

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 2ND DECEMBER 2020
POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Covid-19

Members will be aware that the whole of Leicestershire has been placed in tier 3 today, following the end of the national lockdown.

It is disappointing that Leicestershire has been placed in the highest tier but, given that the rate in Leicestershire remained comfortably above the national average including that for over 60s and test positivity rates, I'm afraid it was inevitable that would happen, as we discussed in our Tuesday briefings.

The first two weeks of lockdown didn't have the effect we would have wanted. I would like to thank all the leaders (Sir Peter, Andy Williams from the NHS, the Chief Constable and the Directors of Public Health) for the united front to show people how serious the situation was, and the local media for the coverage they gave to the message. I'd also like to thank the Lord Lieutenant for his message to the public.

Leicestershire's rate has fallen by 42% in the last seven days, which is very welcome, and has been decreasing at a faster rate than the fall in the national average. However, that has not happened everywhere, and we need to be constantly on our guard if we want to get out of tier 3.

Everyone has to continue to play their part and practice that basic message of hands, face, space. Today's news about a vaccine is great to hear but that must not allow any complacency while we wait for the roll out.

Covid-19 has also had a significant impact on local businesses and on the voluntary and community sector. As a Council we have sought to support both sectors and I thought it would be useful to set details of the support provided.

Support for the Business Sector - We see and hear every day the devastating effect the pandemic has had on the County's business and communities. But we've moved quickly. We established a Business Recovery Grant with £750,000 being available to small businesses impacted by the pandemic. Through this scheme we've already provided £600,000 funding to over 100 individual businesses, who without that support could well have gone under and with the loss of countless numbers of jobs. And we want to do more. We are putting County funding into extending the Government's Kickstart programme to help address youth unemployment in the County and will be rolling out new a Work+ programme that online and through our Libraries will give advice to anyone in the County looking for work, training or support.

Support for the local voluntary and community sector – We recognise and pay tribute to the fantastic and invaluable work that volunteers, charities and communities have been doing during the pandemic. We established the Leicestershire Community Fund to support local community and voluntary groups to maintain their work in supporting the most vulnerable across the county. The Fund has helped over 220 projects across the county with more than £1.5million of funding that has assisted communities to provide food, befriending, mental health and wellbeing support during the crisis.

Yesterday we agreed to continue to provide support for voluntary groups, charities and communities through the launch of Round 3 of the Leicestershire Community Fund with £600,000 of further funding to help the most vulnerable people locally.

Support for vulnerable children and families - We have been awarded £1.46m through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme to provide support to families with children with the costs of food, fuel and utilities over the winter. We will be providing food vouchers in school holidays for families of over 12,000 pupils that are eligible for Free School Meals. In addition, we will be providing support to vulnerable families with children under 5, support with fuel bills for vulnerable adults and additional support to our traveller community.

UK100's new Net Zero Pledge

Later on this agenda is an important notice of motion regarding the need to increase tree planting in the County as one means of reducing our carbon footprint.

I am pleased to inform the Council that I intend to sign up to the UK 100's new Zero Pledge. UK 100 is a coalition of the most ambitious local leaders in the UK committed to achieving Net Zero ahead of national targets, and I am sure all members will wish to be part of it.

The new pledge reaches Net Zero faster than the national government goal of 2050, and has an emphasis on strong action over the next ten years. The target is to achieve net zero council emissions by 2030, and net zero area-wide emissions by 2045 (5 years earlier than originally planned). I have asked that when we next review our Environment Strategy we look at the actions needed to ensure we meet the revised targets.

It is recognised that local authorities do not have all necessary powers yet to reach these ambitious targets. This pledge and working with UK 100 will feed into ongoing dialogue with national government for policy changes that will enable us to meet our Net Zero targets.

N. J. Rushton CC