neither will have any powers of direction and that their engagement will be significantly less intensive than the current Commissioner model, it is essential that their scope is clearly defined and understood across the organisation. We would welcome collaboratively defining their scope as part of the process of agreeing and confirming the Envoys.

Whilst we acknowledge the need for continued assurance, further clarity is needed on the costs associated with intervention, particularly on the responsibility for the costs incurred by the Envoys. Whilst Nottingham taxpayers have been responsible for the costs associated with Government intervention in previous years, we would question the efficacy of taxpayers in remaining responsible for further costs in future years. The Secretary of State under the previous Government established an Improvement and Assurance Board all at the expense of Nottingham taxpayers with whom the relationships within Council regressed and failed to deliver value for money for the city of Nottingham.

We would, therefore, ask the Secretary of State to consider whether it is proportionate for taxpayers in Nottingham to continue to bear these costs, particularly as the Council had initially sought lighter touch support through sector expertise, such as the LGA, as opposed to further ministerial directions or the appointment of Envoys. However, should the Secretary of State continue with its approach and appoint Envoys, then I would ask that any fees payable are capped at 52 days per annum to reduce the cost to the taxpayer.

Continuous Improvement Committee and Plan

The Council supports the proposed requirement to establish a Continuous Improvement Committee and to develop a comprehensive Continuous Improvement

Plan within three months of the Directions taking effect. As indicated previously, this is to be presented to the Council's Executive Board in April this year.

We agree with the proposed focus of the Committee and the Plan, including:

- embedding financial sustainability and robust financial management.
- strengthening scrutiny, governance and decision-making.
- improving risk management and internal assurance.
- accelerating service transformation, particularly in Adult Social Care and Children's Services.

The Council is committed to ensuring that the Committee operates transparently, includes appropriate external expertise, and provides meaningful challenge and support to both members and officers.

We have made significant progress in defining a robust, evidence-based plan for Local Government Reorganisation. The Council is now fully focussed and committed to mobilising at pace to plan and deliver the transition to a new two-unitary council model for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. This includes putting in place the necessary capacity, capability and governance to ensure effective engagement with partners, stakeholders and residents, while sustaining momentum on the Council's improvement journey. The transition presents a clear opportunity to drive service transformation and secure improved, sustainable outcomes for residents over the longer term.

Service transformation and sector expertise

We note the Secretary of State's proposal to direct the authority to secure appropriate external expertise, rather than making additional ministerial appointments at this stage. The Council welcomes this approach and confirms its commitment to working collaboratively to commission and deploy the necessary sector support, particularly in relation to Adult Social Care and Children's Services. The Council has already appointed Debbie Barnes OBE, as external chair of its Children's Improvement Board providing additional expertise and assurance in this regard. Debbie will offer a wealth of experience to the Council, having become the chief executive of Lincolnshire County Council in 2020 and the lead advisor for Children's Services and Education for the Association of County Council Chief Executives. Prior to becoming Chief Executive and under her leadership, Lincolnshire became a leader in advancing social work practice nationwide, supporting improvements in areas such as Rotherham, Tower Hamlets, and Northamptonshire. Furthermore, the Council is also committed to strengthening its assurance around Adult Social Care and will be appointing an external Chair of its Adult's Improvement Board imminently.

Duration and review

The Council agrees that an eighteen-month Direction period, with a formal review after twelve months, strikes an appropriate balance between providing sufficient time

for improvements to embed as well as maintaining momentum and accountability. We also welcome the explicit recognition that the intervention may be de-escalated should progress be faster than anticipated.

Commitment to improvement

We are committed to fostering a continuous learning culture that encourages openness between officers and members with a focus on embedding trust-based behaviours and resilience across our leadership culture. We have addressed structural weaknesses within our formal and informal governance procedures, building trusting and respectful relationships across members and officers. We are committed to strengthening this further, building on a series of development sessions carried out throughout the year and subsequently applying this learning to our processes to our overall governance arrangements.

Finally, the Council wishes to reiterate its strong commitment to continuous improvement, to meeting its Best Value Duty in full, and to delivering high-quality, sustainable services for the people of Nottingham. We will continue to work constructively with the Commissioners until the current Directions conclude, and thereafter with the support mechanisms in place, the Department, and sector partners.

We trust that these representations will be helpful to the Secretary of State in reaching a final decision on the proposed Directions and appointments. Whilst we know that there is more to do and we must not be complacent in leading Nottingham forward, and our focus now must be on delivering continuous improvement for Nottingham and our residents. We are ambitious for Nottingham and are committed to being the most improved Council in the country.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Neghat Khan
Leader of Nottingham City Council

cc.

James Blythe

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