

COUNTY COUNCIL : 23 SEPTEMBER 2009

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

- The report to the last Cabinet meeting setting out the projected position for the coming four years has inevitably generated a great deal of interest and debate.
- I think the vast majority of key stakeholders, especially service users and staff, appreciate how candid we have been in setting out the situation as we see it.
- Inevitably there has been a lot of media interest and the report has initiated what is likely to be a protracted period of political debate. That is entirely right and proper given the importance of the issues under consideration. There has been no real challenge to our view of the scale of the problem. Indeed other authorities have followed us in declaring significant savings they envisage having to make as a result of the state of public finances. The next stage is to ask the public their views about service priorities to help guide the difficult decisions that will be required.

Total Place

- I reported to July Council that Leicester and Leicestershire had been chosen as one of the national pilots for the Total Place programme.
- This programme is intended to identify how local agencies can work together to provide better services more efficiently. It will identify what changes the Government can make to legislation and funding arrangements to make this process easier.
- There are three parts to the Leicester and Leicestershire work:
- First, analysis of the total spend (the 'count') by all the agencies. The work, which is not concluded is indicating that in the region of £6bn is spent by local and national government organisations in Leicester and Leicestershire. The vast majority of this is spent by local authorities, local NHS and the Department of Work and Pensions.
- Second, a thorough assessment of the costs and effectiveness of all the services that are needed to treat alcohol and drug dependency. Work so far has indicated how many aspects of people's lives and therefore areas of

service are affected. They include unemployment and benefits, domestic abuse and family breakdown, neighbour disputes, disorder in town centres, mental ill-health, casualties in Accident and Emergency and the full range of Police and criminal justice system services.

- The project is examining how different approaches can reduce some of these impacts on individuals, their families, the wider community and also reduce overall service costs.
- Third is a project to improve the way that local agencies provide joint access to their services. There is a collective view that we can do better and we need to introduce improvements.
- There will be briefings for Members in October/November as the work begins to identify proposals.
- Total Place has emphasised how important it is that local agencies look together at the impact of their spending plans. I am pleased to say that Leicestershire Together has agreed to our proposal that all the local agencies should work together to plan our approach to public spending reductions and to maximise our joint efforts to achieve efficiencies. This is the best way for us to ensure that the front line services Leicestershire people enjoy are protected and indeed improved as much as possible.

Pennbury

- I am pleased to say that the Government has seen sense at last and dropped the Pennbury proposal from the list of proposed eco-towns published in July. As we have said in this Chamber before it should not have been included as a potential site in the first place. The evidence that it was not a suitable location was already available in work undertaken by the County Council.
- It was particularly disappointing that the Government and its agencies such as the Government Office for the East Midlands chose to ignore this evidence. The result was an unnecessary amount of work wasting millions of pounds of taxpayers money and an estimated cost to the County Council of around £0.5m.
- However I believe that the way the County Council has dealt with Pennbury has only enhanced its status as the community leader for Leicestershire:
- The local members Kevin Feltham and Simon Galton gave real local leadership to their communities and drove a highly effect campaign through CASCET. The local community responded to this leadership and the whole episode has I'm sure enhanced community spirit in the area.
- The Scrutiny Review Panel looked in detail at the proposals and produced one of the best pieces of work undertaken by the scrutiny side of the previous Council.

- Our officers acted with great professionalism and provided evidence that was impossible to ignore even by this Government.
- In my view the Co-operative Group on the other hand has not emerged with credit. In particular, it has failed to engage properly with local people to address their concerns about the very substantial changes to the area they were promoting.

Performance

- Leicestershire has for a number of years now been one of the top performing local authorities. This was recognised in our success in being LGC Council of the Year for 2009. Of course it is no longer enough for the County Council itself to be high performing. We must ensure that the range of services being delivered by our partner agencies also meet the needs of local people.
- Part of staying at the forefront is being self aware and to help us in this we are members of a benchmarking club that compares the performance of all County Councils. This year for the first time this benchmarking is undertaken against the new National Indicator set that measures not only the County Council's performance but also the collective performance of all the other agencies working in the County.
- I am very pleased to inform you that the draft results indicate that Leicestershire is the best performing County area in the country.

Examination Results

- Results overall in Leicestershire are at their highest ever levels for all age groups. Of particular note is the 5A*-C figure at GCSE which increased by almost 3% to 67.5%. This means that for the first time, more than two out of three 16 year olds are achieving this benchmark . I congratulate all of the students and their teachers on this achievement.

School Development

- In August delegates from all over England (including from the DCSF) came to Leicestershire to view the state-of-the-art facilities at Coalville's award winning Forest Way School. The school, which has just scooped the prestigious Times Education Supplement's 'Outstanding New or Refurbished School' award, was showcased to local and central government officials as a fine example of a school offering 21st Century education to children with special needs. The showcase demonstrated Leicestershire's response to the challenges of delivering excellent special schools.
- On Saturday 19 September Belvoir High School in Bottesford hosted a public open day to celebrate the opening of the newly extended and refurbished school. It is the first newly refurbished and extended school to open as part of the Melton and Vale of Belvoir schools reorganisation. It fulfils the

Administration's election pledges and highlights the County Council's dedication to providing the best quality of education for Leicestershire children.

Park and Ride

- We are making excellent progress on the Enderby Park & Ride site and by the time we meet again in full Council the facility will be open and running. This will offer 1000 spaces for drivers to park safely and take fast, brand new buses into the city centre for work, shopping and hospital visits. Despite some hiccoughs over New Growth Point funding, I can confirm that the proposed Park & Ride site at Birstall will go ahead and this time next year, I shall be announcing the imminent opening of a further 1000 spaces as part of the County Council's contribution to making transport work well in the city and surrounding areas.

Rail Electrification

- In its statement on Rail Electrification issued in July, the Government did not list the Midland Main Line as one of the projects to go ahead. It has stated that it will carefully consider the costs and benefits of wider electrification, with particular reference to the Midland Main Line, but it is disappointing that as the Midland Main Line has such a compelling business case, the Government did not go ahead with it. I shall continue to press the Government to deliver this scheme which is so vital to the economic development of the County and the region.

National Transport Awards

- I am pleased to report success for the County Council at the National Transport Awards 2009. Leicestershire County Council was Highly Commended in the category Local Transport Authority of the Year; Director of Highways, Transportation & Waste Management, Matthew Lugg, received an award for his "outstanding contribution to local transport" and School Crossing Patrol, Veronica Allen, was commended in the category Frontline Employee of the Year.