

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 6TH JULY 2022

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Medium Term Financial Strategy

At its meeting on 24th June the Cabinet received a report on the County Council's worsening financial position. A copy of the report was sent to all members and I would urge you to read the report at the following link [cabinet report](#).

National and global events since we set the budget in February have triggered a decline in the overall financial situation affecting all councils including Leicestershire.

With inflation already at nine per cent - and expected to pass 11 per cent by October – the cost of providing day-to-day council services, as well as crucial long-term major infrastructure projects to accommodate a growing County population, have surged.

Previously the Council calculated there would be an £8 million gap between what we need to spend and our income next year, but these pressures have widened the gap to around £20 million. By 2025/26 the budget gap is predicted to increase from £40 million to £70 million unless further action is taken. These estimates will grow even further if the trend of worsening economic news continues.

Members may also have noted a report that the Government has already given the County Council an additional £30m. To put that in context, half of that comes from the increase in Council Tax. Inflation is expected to exceed 11%, which is roughly three times the level expected when Government set the £30m. By their own calculation we will be tens of millions of pounds short.

Over the summer work will be undertaken to identify new savings proposals. These are almost certain to mean looking at service reductions to discretionary services such as support to businesses, opening arrangements for recycling and household waste sites and bus services. The more significant adults and children's social care budgets will also need to generate considerable savings. The inflationary impact on the £500 million capital programme is significant and expected to

increase. There is no doubt that some existing capital schemes will need to be cancelled, mothballed or reduced in scope.

The Cabinet will consider the saving options in the autumn. Though no decisions have been taken I want to level with members and with people about the frightening financial situation we face.

Cost of Living

At the last meeting of the Council, we debated a notice of motion concerning the cost of living. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to provide a brief update on what we have been doing.

In the 12 months to September 2022, we are aiming to have spent £7.2m supporting households in Leicestershire: -

- £3.3 million to ensure all children who are entitled to Free School meals also get this benefit in the holidays;
- £1 million to provide 18,000 households in receipt of Council Tax benefit a further £60 discount;
- £1 million to provide food and heating vouchers to those most in need;
- £1.2 million setting up a scheme to pay £100 to approximately 11,000 people in receipt of pension credit;
- £500,000 to voluntary organisations and charities including food banks.

A further £3.6 million is expected to be spent in October 2022 to March 2023 (subject to Government confirmation) so that similar support can be provided throughout the winter.

Ukrainian Guests

I want to place on record my thanks and I am sure that of the whole Council for the tremendous work done by officers of all Councils and local communities in supporting Ukrainian guests arriving in Leicestershire. To date 548 people (265 family groups) have been settled. Most have now received their £200 grant payment and good progress is being made in making payments to host families.

Ukrainian guests are being offered a travel grant of £65 to support their travel needs. This will enable them to purchase a short-term bus pass or help with other travel costs when they arrive in Leicestershire, making their options more flexible. The travel grant will be paid through the

same payment card system used for the initial £200 payment. To apply for the travel grant, guests or their hosts will need to fill in a simple form which can be requested by emailing UkraineTransport@leics.gov.uk. This support grant is currently only available once for each guest, and only for guests on the Homes 4 Ukraine scheme. The first payments for this support should be made in early July and to date 127 requests for transport support have been received. We will review the need to continue this travel grant.

Schools have played their part in accommodating and supporting children. School transport is be provided for Ukrainian children who need support to get to their allocated school (if not in walking distance). Those needing transport support should email UkraineTransport@leics.gov.uk. To date, 16 children have been supported with transport to school.

Two weeks ago, the Government announced that eligibility for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme will be expanded to unaccompanied children and minors, that is children not travelling with a parent/legal guardian but could be alone or with another relative. Sponsors for these children should be known to the child and their parents prior to the conflict beginning and it is likely they will be supported under Private Fostering Arrangements. The Children and Families Department is currently working through the implications of this decision to ensure children are placed safely.

Electric Vehicle Charging points

We are a 'green council' and we want to play our part in driving the EV revolution in Leicestershire. Research has shown people are making the EV switch now, and this will accelerate once the ban on new petrol and diesel engines in 2030 kicks in. This investment will help residents make greener choices and crucially underpin public confidence in the EV market.

Given the rural nature of our County, it is essential we have a comprehensive network of public charging points so that motorists can travel without the worry of finding a place to power up, and residents without driveways know they can charge their vehicles close to home.

We have therefore teamed up with Midlands Connect and four other local authorities to submit a bid for £935,355 Government funding to provide electric charging infrastructure. If successful, the bid will fund a

total of 349 EV charging points across the Midlands with up to 100 charging points across Leicestershire.

We are determined to become cleaner and greener, and a successful LEVI bid can only further emphasise our commitment to carbon reduction and shows effective action on climate change, as well as supporting the green economy.

Quorn Solar Farm

Yet another initiative to support our green ambition is a new £5.9 million solar farm near Quorn that will generate enough electricity each year to power all the County Council's properties and thousands of its streetlights.

Pride Week

Around the world, LGBT+ people and their communities are celebrating Pride month – many Pride festivals across the world are timed to coincide with the anniversary of the [Stonewall riots](#), which happened on June 28th, 1969 in New York.

This Pride month has been marred by the terrible news coming from Oslo Pride on 25th June – the event was hit by a terrorist attack, where two people were killed, and over 20 were injured. The incident is a reminder that whilst Pride exists to celebrate love and diversity, there is still much to do to fight hatred and stand up for LGBT+ rights across the world.

Other Prides across the UK will take place throughout the Summer, including our local Pride - [Leicester Pride](#) - the celebration of Leicester and Leicestershire's lesbian, gay, bi and trans + (LGBT+) communities which takes place on Saturday 3 September at Victoria Park in Leicester.

Colleagues from across the Council will be at the event to promote job opportunities and fostering and adoption. Council employees will also be marching in the parade, which starts at Curve and travels through the City Centre before arriving at Victoria Park.

All elected members are invited to join the parade and celebrate Pride together with colleagues from all Council departments, including members of the LGBT+ staff network.

Queens Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS)

As we all know we have just celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and with that in mind the Lord-Lieutenant has reminded me about the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS).

The QAVS was set up twenty years ago to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and it sets out to recognise and celebrate exceptional local volunteer groups across the United Kingdom. The standard expected is very high, as the award is an Honour equivalent to an MBE. A QAVS is given to a group of three or more people doing volunteering work and the group should have been running for three years or more.

Since 2019, ten of Leicestershire's most exceptional voluntary groups have received the award and that is a fantastic achievement. In June of this year, the Leicester Deaf Centre and Leicester Hospitals Volunteers were the latest recipients.

It is important that we recognise the work of our volunteers here in Leicestershire and the job they do in our communities. We as Members should be proud of them. However, we know our divisions and we as Members should do as much as we can to promote the QAVS in our communities and I therefore ask you to go out and promote the award within your division. The nomination process for the 2023 QAVS Awards is now open and closes on the 15th of September. With this in mind I have asked the Lieutenancy Office to send every member further information about the award including a link to the nomination form.

Please do what you can to encourage nominations within your division. Just think of the pride that organisations and the communities would have if they were to receive a QAVS in June next year.

Census 2021

The Census figures published this week underline that Leicestershire is growing - and confirms we are one of the fastest growing areas in the country in terms of economic growth and in population. With our population set to rise by 20 per cent in 20 years, it's clearly important we support growing communities by putting the right infrastructure in the right place. And with new homes and business space visibly taking shape across the County, we've created a short video setting out how we're doing just that and shaping the County of tomorrow. You can

watch the two-minute video on our website or through our social media channels.

Mr N. J. Rushton CC
Leader of the Council