

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 24th SEPTEMBER 2025

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

MTFS

The financial challenge that Local Government faces is well documented and has been on-going for several years. We all know from our own experience that if you don't deal with a problem, it gets worse. The same applies to managing a council's finances. If your expenditure is higher than your income, then inflation and service demand will grow the problem until it becomes unmanageable.

It is no surprise that the previous administration's approach of tinkering with efficiencies, cutting services when they ran out of ideas and hoping someone else will bail them out has left us with:

- A £90 million black hole in the revenue budget
- An £80 million funding shortfall in the capital programme
- And a SEND deficit that was £64 million at the start of this year and forecast to just keep growing and growing and growing

After 24-years in power and 12-years of maximum Council Tax increases it is staggering that they never realised that doing the same thing gets you the same results. You need to grasp the nettle and Reform how the Council operates.

I'm sure my colleagues on the Conservative benches will vehemently object to the suggestion that they have let residents down. But the growing list of service failures we are having to deal with tells a different story:

- The County Record Office, which is a vital store of the history and culture of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, outgrew its current home years ago. But there is no plan in place despite pressure from the National Archives.
- Beaumanor Hall has been left to drift for too long, costing taxpayers a fortune to see a nationally significant asset criminally underutilised.
- Most recently and most disappointingly the Care Quality Commission has judged that the Adult Social Care department "requires improvement" in their February 2025 assessment.

I doubt all the skeletons have finished falling out of the closet.

Maybe it is for the best that fixing all these issues and Reforming the Council has been left for my new administration. We will work through these problems and solve them in a professional way avoiding the drift and indecision that seems to have been endemic with the previous Tory administration.

Despite this myriad of issues there has been one undoubtedly positive theme that breaks through the bad news. I repeatedly hear about the Council's skilled and committed workforce that the public values, this certainly echoes my own experience.

So, a question that I will leave you with is:

“If staff are thought of so highly, why have we not seen the results our residents deserve? Could this be due to historic failings of political leadership?”

I will leave that question to the residents of Leicestershire to decide.

Notable achievements since May

It has been less than 5 months since the elections in May, but it feels a suitable time to reflect on some notable achievements in this short period.

The new flags policy has generated plenty of interest and I am pleased we implemented it so quickly. However, I feel that the reason we changed the policy is often overlooked. As a group, Reform strongly believe that the Council should have a laser focus on delivering services for residents and anything else should be questioned. Flags are a small part of this, but focus will be a theme going forward.

This is why I am pleased to report that the Employment Committee has recently approved a consultation to commence with the trade unions and staff on a new Working Arrangements Policy. This will set out how much time employees should spend working alongside colleagues in a Council office. One thing I find striking is how dynamic and productive our offices feel when teams are in and working together. I would like to see more of this as I truly believe the benefit to staff wellbeing and service delivery will be noticeable.

Council finances have been at the front of my mind since the election. I feel it is vital that we have a fresh look at all aspects of how the Council operates. As I have already said we need a different approach to balancing the budget and I believe getting some external support to help identify and deliver savings and support staff with the changes will allow us to move at greater pace and with less service disruption that would otherwise be possible.

My expectation is that if we get this right not only will savings be identified, but just as importantly, opportunities to improve service delivery will be identified. Members are aware that the procurement is underway and an update on the approach will be shared after the specialist advisors have been appointed at the end of October. I can assure the Council that proposals for change will be shared after they have been reviewed by officers and Cabinet.

As a Cabinet we recognise the need to progress financial improvements and not just wait for the efficiency review. Members are aware of the £2 million that we liberated from Net Zero to invest in flood prevention. The Lead Member will give an update on the proposals for the investment and how we will seek to minimise the risk of flooding through direct support for communities and investment in our Highways Drainage Assets.

To start the work of balancing the budget some significant savings have already been achieved or are at an advance state of being progressed:

- The Adult Social Care team are targeting £1 million of savings following a review of home care procurement.
- The Highways team expect to deliver £540,000 from energy savings on the streetlights project, although this could be significantly higher if Ed Miliband keeps increasing energy costs.
- Children & Family Services are aiming to save over £800,000 this year by not holding back recruitment of non-essential jobs, with half estimated to be permanent savings.
- It is only right that as a Cabinet we lead by example, after my mini reshuffle your new Reform Cabinet will cost residents £25 thousand less each year than our Conservative predecessors.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the construction of the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road is now entering its final stages, and the last remaining roundabouts are due to be completed and opened to traffic at the end of September. This will be a big step towards completion of the scheme on the ground.

We look forward to full completion and the opening of the new road in spring 2026. Together with the Borough Council, we plan to get the community involved to help choose a new name for the road. More information on this will be available later this year.

Local Government Reorganisation

The last two Council meetings were dominated by local government reorganisation, including the special meeting called by the Conservative Group. There are, of course, other important issues such as the Council's financial position to which I've just referred, although we should not lose sight of the fact that reorganisation on the right scale can benefit our finances.

At its last meeting the Cabinet received a report, which was sent to all members, which set out the background to reorganisation, initial plans submitted by councils in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and the next steps. I hope everyone who read it found it a useful report in the context of all the emotion the subject has generated.

There is speculation following the Government's reshuffle about whether they will now give the same priority to reorganisation. Their capacity to get changes in 21 two tier areas approved before the end of this Parliament was already doubtful. Alongside, it is known that MPs of all parties oppose reorganisation as proposed in the Bill going through Parliament and are making their views known privately and publicly.

But we have no choice other than to make a final submission in November. As the Cabinet report said, recent Council decisions have been more about what a majority of members oppose than about what they support. So the Cabinet resolution on 12th September highlighted the importance of modelling all the different options which have so far been put forward.

We need a much wider evidence base than we currently have to enable an informed view of the consequences for the County of a City boundary extension. We need to

recognise that whatever opposition has been put forward and however loudly, the City Mayor will make a submission to extend the City's boundary.

The results of the modelling are due next week and I will arrange for them to be communicated to all members.

I will then discuss with the other Group Leaders the timetable for decision making before the final submission is due at the end of November.

Meeting with the Lord Lieutenant

It was a pleasure that His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, Mr Mike Kapur, met with Cabinet members and the Chairman of the County Council recently to discuss his role, particularly in the community.

I said to the Lord Lieutenant I would encourage all members to support him in his role especially promoting The King's Award for Voluntary Service with the current nomination process now open. If you know a worthy volunteer organisation to nominate, please speak to the Members' Secretariat.

Meeting with Staff Network Representatives

I am pleased to report that the Deputy Leader, Mr Squires and I had a positive meeting yesterday with representatives from the staff networks. The meeting marked the beginning of an ongoing dialogue which recognises the importance of communicating to staff and hearing their voices. The staff network representatives and I both recognised that sometimes decisions will be made that may not align with their views. However, we all agree that maintaining open lines of communication will be essential to provide reassurance.

Our role as an administration is to enhance, support and encourage staff as it is through this that we will deliver the most effective and efficient services for the people of Leicestershire. We recognise that staff wellbeing, valuing staff and respect is key to productivity.