

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 16TH MARCH 2016**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****Combined Authority/ Devolution Deal**

I can report that we remain very much on track to establish the Leicester/ Leicestershire Combined Authority by the Autumn. The positive collaboration between the County Council, City Council, district councils and the LLEP means that we are in an increasingly strong position to take advantage of the Government's devolution agenda, in stark contrast to some other places where combined authority and devolution plans have been unravelling on a weekly basis. We are fortunate in that Leicester and Leicestershire's boundaries broadly match those of the functional economic area which means that our partnership working and proposed activities are rooted in a meaningful economic geography. And our strength is reflected in the fact that other authorities are discussing the possibility of joining us, in particular Rutland, where I had positive engagement with the late leader Roger Begy and am having equally positive conversations with his successor, Terry King.

We are now building on our Combined Authority platform to develop a Devolution Deal with Government. Whilst still at an early stage, the nine Councils are committed to exploring radical and innovative ideas across a range of issues for inclusion in our deal. These will be discussed at the next meeting of the Economic Growth Board (now acting as the Shadow Combined Authority) on 22nd March. We hope to engage with Government on a Devolution Deal proposition before the summer recess.

Midlands Engine

I am continuing to engage fully with the emergence and development of the Midlands Engine which is our local version of the Northern Powerhouse and provides the opportunity to raise the profile of the Midlands both nationally and internationally and secure increased government funding to boost economic growth. I am particularly

keen to ensure that Leicestershire, and indeed the wider East Midlands, is fully and effectively represented in the Midlands Engine governance arrangements.

To this end I am keen that the Midlands Engine office should be based in Leicestershire and along with Loughborough University, Leicester City Council, the other City and County Council's in the East Midlands, the LLEP and other partners I am supporting a proposal for the office to be hosted at Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park.

I am also pleased to report that two schemes in the county have been submitted, via the Midlands Engine, for Government funding. These are further expansion of Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park, and further phases of the Leicester North West transport scheme. I am also a member of the Midlands Connect Board, which is effectively the transport arm of Midlands Engine. The main focus for Midlands Connect is to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy for road and rail by March 2017. The Government has provided £5m to fund the development of this strategy.

Charnwood Campus

The closure of the Astra Zeneca life sciences facility in Loughborough was a shock to the town's and the county's economy. I am delighted to report that the site, now known as Charnwood Campus, is fast becoming a major economic development focus yet again. Earlier this month Nicky Morgan MP and the Life Sciences Minister, George Freeman, attended a roundtable at Charnwood Campus. At this event a substantial new occupier of part of the campus, the pharmaceutical company Almac, was welcomed. Almac's announcement of a £16 million investment in the site expected to create 180 new jobs over the next 5 years is a welcome vote of confidence in Loughborough as a centre for life sciences activity.

George Freeman also launched a new toolkit for the revitalisation of major life sciences sites, and invited Charnwood Campus and local partners to put forward the site as a pilot Life Sciences Opportunity Zone. The County Council will be represented on a task force chaired by Nicky Morgan MP which will put a bid together. I look forward to working with Nicky, Charnwood Campus, Almac, the LLEP, the borough council and other key partners such as Loughborough University in ensuring the potential of this site is maximised alongside complementary expansion of the University's Science and Enterprise Parks and other key sites in the area.

Street Parties to celebrate the Queen's 90th Birthday

Finally, I am delighted to advise the Council first that the County Council will be offering free road closure applications for street parties held to mark The Queen's 90th Birthday and secondly that the City and County Councils will be arranging a joint celebration for The Queen's Birthday in Jubilee Square on Sunday, 12th June.

In regard to local street parties I would ask members to help and support communities and urge them to get in touch as soon as possible so the arrangements can be put in place. I understand the process takes about 6 weeks in total so it is important to get applications in early.

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COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 16th MARCH 2016**POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEAD MEMBER****CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

In previous statements I have referred to the significant changes underway in the education and schools agenda, and the impact of those changes on our own services and arrangements. My statement today provides further information as a result of recent announcements and the potential impact for us in Leicestershire. It also highlights some of the good work we are doing supporting children and families.

Firstly in the post-16 education sector, where a programme of national sub-regional reviews has been established, as a result of a report by the National Audit Office which identified the lack of financial sustainability in current arrangements.

Leicestershire has 5 FE colleges and 18 sixth forms, 16 of which are academies, and they will be impacted by this review. We are working closely with these providers, and in collaboration with the city council, to ensure that Leicestershire gets the very best deal possible from any changes that may be required as a result of the review, which will be led by a nationally appointed commissioner.

With regard to our primary and secondary school provision, you will remember the statement made by George Osborne when announcing the content of the Comprehensive Spending Review, that “local authorities running schools is a thing of the past”. This has been further reinforced by Nicky Morgan when addressing the Primary Heads meeting, and again at the Secondary Heads meeting last Friday. Schools are being directed to form Multi-Academy Trusts, or MATs. Schools wishing to convert to Academy status will no longer be able to do so on their own, and will need to work through MATS to gain approval. Where maintained schools are working below national standards, they will become sponsored Academies.

Last week the first stages of a consultation on a national schools funding formula was announced with the intention to implement change over a period of years starting in 2017/18.

It is anticipated that there will be 4 ‘blocks’ of funding.

The first will be for schools and it is intended that schools will receive their funding directly, so there will be no requirement for a Schools Forum and the LA will have no role.

The second funding block will be for high needs pupils such as those with special educational needs and disabilities. It is intended that the LA will continue to be responsible for ensuring that the needs of these children are met. In Leicestershire, as with many other LAs, there is already considerable pressure on this budget as a result of growth in the number of children with additional needs and Children and Family Services is already reviewing these pressures as part of its new Transformation Programme of work.

The third block of funding will be for early years and there is much less known about how this funding will be allocated or governed. There will be separate consultation about this later in the year.

Finally, there will be a new central schools block created for LA services such as admissions. However, the current central Education Services Grant will be removed and the consultation recognises that LAs will need to look for alternative funding sources to meet some of its statutory duties.

The consultation period is short and ends on 17th April. We have already convened an emergency meeting of the Schools Forum to consider the consultation and to plan for the transition from current arrangements to new arrangements. There will be significant financial pressures on many of our secondary academies, where there is currently surplus capacity whilst waiting for the population bulge to work through the system. We are working with these academies to facilitate discussions between the Education Funding Agency and the Regional Schools Commissioner to find short term solutions and a meeting has been arranged for 5th April.

I will ensure that Members are kept informed about the progress of these changes and the impact for Leicestershire and actions that will be required.

In the meantime there continues to be much to recognise with regard to the work of Children and Family Services including a range of high profile activities and events over the past month including:

- The launch of CEASE; our local Campaign to Eradicate Abuse and Sexual Exploitation. There was significant media coverage of this event and I would encourage all elected Members to sign the CEASE Pledge.
- We have followed this up through our new blog called [keepingchildrensafe](#). This highlights the excellent safeguarding work that is taking place across Leicestershire and enables us to support the new national campaign to encourage people to report child abuse. The next part of this campaign will be profiled in Leicestershire Matters.
- Additionally, we have, in the past couple of weeks, had media teams working alongside our staff in First Response – our first point of contact for

referrals about suspected safeguarding matters. There has been wide ranging media coverage in the press and on local radio plus East Midlands Today. All of this activity helps to ensure that Leicestershire residents understand our work and are confident in the services that we provide to protect children and young people.

Finally, last week, in this Council Chamber, we hosted an event about the education of our children in care, led by the HMI Ofsted lead. She was extremely complimentary about our local work, as well as the regional and national leadership that we are providing in this important area of our business. All of this work, combined with our continued national high performance for Supporting Leicestershire Families means that Leicestershire County Council continues to have a high profile for the excellent work that we do with children, young people and their families.

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