

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 23RD SEPTEMBER 2015

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Combined Authority

In my statement to the Council in July I outlined our intentions to establish a Combined Authority for Leicester and Leicestershire. Since then a considerable amount of work has gone into developing the proposals.

I am pleased to say that we are now in a position where the Draft Governance Review and Draft Scheme are now out for consultation with key stakeholders. I hope that we get positive feedback to the consultation (www.lca.org.uk).

Our proposals will provide robust governance across the functional economic area and will enable us to make key decisions to support economic development, regeneration and transport. The Combined Authority will exercise its functions concurrently with the constituent councils and there are safeguards built in to the governance arrangements to protect the interests of partners. No constituent council is ceding existing functions to the Combined Authority.

We have also put into the Scheme proposals scrutiny arrangements and I hope to get back feedback on how this function will be exercised and contribute in a positive way to the significant economic and infrastructure challenges that face the area and which the Combined Authority proposal is seeking to address.

The timetable we have in mind is ambitious. Subject to the outcome of consultation we aim to get the final proposals agreed by all Councils and submitted to the Secretary of State in December with a hope that the Government can undertake the necessary consultations and agree the Scheme for implementation by October 2016.

SYRIAN REFUGEES

There is a motion later on the agenda from Mr Sharp but I would like to update the Council following the debate at the last Cabinet meeting.

It can now be confirmed that there has been no recent invitation to local authorities to join the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme which was set up in 2014. As was pointed out at the Cabinet meeting, so far 216 refugees have been resettled under that Scheme – it would appear with a handful more this week - and it is therefore perfectly understandable why the Prime Minister has specifically stated that the existing Scheme has to be expanded in order to meet his commitment to resettle up to 20,000 refugees over the life of this Parliament. It makes sense for the County Council to wait to hear from the Government on a new Scheme and to know more about the cost to the Council and our partners, before any response is made to the Government.

The LGA is going a good job on a cross-party basis representing local authorities in what I know are difficult negotiations with the Government. I would hope, however, that all parties in the County Council are prepared to support (i) the LGA's recent statement:

“We need to know who is arriving and when in order to ensure that we have the right homes, school places, and other support that may be required.

“There are a number of issues that need to be urgently resolved, in particular the need for a firm commitment that councils resettling refugees will receive full financial support, in order that it is not seen later as an unfair burden on communities that open their doors.”

and (ii) the LGA's position that resettling 20,000 refugees could not proceed until there is clarity about the funding.

A meeting of chief and senior officers of all partners across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (local authorities, NHS, Police, and the Local Resilience Forum) took place last Friday. All were in agreement with what is set out above and where necessary were reporting back to their respective organisations. There was also agreement that it is important to continue the dialogue with church authorities and voluntary organisations who have indicated their willingness to assist in resettling

refugees and who will be able to help in providing information and advice to individual citizens who are indicating their own desire to assist.

Pension Fund

Leicestershire together with seven other authorities is at the forefront in developing proposals for a joint procurement for passively managed assets that could result in the appointment of a single management firm instead of the four different ones currently used.

The work on this predates the announcement in the Summer budget that Local Government Pension Funds must come forward with proposals to invest via collaborative vehicles.

The intention is to have this new arrangement in place by November and it is hoped that this will reduce costs in terms of fees paid by nearly £300,000 per annum.

Leader of the Labour Party

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Jeremy Corbyn on his election as Leader of the Labour Party.

Brian Roberts

I am sure all members will wish to join with me in congratulating Brian Roberts on his appointment as Vice-President of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

Sue Goudie

As Members may be aware Sue Goudie is retiring at the end of September. Sue has been providing support to the Leader of the Council since June 2000 and during the last fifteen years has worked for three Leaders - the late Harry Barber, his successor and myself. I would like to thank Sue for the support she has given me and wish her a long and happy retirement.