

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 28TH JUNE 2017**POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL****Grenfell Tower Fire and Terrorist Attacks**

Since the last meeting of this Council we have gathered together on four occasions to stand in silent tribute to the victims of the three terrorist attacks in Manchester, on London Bridge, at Finsbury Park and for the residents of Grenfell Tower who lost their lives in that terrible tragedy.

It was heartening to see so many people across Leicestershire paying tributes and the many members of staff who joined the Chairman and I for the minute's silence.

The attacks in London and Manchester have no doubt put a significant strain on our communities but we cannot let these extremists divide us. We must come together, stay strong and support each other. Members as community leaders have a key role to play in engaging with all sections of the community they represent and foster and promote understanding.

The tragedy at Grenfell and the shocking loss of life has had a profound impact on all and we need to learn lessons from this. In my capacity as a County Council representative and Chairman of the Fire Authority I have asked the Chief Fire Officer to

- provide such support as we can to the London Fire Brigade;
- undertake a review to make sure that public, firefighter safety and protecting buildings are our top priorities;
- promote the fire prevention and protection message to all housing providers and local authorities and urge them review their fire safety measures.

Elections

I am of course disappointed with the results of the general election but pleased to see that Leicestershire returned all Conservative MPs.

The failure to secure an outright majority is already having implications for local government. The Queen's Speech yesterday did not include plans to abolish revenue support grant and hand local government 100% of business rates. What this means for local government funding after 2020 is uncertain though I am heartened to see the Government is to continue with the funding review. In this regard we will continue our campaign for fair funding and over the summer will be engaging with stakeholders and public so that we can gather support to press our case with

Government. I will be meeting with all Leicestershire MPs so that they are fully aware of our fair funding proposals and seeking their ongoing support for our campaign.

I hope we can get clarity soon on issues relating to social care and education funding so that we can begin to plan for the future.

MTFS and Transformation

The County Council continues to face a difficult financial position. Over the medium term the combination of an aging and growing population and static income is going to put us under increasing financial pressure that means we need to continue to save money. The current MTFS includes £66m of savings of which £23m have yet to be identified.

I have no doubt all members will wish to minimise the impact of savings on front line services. To do this we need to marshal all the resources of the County Council to make sure we make as well informed decisions as possible. I am therefore very pleased that Dr Eynon and the Labour group have agreed to re-join the Transformation Board. I don't expect we will agree all the time, but I expect they will make a valuable input to the important work the Board does.

The invitation to re-join remains open to the Liberal Democrats. I do hope they focus on the bigger picture rather than narrow party politics and re-consider their earlier decision to leave.

Rolls Royce Investment in Loughborough

I was delighted to be present earlier this month for the 'turf-cutting' for the new National Centre in Combustion and Aerothermal Technology at the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (LUSEP). The National Centre, which has Rolls Royce as a lead partner, will put Loughborough and Leicestershire at the heart of aerospace engineering and technology development in the UK. It will, when it is operational from 2019, focus on the development of future low emission aerospace combustion systems that will reduce the environmental impact of aircraft. It is the latest exciting development at LUSEP which is already home to 2000 jobs and has ambitious plans to expand further.

The County Council has actively supported the development and expansion of LUSEP, including by investing £450,000 which facilitated the building of an Advanced Technology Innovation Centre, now fully occupied; by committing a further £1m to support future developments, and by supporting the designation of the Science and Enterprise Park as part of the new Loughborough and Leicester Enterprise Zone. I will continue to work with the University, LLEP, Government and local businesses to build on the successes to date so that we provide high quality jobs for the future in the county.

Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM) and Midlands Connect

The first meeting of TfEM took place on the 16th June 2017 here at County Hall. City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby was elected as Chair and Richard Davies from Lincolnshire County Council was elected as Vice Chair.

TfEM brings together senior leaders from the region's local transport authorities. It will provide regional leadership on strategic transport issues for the East Midlands such as the future of the Midland Main Line, the A46 and HS2, develop and agree transport investment priorities, and provide collective input into the Midlands Connect initiative, the Department for Transport and its delivery bodies.

In March Midlands Connect launched its transport strategy to drive the Midlands Engine. The proposals have the potential to unlock £5 billion in untapped economic potential and contribute to the wider Midlands Engine target of creating 300,000 new jobs over the next two decades.

Key early priorities include:

- The 'Midlands Rail Hub', which will help release up to an extra 85,000 train seats across the network every day and allow up to ten extra trains an hour through central Birmingham – currently a key bottleneck limiting east-west rail movements.
- A package of improvements along the A46 corridor running across the Midlands from Tewkesbury to the Lincolnshire coast to support the manufacturing sector – starting with improvements around Newark.
- A package of improvements along the A52 corridor between Derby and Nottingham including access to the East Midlands HS2 Hub Station at Toton and East Midlands Airport - to be delivered by the end of the 2020's as a critical part of improving east-west connectivity.
- A series of improvements to help relieve traffic pressures across the heart of the Midlands motorway network, including the future roles of the A42 and A5 corridors in improving east and west links.
- Over-arching all the projects is an ambition to increase intelligent connectivity across the Midlands. This could involve smart and digital travel applications as well as trials for connected passenger and freight autonomous vehicles.

Over the next three years Midlands Connect will use £17 million of Government funding to undertake the planning and design work on early priorities. It will also draw up the business cases needed to pursue a rolling 25-year programme of transport infrastructure investment. This long term approach is aimed at giving much needed certainty to businesses, communities and investors, whilst also improving the quality of life and skills with improved access to new opportunities both within the Midlands and beyond.

Key benefits for Leicestershire could include:

- Smart motorway from J19 to J24
- Improvements to the A46 including consideration of a route to the south and east of Leicester to the M69 including a new J20a
- Rail improvements between Leicester and Coventry and Leicester and Birmingham
- Improvements to the A5
- Classic compatible rail services connecting Leicester to HS2
- Improved connectivity between East Midlands Gateway and HS2 at Toton
- Improvements to the A42

All Member Briefings

I have been at some myself but I am pleased with the feedback that new members in particular have found the series of All Member Briefings, which the officers have provided in recent weeks, to be helpful. If you have further feedback, would like something to be repeated or refreshed, or followed up in a particular way, please let Mo Seedat know.

I have asked for the next round of briefings starting in September to include Resilience and Regulatory Services, both of which are now within my own Cabinet portfolio. They are examples of the sort of vital services which the Council provides and which do not always receive a lot of attention. I am sure there will be considerable member interest in these briefings.