

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 20TH MAY 2015

LEADER'S POSITION STATEMENT

Election Results

7th May 2015 is a date that not only saw the return of the first majority Conservative government since 1992, but the Conservatives becoming the largest party in local government on the back of excellent local election results, retaking control of the Local Government Association from Labour.

I would like to put on record my congratulations to all Leicestershire's MPs who were re-elected and to the newly elected MPs, Edward Argar in Charnwood and Alberto Costa in South Leicestershire.

I would also like to congratulate Sir Peter Soulsby upon his re-election as Mayor in Leicester City, and the new Conservative administration under Mike Hall taking over at Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

I commiserate with all those who were not successful at these elections and thank them for their public service to Leicestershire.

Cities Devolution Bill

Chancellor George Osborne is planning to set out the new Government's plans to devolve sweeping powers and funding in his Cities Devolution Bill, in the Queen's Speech. Whilst I welcome this, I do not want upper tier authorities to get left behind. County Councils need to enjoy the same benefits of this legislation as intended for the Cities. To this end, I have written to the new Communities and Local Government Secretary Greg Clark MP, seeking an early meeting with him to discuss our plans for a Combined Authority with the City of Leicester. Mr Clark is aware from his previous visit of the excellent working relationships between the two authorities. I would expect any Combined Authority should have devolved powers and funding over such areas as transport, skills, job creation, strategic planning and housing, policing and economic development. I know Mr Clark will be an excellent champion for local government around the Cabinet table and I shall be lobbying our MPs for their support in trying to achieve a fairer deal for Leicestershire.

Boundary Review

We are now half way through the current term of office and that means our thoughts will soon be turning to County elections in 2017.

Those elections are likely to be fought under new boundaries. I am grateful to officers and members of the Boundary Review Working Group who have worked hard to produce draft proposals to put before the Local Government Boundary Commission. Let me assure Members they will have every opportunity to feed into this process, as will parish councils and members of the public, during the planned period of consultation. There has been a high level of agreement thus far between the political parties for which I am grateful.

Strategic Direction

The new Government has set out its priorities for the nation, including an In/Out referendum on our EU membership, eliminating the deficit and working towards full employment.

We know that the funding arrangements for local government will continue to be difficult given that the budgets for overseas aid, health and education will continue to be protected by this Government.

Whilst the County Council has achieved much in delivering the efficiency savings required of it, transforming the way it does business, driving economic growth, investing in infrastructure, protecting services to the most vulnerable people and is regarded as a vanguard authority with the Supporting Leicestershire Families programme, we know more austerity is to come.

I have asked Byron Rhodes to continue with his Transformation process and ensure every department of this Council meets its fiscal requirements. I hope that Mr Sharp, the new Labour Leader, will reconsider his Group's position and re-join the Transformation Board. Nothing is more important than targeting our finite resources towards those services we value the most. Without financial discipline, no service is safe. I shall not rest until this new Government delivers a fairer funding deal for Leicestershire. Success is achievable (as Ivan Ould proved with fair funding for schools via f40) but we must be united in our approach to Government. I will once again be briefing our MPs as to the dire state of Leicestershire's funding and seeking their and this Council's support to get a better deal.

Great Central Railway

This morning I was pleased to be at the announcement of the opening of a new railway heritage museum which will have national significance and be built adjacent to the Great Central Railway's Leicester North Station near Birstall. I have said to the City Mayor that he and the GCR can count on the full support of the County Council to ensure the success of the venture.

Multi Agency Traveller Unit (MATU)

Members will be aware that the MATU was formed in 2009 and brought together a number of County and City Council staff with various disciplines and specialisms. The unit also includes a dedicated police officer.

The Unit has been instrumental in improving understanding between the traveller and settled communities through a programme of education and information. The unit has helped support the traveller communities and in particular ensured that Gypsy and Traveller children have the same opportunities for education as the rest of the wider community. The Unit has also dealt with unauthorised encampments on public land in a firm but fair manner.

It is extremely pleasing to report that the work of the Unit is receiving the recognition it richly deserves. The awards, it has received to date include:

- 2012 Leicestershire Chief Superintendents Commendation of Outstanding Work dealing in Partnership with Gypsy and Traveller issues
- 2014 Douglas McMillan Award for introducing the charity to the Gypsy and Traveller Community
- 2015 High Sheriffs Award in recognition of “great and valuable services to the community.”