

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 20 FEBRUARY 2019

LEADER'S POSITION STATEMENT

Local Government Finance

Later on this agenda we will be discussing the MTFs. For now, I will just say that we are in a much better position than a large number of other councils because we took the difficult decisions early and achieved significant efficiencies. However, the cost and demand pressures we face going forward will put the Council's financial position under tremendous strain. We need to retain that same responsible, resolute attitude to budget setting.

County Councils have suffered most from the current outdated system of council funding hence our campaign, through the CCN, for fairer funding. The latest Government consultation on fair funding is to be welcomed as it outlines a simple formula which is more responsive to population levels and demographics. It also contains proposals which address some key concerns of counties such as concessionary travel, local bus support and home to school transport.

A concern that remains is the lack of clarity on the adult social care and children's services formulae and whether these will respond to demographic and demand pressures.

Fair Funding alone will not solve our financial challenges. Reform of funding streams such as the community infrastructure levy and new homes bonus will to ensure funding goes to the right councils to support housing growth and infrastructure.

The proposal for 75% business rates retention is an important and welcome start but more fiscal reform is needed so that properly-resourced county councils can grow their local economies in a post-Brexit landscape, integrate health services and reshape care, and ensure that we build sustainable communities.

Meeting with Headteachers

Members will be aware that we are currently consulting on the development of provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities across Leicestershire.

This is an ambitious programme to develop high quality local provision to meet the demand in Leicestershire.

Last month the issue of children being taken off the roll of schools was reported in the Leicester Mercury following a discussion at Scrutiny around national concerns.

By no means were my comments meant to criticise Leicestershire Academies; indeed we are rightly proud of the low exclusion rates across Leicestershire schools, the work schools do together to prevent exclusion and the engagement of schools across Leicestershire in the SEND developments. I have met with representatives of secondary and primary heads to get these points across and it was a very productive discussion.

Local Development Corporation (Toton)

I have been invited by Sir John Peace, Chair of the Midlands Engine and Midlands Connect, to become a member of an Oversight Board for the 'Locally-led' Development Corporation which is being established for the HS2 hub at Toton and nearby development opportunities. The Corporation was announced by the Chancellor in his last Budget and provides a major opportunity to drive jobs growth in Leicestershire and the wider East Midlands. I am looking forward to helping shape this.

Transport for the East Midlands – Regional Infrastructure Summit

Along with business leaders, other local authority leaders, local enterprise partnerships and Government, I attended the second East Midlands Infrastructure Summit on Friday 8 February. I was pleased to hear the progress being made on our Transport for the East Midlands priorities. The clear message was that while we have made significant advances, we cannot ease off in our efforts to ensure we get the right infrastructure to support the jobs and housing that will drive the East Midlands economy. The other point that came across strongly for me was that the power of speaking with one voice and clearly articulating our message is delivering tangible results in Government's commitment to Midlands Engine, Midlands Connect and support for our region.

We had a presentation from Uber on how mobility might look in the future. An OECD study has found that the same amount of mobility could be achieved with 90% reduction in the number of cars when operating with self-drive cars. Uber are currently developing self-drive cars. Such a system would reduce the need for parking space in our towns, meaning more opportunities for alternative uses such as outdoor cafes, parks or much needed housing, supporting both quality of life and the local economy. We should also consider applying this sort of thinking to some of our rural mobility challenges.

Meeting with Leicestershire MPs

I recently met with Sir Alan Duncan.

I confirmed our budget and precept plans for 2019/20 and asked for his continuing support in the delivery of the Government's fair funding review.

We also discussed the need to deliver the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (MMDR) and its importance to Melton's local economy, regeneration and delivering much needed housing for the area. Funding for the MMDR is contingent upon the ability of the local planning authority to deliver the units of housing needed to support it. I asked for his support to ensure Melton Borough Council were aware of their responsibilities in this respect.

Finally, we discussed the Strategic Growth Plan and the refresh of the County Council's Prospectus for Growth- highlighting that future investment decisions on infrastructure taken by the LLEP needed to be supported and evidenced by its constituent local authorities working together to secure better outcomes for residents and businesses.

Meeting with the Bishop of Leicester

I met with the Rt Revd Martyn Snow two weeks ago in what is a regular series of meetings. We discussed the financial situation facing the public sector and the impact on communities; plans to conclude the reordering (the redevelopment) of the Cathedral; and a range of matters relating to the Diocese's significant role in local education.

The Bishop showed me around the very impressive St Martins Lodge, a boutique hotel across the road from the Cathedral and managed by the Cathedral Authorities. Equally impressive is the refurbishment of the adjacent building in Peacock Lane for the Bishop's project known as 'The Community of the Tree of Life', which seeks to inspire young people to live a flourishing and fruitful life rooted in faith.

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