

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 27TH SEPTEMBER 2017

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Fair Funding

Despite good prudent financial management and planning over the last eight years of austerity, the Council still faces huge financial challenges going forward. The MTFs projections point to a financial gap of nearly £40 million.

We are not helped by a funding formula which is inherently unfair and members will be aware of our campaign for fairer funding, ably led by Byron Rhodes with tremendous support from our finance and research teams led by Chris Tambini and Jo Miller.

I believe that the campaign is getting some traction and I would encourage all members to engage with their political parties and local communities to bring pressure to bear on the Government so that we get a fair settlement for the people of Leicestershire.

Corporate Asset Investment Fund Strategy

At the Cabinet meeting on 15 September, we approved a new Corporate Asset Investment Fund Strategy.

The Strategy sets out the basis on which we propose to invest some of our capital resources and is aimed at generating a long term and relatively stable source of income to offset the funding gap in the MTFs. Unlike many others, our Strategy is not seeking to borrow to fund these investments but using existing capital resources available to the Council.

As with any investment, there are risks but we have in place a good governance framework which guides our investment decisions.

Visit to Leicestershire by Sichuan Vice-Governor

I was pleased to welcome to Leicestershire earlier this week a delegation led by Mr Zhu Hexin, Vice Governor of Sichuan Provincial People's Government, and including senior officials from both Sichuan and Chengdu provinces.

Our relationship with Sichuan is one of the longest UK/China twinning relationships and 2018 will mark the 30th Anniversary of that relationship.

Sir John Peace, the Chairman of the Midlands Engine, stressed the importance of developing bi-lateral links with China that will build prosperity for the Midlands as one of the fastest growing regions in the world. Also present were representatives from our three universities, the LLEP and Department of International Trade.

The highlight was the signing of the new three year Memorandum of Understanding which focusses on opportunities for business trade, education, culture and sport. The MoU will establish a framework for strengthening bilateral cooperation and building stronger commercial relationships and as, co-signatory, the County Council, working closely with the new Place Marketing Organisation, will help support and broker new connections for Sichuan across the Midlands region wherever possible and appropriate.

Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect

I am pleased to see that last week the Midlands Engine submitted its Vision for Growth to the Prime Minister's office. The document is the culmination of collaborative work across the Midlands which the County Council has contributed to. It sets out five areas where the Midlands Engine will develop detailed work plans for the next two years and beyond. These are Connect the Midlands; Invest in Strategic Infrastructure; Grow International Trade and Investment; Increase Innovation and Enterprise; and Shape Great Places. I will continue to work with partners, including the LLEP, the City Mayor and other counties and cities, to support and influence the Engine, and its transport based partnership, Midlands Connect. I'm already delighted to see that the Vision for Growth gives prominence to our proposals to develop an A46 Enterprise Corridor to improve connectivity and support future employment and housing growth.

Within the context provided by this regional-level work I have been holding a series of meetings with key council leaders to strengthen our strategic relations. These have included meetings with Sir Peter Soulsby, the City Mayor, the Leader of Nottingham City and the Leaders of Staffordshire and Warwickshire, Phil Atkins and Izzi Seccombe respectively. Shortly I will be meeting with Kay Cutts and Barry Lewis, the Leaders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. These have been productive discussions and I can report a growing commitment to joint working across our borders in support of economic growth and strategic infrastructure provision. The A46 proposals, which form part of an improved route from the south west of England to the north-east, are a good example, and we are working especially closely with our near neighbours to secure the funding so that this nationally, regionally and locally significant infrastructure investment can be brought to fruition.

Strategic Growth Plan

Progress continues to be made in preparing the Strategic Growth Plan for Leicester and Leicestershire which will set the strategic policy context for economic and

housing growth up to 2050. I was, however, disappointed to hear that the approval of a draft SGP for consultation had recently been deferred. The challenges we face, not least around accommodating major housing growth, are not easy ones to solve but the emerging plan proposes a bold and imaginative long term solution and I urge all partners to the plan to continue to prioritise its development. The Government must play its part too, not least in funding some of the key infrastructure which is essential to support the growth.

As part of our work articulating our ambitious growth plans, we have produced a Prospectus for Growth detailing the key infrastructure needed to unlock this growth for the County and support Midlands Connect. The Prospectus for Growth was available to Members in the briefing this morning.

Welfare Reform

The Government's Welfare Reforms, which are aimed at encouraging people into employment, are due to be implemented. Clearly this will have an impact on individuals and families concerned, but will also impact on the Council.

We have already started to understand the likely impact of these reforms on those who use our services and what it might mean for how our services are delivered going forward. This is critical for our planning and understanding of any financial impact.

I am also pleased to note that the Scrutiny Commission has recently held a workshop on poverty following on from the Bishop of Leicester's Poverty Commission report and I look forward to receiving its findings.

This is an excellent example of how the Executive and Scrutiny can work together to understand the impact of national policy changes on our services and the people we serve, and to plan to meet the challenges posed.

Loughborough University and the 2017 School Games

Earlier this month the national School Games were held at Loughborough University for the second of three successive years. The contract to stage the Games was won by the University with support from the County and City Councils and I reported to the Council this time last year how successful had been the first year. I am pleased to say that this year's games appear to have been even more successful, particularly measured by the interaction on social media as well as in the level of performance across the different sports, a real pathway for young people to Olympic selection.

I would like to put on record the Council's thanks to staff in the Environment and Transport Department led by Ian Vears, for all their work in making it possible for the cycling races to take place on a genuine road circuit on the public highway.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Loughborough University which is now, following The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, in the top 10 of every national league table and top in the region.

Historic Child Sexual Abuse

I am delighted to report that two members of staff in the Children and Families Department, Victor Cooke and Donna Smalley, will soon receive the Chief Constable's Team Award for their contribution to Operation Barzini, an investigation into historic child sexual abuse.

The award, to be made by the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, is in recognition to their contribution to the Inquiry which interviewed 25 suspects. 12 defendants stood trial. One received a life sentence and the remainder were sentenced to a total of over 60 year's imprisonment. This was an excellent outcome for the victim.

Birkett House Special School

In September Birkett House in Wigston moved into their new £10 million state-of-the-art special school. The County Council has worked with the school to create the brand-new building at the Wigston Academy, Station Road campus. The school will provide places for up to 125 children and young people aged four to 19.

The new building includes a hydrotherapy pool and sensory interactive rooms, with virtual reality technology that enables students to engage in a range of activities in a simulator, relatively free from the limitations imposed by their disability. The new building increases the places available to students from 91 to 125 thereby extending the number of pupils who can benefit from this school, which is rated outstanding by Ofsted.