

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 18TH MAY 2022

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

County Deal

I am taking it that members will be reasonably familiar with the Devolution Framework in the Levelling Up White Paper and levels 1,2 and 3. If not, officers can forward copies.

I said in my position statement to the Council in February that we wanted to get a deal as close as possible to level 3. In other words, we wanted a deal in line to some extent with our bid which we were encouraged to make last year but turned out not to meet the Functional Economic Area test when the White Paper was published in November.

I also said in February that we would be looking to work with Leicester and Rutland, which the White Paper suggested would be appropriate in our case.

I am now able to inform the Council that discussions with Government about the scope of a bid have concluded and we are only able to bid for a level 2 deal. That means that the ambitious elements which we were still encouraged to include after the White Paper was published, such as:

- A Better Care Fund for Children and Young People
- Gainshare funding to support road infrastructure
- Funding for buses
- Further funding for Broadband

will have to wait for another day.

That is certainly disappointing but, although it would be wrong to go into detail about our discussions with Government, it is clear that they see going for a level 2 deal as putting us in a good place to achieve further devolution later on.

They are also clear that we should proceed from here for a level 2 bid covering Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland – a non-mayoral combined authority to be made up of upper tier local authorities only, but with the district councils involved. That is the model of authority set out in the White Paper and now to be taken forward in legislation.

Lastly, it is clear that we are not able to join with the bid for the level 3 mayoral deal which Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Derby (D2N2) are making.

The next steps, we are advised, will be discussions for the upper tier authorities with Government officials about governance, rather than the content of a level 2 bid, which will follow the Devolution Framework. I will be meeting with the City Mayor, the new Leader of Rutland and the Leaders and Deputy Leaders of the District Councils shortly and will keep the Council informed.

UKSPF and Levelling Up fund.

As part of the Government's commitment to delivering on its Levelling Up agenda, the County Council and district councils can bid into two new funding pots this summer. Bidding takes time and resources, but maximising funding coming into Leicestershire is of paramount importance. That is why I have reached out to the district councils as they pull together Levelling Up Fund Bids and UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plans and offered to help strengthen their proposals and support the coordination of bids across the County.

Tackling the cost of living crisis

We recognise the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on individuals and families across Leicestershire. The Council has a strong record of supporting vulnerable households and the Deputy Leader will outline some of the actions taken.

The Council has also been working alongside district councils to ensure the County doesn't miss out on Government funding allocated to district councils to install energy efficiency measures in those homes most in need of support. As a result, over the next year, more than £3m will be spent making Leicestershire's homes warmer and tackling the crucial issue of rising energy prices.

Later on the agenda for this meeting, there is a notice of motion which refers to a LLR wide group looking at how we can all work together to address this issue and build on the work we have already started.

Supporting Ukrainian refugees

I am very proud of the way Leicestershire residents have stepped up to support those fleeing the conflict in the Ukraine. The way local people have raised money and donated goods to support those seeking refuge has been humbling. An extra special mention should go to those in the County who have offered to host Ukrainians in their homes and I know that to date over 700 visa applications have been made for Ukrainians who will be hosted by 'sponsors' in Leicestershire. A significant minority of these have already arrived in the County and the Council has worked closely with partners to make sure they are supported on their arrival.

Our preparations have not been helped by the quality and timeliness of data provided by the Government, but I am happy to report that local partners are working well together to make sure that Ukrainian guests and their sponsors get the support they need and richly deserve.

I am particularly pleased that our officers have been liaising closely with the Ukrainian Centre in Leicester; their input is helping the Council and partners to make sure that the local response is as effective as possible.

With regard to the notice of motion on providing free bus passes we will look at how best to accommodate that request.

Supporting the economy and delivering economic growth

This Council continues to support businesses including through the provision of advice and guidance and providing space for innovative businesses to locate and expand in the County. We are working with partners and the LLEP to support the local economy's recovery from Covid19 and will work with partners to secure the funding we need to provide key infrastructure and improve skills.

There is, however, an area of major concern. Continuing to forward fund major schemes arising from district councils' local plans is going to be incredibly difficult and impossible in some cases, with inflation making matters far worse than we ever imagined. Going forward, we will need to be innovative in identifying sources of funding for capital, including working with planning authorities and developers to ensure infrastructure required to support economic and housing growth is fully funded and maintaining sound financial management of the resources that we do have to meet this challenge.

Fair Funding

The County Council continues to be one of the lowest funded authorities and continues to campaign for a fair funding deal, recently leading the formation of the F20 group. The group is made up of those authorities who have higher levels of council tax and lower levels of core spending power and we will continue with our efforts and lobbying of MPs.

The Council's financial position, both in relation to Capital and Revenue funds is grave. Existing service demand pressures are being compounded by high inflation. As the lowest funded Council in England, the Council has limited capacity to continue to invest in vital services or the infrastructure which Leicestershire needs.

Green Leicestershire

Fresh proposals designed to tackle climate change and make Leicestershire a net zero carbon County have been published recently. The draft Leicestershire Net Zero 2045 Strategy and Action Plan sets out Leicestershire County Council's plan to join forces with residents, councils, businesses, universities and others in the race to net zero carbon from the County. Tackling climate change across the whole of Leicestershire is too big a job for any one organisation. This plan sets out how we can work together to get to net zero by 2045.

A cleaner, greener Leicestershire has much wider benefits for our health and our economy, and everyone can make changes to help make it a reality.

We all have a role to play - collectively, we can make a big difference!

'Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge'

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to let members know that our colleague, Craig Smith, the County Councillor for the Coalville North Division is to lead a team of 4 friends taking part in what is billed as the "World's Toughest Race", the "Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge" – an incredible 3,000-mile unsupported rowing race across the Atlantic Ocean.

The race begins in December 2025 from La Gomera, Canary Islands. The 40 participating crews expect to spend anywhere between 29-75 days at sea on average. Finishing at Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua.

The team named “Anchor Management” will be a mixed crew of 4 and will be rowing non-stop, 2 hours on 2 hours off, 24 hours a day for the duration of the voyage. The crew are not just aiming to complete the crossing safely and successfully, but to beat the current mixed crew World Record of 40 days and 23 hours, that was set this year by a British Army crew.

The crew hope to raise more than £200,000 for McMillan Cancer support, a charity that holds special meaning to the crew, in particular Sarah who 7 years ago was diagnosed with Breast cancer. As well as raising funds they also hope to raise awareness of the beauty and fragility of the Ocean and urge people to take action and to protect it for future generations.

Craig’s crew are in the Chamber with us today and I am sure all members will want to wish the crew every success and assist them in raising funds for McMillan Cancer.

**N. J. Rushton CC
Leader of the Council**

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