

County Council Meeting - 19th May 2021

Leader's Position Statement

Welcome to new Members

Could I echo the Chairman's comments and formally welcome all new and returning members to County Hall and congratulate everyone on their election.

I would also like to offer my thanks to all the candidates of all parties who put themselves forward for election. Without them, we cannot have a thriving participative democracy.

Thanks also to all the staff, the Returning Officer and the Deputies for their hard work ensuring the smooth running of the elections and ensuring the safety of the public, particularly with regard to the Covid pandemic. Thanks also to those staff at County Hall who ran the on-line election results service.

Member Induction, Learning and Development Programme

I'm very proud of the way this Council supports all its members. This is reflected in the comprehensive induction process which sees members offered training, learning and development briefings. New members will be assigned an officer mentor, who is on hand to offer advice and guidance. This combines with assistance offered by the political groups to help their new members get up to speed quickly with the workings of the Council and understand the big issues of public policy that they will be helping shape for the communities they represent in Leicestershire.

Covid-19

The Coronavirus case rate in the County is now a fraction of what it was at the peak of the second wave, in no small part due to the continued work of our staff and the success of the national vaccination programme.

However, it is vital we remain vigilant and continue to stick to the guidance as the roadmap unwinds. The recent outbreak and increase in cases in Harborough is a reminder of how quickly things can change, particularly in the unvaccinated population. Additionally, the threat of a new variant taking hold, and potentially weakening the efficacy of the vaccine, means we need to remain on our guard.

From the very beginning of this pandemic we have planned for, and delivered, the safe, effective recovery of Council services, protecting the vulnerable and ensuring the safety of our service users and citizens. We have worked in partnership through the Local Resilience Forum and also supported the local economy.

We are now focused on ensuring the Council builds back stronger from this pandemic. Our community leadership role means we are ideally placed to do that.

Honorary Aldermen

I will be proposing three retired members of the County Council to receive the highest honour this Council can bestow to recognise outstanding civic service. These Aldermen will be Mr Byron Rhodes, the former member for the Belvoir Division, Mr Ivan Ould, former member for the Market Bosworth Division, and Mrs Janice Richards who represented the Earl Shilton Division. They will be elected at our meeting in July.

The New Term

The Conservative manifesto entitled “*Building a Greener Future for Leicestershire*” was endorsed by voters at the recent elections, resulting in the biggest majority this Council has seen in its current form. It will build upon our previous achievements, such as being recognised by *ImPower* as the most productive and efficiently run Council in England and Wales, whilst being the worst funded County authority in the UK. This manifesto acts as the guidance and direction to chief officers of the policy aims of the new administration.

Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done from the previous term. Money remains tight, funding of major infrastructure projects is a concern, and rising demand for social care and SEND services, as well as the impact of Covid on the council, are all major issues to be dealt with.

That’s why our main themes over the next four years and beyond will focus on:

- A plan for a cleaner, greener Leicestershire - carbon reduction and planting 700,000 trees, one for every resident;
- Extra investment in the environment, filling potholes, keeping our highways safe, reduce speeding in our communities, clearing gullies to help with flooding;
- A Strong Covid response and recovery - by building upon our work with our NHS colleagues, care and key workers, and working with our communities in eradicating this disease;
- Strong economy and investing for the future- we have a clear economic plan to invest for the future, pay down debt and maximise opportunities for jobs and future prosperity. I’m delighted that the bid for a Freeport for Leicestershire was successful. It’s one of the flagship Government policies to drive inward investment, jobs, and growth for the future;

- Continue protecting and safeguarding vulnerable people - as it's our statutory responsibility.

This manifesto is a bold document setting out the strategic direction of the Council for the next four years. The new Administration is determined to succeed in implementing its mandate from the electorate. The immediate priority remains our response to and recovery from the Covid pandemic, and it will dominate policy making and our decisions for the foreseeable future. Our overriding pledge to the people of Leicestershire is that we will always be on your side - and we will always do the right things by you.

Nick Rushton

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