

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 15TH MAY 2024

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Local Elections 2024

May I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to Rupert Matthews on his re-election as the Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The role of the Police and Crime Commissioner, to ensure the policing needs of our communities are met as effectively as possible, bringing communities closer to the Police, building confidence in the system, and restoring trust is a role that Rupert takes very seriously, and he has my full support in delivering it.

Through the Police and Crime Panel, ably chaired by Mrs Taylor, he is held to account for his actions and I'm sure Mrs Taylor will agree with me that she has established a strong working relationship with Rupert which can only benefit Leicestershire.

I would also like to congratulate Claire Ward on her election as mayor of the so-called East Midlands Combined County Authority, which encompasses Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, Derbyshire and Derby. The mayor has said that extending the boundaries of the Combined Authority is not a priority for her but I'm happy to work with her in any way in the interests of the real East Midlands.

Performance and Efficiency Update

Members will have seen the furore created by the Times publishing a league table of council performance. There is an obvious gap in good comparative data to measure council performance. So, with the public increasingly aware of the impact of failing councils it is no surprise that someone has tried to fill the gap. Unfortunately, it wasn't done in a particularly useful way.

The Times only used 21 measures, which was never going to be particularly informative and ignoring relative funding is a fatal flaw. This is why I prefer the rounded approach to performance benchmarking that the County Council takes. Members will have seen this reported to Cabinet in March. Using 257 measures, all from nationally published data, is a far superior approach.

Amongst counties Leicestershire ranks third for core performance and we move to top of the chart when our low funding is considered. I believe that is the definition of delivering value of money for our residents.

Whilst we should take immense pride from this it is vital that this Council continues to challenge itself on our performance compared to other authorities. Only by doing this can we keep on the path of increasing efficiency and productivity. For the funding that we receive I am confident that the residents of Leicestershire receive better outcomes than anywhere else in the country.

Gas Outage – Ratby and Kirby Muxloe

In February, the Cabinet, as well as recognising the tremendous community response, resolved formally to ask Cadent Gas and Severn Trent Water for their full explanation of exactly what happened within their responsibilities and what gave rise to the serious inconvenience and danger faced by local residents during the winter. Suffice it to say that correspondence is still ongoing and the Council will continue to press for those full explanations.

In the meantime, it remains a concern that several residents are still waiting for the replacement of gas equipment which was damaged beyond repair.

Tree for Every Person

Our ambitious plans to plant 700,000 trees across Leicestershire have passed the halfway mark - with the total reaching more than 356,000. The landmark is another leap forward in our pledge to plant one tree for every person in the county and to help secure a greener future for all. We support the initiative by planting trees directly, applying for funding to support initiatives and giving away tree packs. Last year, in partnership with the Woodland Trust we gave away 50,000 trees and hedgerows to farmers, landowners, community groups, parish councils and schools in a bid to encourage more planting across Leicestershire, and we're hoping to exceed that number this year. The free tree packs are designed to help renew and restore existing woodland and vegetation, as well as replacing trees which have been affected by diseases such as ash dieback.

Rural Broadband

For many years I have been committed to ensuring that our residents and businesses have access to the fastest, most reliable internet connections available and I pay tribute to the Lead Member, Pam Posnett, who has overseen the Council's excellent work in this area.

The past year has seen the Council work with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology on Project Gigahub. This project was designed to boost the connectivity of schools, libraries, recycling centres and other public sector buildings in hard-to-reach areas which wouldn't have received an upgrade commercially due to their rural location.

BT completed delivery of Project Gigahub in March 2024. The project has brought lightning-fast, reliable broadband to 43 rural public sector buildings opening up digital resources for pupils and enabling libraries to offer more activities, as well as make the area more attractive for potential future investment from commercial broadband suppliers.

The digital team have been working with Openreach to encourage a number of Fibre Community Partnerships in rural areas. A Fibre Community Partnership offers Ultrafast Full Fibre broadband to areas which are not part of any commercial providers current rollout plans and is jointly funded by government and Openreach.

Eight exchanges in Leicestershire have gone ahead with builds including Wymondham, Somerby, Waltham on the Wolds, Thurlaston and Rearsby. In total these schemes will bring gigabit capable fibre to the premise connections to over 4,500 premises in our most rural areas.

In February 2024 the Government announced that homes and businesses across Leicestershire are set to get improved broadband connectivity as part of a different initiative; the [Government's](#) national Project Gigabit scheme.

Around 14,500 properties in the county will benefit from the scheme which is designed to help hard-to-reach, rural communities access more reliable broadband. The latest rollout comes after the Government signed a new £70 million contract with independent broadband provider Cityfibre, who will deliver the connections across Leicestershire and Warwickshire.

Premises across Leicestershire are included in the plans and more details will become available as the build starts later in the Summer. Project Gigabit will run until 2030.

Mr N. J. Rushton
Leader of the Council

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