

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 25TH SEPTEMBER 2019
POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Appointments of local MPs to the new Government

I am pleased to see that Nicky Morgan MP was appointed Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Edward Argar was appointed as the new Health Minister to the Department of Health and Social Security.

I will be meeting with them and other Leicestershire MPs and I hope that having two local MPs at the heart of Government will mean our concerns are aired at the top table.

No Deal EU Exit Preparations.

As you will have heard if you attended the all-Member briefing this morning the Council is continuing to work closely with partners through our Local Resilience Forum, LLR Prepared, to ensure the county is prepared for a No Deal Exit from the EU should that happen. I am confident that effective preparations are being made but as things currently stand this will be at a significant cost to the County Council. In August the Government allocated £20m nationally to local authorities to help them prepare for a No Deal Brexit. This is a woefully inadequate sum and I am especially concerned that the County Council which has to ensure effective traffic management in the area around East Midlands Airport (which has been designated as a priority port for Brexit purposes by the Government) has only received £87,500. Rutland Council and Leicester City Council received £105,000 each, and North West Leicestershire DC has received £167,500. The sum allocated massively undervalues the real costs to the County Council and I have written to the Secretary of State asking him to provide additional funding so that there is no impact on other services we provide.

Unitary Authority Business Case

I would advise members that work by officers on developing the Strategic Business Case for a Unitary Authority for Leicestershire has been completed. That business case will now be considered by the cross-party member working group on 27th September following which any final amendments will be made.

The strategic business case will then be considered by the Cabinet on 22 October and a special meeting of the Scrutiny Commission on 30 October – and I look forward to hearing their views.

The Cabinet on 22nd November will consider all comments made and will be asked to agree the final strategic business case. This will then be discussed by the County Council on 4th December. Given the backdrop of national uncertainty,

I hope that on 4th December we can agree that at the right time, a public consultation is required to enable us to reach a settled will on this matter.

Climate Change

As colleagues will remember, we were one of the earlier Councils to declare a climate emergency back in May. We have since been joined by over half of the UK's principal authorities, showing that local government is really stepping up to the plate to take the lead in tackling the most serious issue facing society globally today.

Since 2008-09, we have reduced our carbon emissions by over 60% and our wider greenhouse gas emissions by 55%. Our recent commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030 puts us as a leading player locally and nationally in taking action on climate change.

We are continuing to take forward ambitious projects that will help us meet this commitment and improve the environment of Leicestershire such as investing in a 10MW solar farm at Quorn and in one of the first UK carbon neutral industrial estates. We are also undertaking a comprehensive tree planting programme as part of our recent Tree Management Strategy, developing a plan to reduce emissions from our council vehicles, supporting local small-medium enterprises (SME's) to reduce their emissions and enabling residents to sign up to affordable green electricity tariffs through Fosse Energy.

The challenge for us to meet our carbon neutral target as well as the wider commitment of contributing to keeping global temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius is huge. However, we have made an excellent start and I look forward to working in collaboration with others across the public, private and voluntary sectors to meet these challenges so we can ensure a better future for the people of Leicestershire and future generations.

HS2 Update

HS2 is being reviewed by Government, which is as would be expected for such a significant investment. I remain of the firm belief that HS2 is vital to the future prosperity of the county, the wider East Midlands and indeed the country's economy. It's clear that the costs are rising and that the delivery programme will change; section 2b through Leicestershire is now due to be operational between 2035 and 2040, but the long term benefits will be with us for many future generations to come. HS2 will improve capacity on the rail network making train journeys a more attractive choice and in many cases will provide a realistic alternative to the private car. It will also increase rail freight capacity across the rail network, relieving demand on our road networks.

I particularly welcome proposals put forward by Midlands Connect for a redesigned junction to the south of Toton station that will allow trains from the

Midland Mainline through Leicestershire to connect on to the HS2 line therefore providing fast direct connection to Leeds and the North. Reflecting this, I fully support the recent letter sent by Midlands Connect, as well as the submission by Transport for the East Midlands, in their comments to Douglas Oakervee, and his panel of experts, who are gathering evidence for the Government review on the future of HS2. I await the outcome of the review with optimism.

World Suicide Prevention Day

Members may recall that on 10th September last year, the County Council, alongside the City Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner, launched our 'Suicide is preventable- start a conversation' campaign.

At that time we launched a web-site and pledge. The website brings together in one place local resources, support and advice that help keep residents safe and supports them to reach out for help in times of crises and distress. Since its launch there have been over 27,000 hits and 126 pledges of support from individuals and organisations.

It is clear that the campaign has made a real difference. In the coming year, the campaign and website will continue to evolve and develop. I am sorry that I was unable to attend the recent suicide prevention conference, but I was represented.

Loughborough Town Deal.

I am delighted that the town of Loughborough has been invited by the Government to develop a Town Deal and bid for up to £25m of funding from the Government's £3.6bn Towns Fund. I am awaiting more details but I understand that the funding is intended to support town centre regeneration, broadband, further and higher education and skills, social and cultural facilities and transport infrastructure. The Council is ready to work with key partners, including Charnwood Borough Council, the LLEP, Loughborough University and Loughborough College, to ensure this opportunity brings real benefits to the town.

Loughborough Area of Innovation.

Members may have noticed the display in the lobby area relating to the Loughborough Area of Innovation. If you have not seen it I would urge you to have a look after this meeting. This is an exciting initiative, led by the University with my full support, which will help drive local growth and support growth more widely across the county and nationally. It provides an exemplar of how the Government's Industrial Strategy and the LLEP's emerging Local Industrial Strategy can be delivered by local partners in one place.

Ashmount Special School

Finally, I am pleased to inform you that Ashmount Special School has been highlighted for its best practice in the 2019/20 Parliamentary Review.

The school was designated as a National Support School by the Department for Education, and Headteacher David Deacon became recognised as a National Leader of Education in 2018. The school has committed itself to promoting and engaging in best practice for many years.

N. J. Rushton CC