

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 19 MARCH 2008

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

Beacon Award

- I am very pleased to announce that the County Council has been recognised as a Beacon Authority for its work in reducing re-offending in a joint application with Leicester City Council, and the district councils of Melton, Hinckley and Bosworth and Oadby and Wigston. The Beacon Scheme was set up to disseminate best practice in service delivery across local government. Beacon status is granted to those authorities who can demonstrate a clear vision, excellent services and a willingness to innovate within a theme.
- The application was commended for coherent partnership working between the authorities involved in this joint award. Political commitment to reducing re-offending and working across boundaries gets the most out of resources. Activities to support skills and employment have had a real impact on employment opportunities for ex-offenders, and examples include the work of Leicestershire Cares, an umbrella organisation for local employers, the Work Wise scheme from the Leicestershire Probation Service and support from volunteer mentors. The work of our own Youth Offending Service has also made a significant contribution to the overall reduction in re-offending and was highlighted in the application.
- I am sure Members will wish to join me in congratulating all concerned on this well deserved award.

Travel Vouchers for Young People

- The County Council has announced a trial of travel vouchers for young people that is designed to show how we can help tackle isolation and dependency on parents to provide transport. The trial will show how popular the scheme might be and what difference it can make to young people in promoting independence. £50 worth of vouchers will be offered, on application, to students in selected areas of the County. The vouchers will be available for use from 1 May and will be valid throughout the summer. First reaction from students and the County Youth Council for Leicestershire has been very positive. We will be looking at the success of the project and using evidence from the trial to develop our approach later in the year.

Concessionary Travel

- Members may be aware that the English National Travel Concessionary Scheme takes effect from 1 April. All holders of Leicestershire travel passes are eligible to apply and, as administrators of the scheme locally, we have written out to all 110,000 of them. Although we have had over 85,000 responses, that leaves 25,000 outstanding and I urge all Members to encourage their constituents who are eligible to get in touch. The contact details are being circulated via the Members' Information Service.

High Speed Rail Plans

- Members may have noticed reports in the Leicester Mercury claiming that Government plans for a high speed rail link to Nottingham and Sheffield will bypass Leicester. This is a long term prospect but, if it were true, it would be of great concern and we will be pressing the Department for Transport to clarify the status of this report and what are its long term plans for investing in rail in the Midlands.

Vox Pop

- The annual Vox Pop event this year was even better than before. It was the culmination of 7 district based conferences for young people, from which a number of key issues were highlighted. These issues were then debated in a Select Committee style at the Vox Pop event on Saturday 1st March. The young people, from all over the County, then put questions to a Panel of Members and Officers. There was an engaging debate, and the young people involved demonstrated excellent skills in identifying and presenting issues. This event was organised by the County Youth Council, CYCLe, and I have made a commitment to them that we will follow through the matters raised to ensure that the Council continues to listen and respond to our young people.