



## **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 26 MARCH 2003**

### **POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER**

#### **Local Public Service Agreement (PSA)**

Members will recall that the Authority entered into negotiations with the Government in November 2002 in order to develop Leicestershire's first Public Service Agreement (PSA). The PSA bid ('Delivering a Better Future in Leicestershire') was developed jointly with District and Borough Councils, Leicestershire Constabulary and Health colleagues.

I am pleased to report that the detailed negotiations on the 12 'stretch' targets, which are to be included in the Agreement, are now nearing a successful conclusion. The County Council's Cabinet is expected to receive a copy of the final Agreement for formal approval on 15<sup>th</sup> April. A report will then be made to the Scrutiny Commission on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

Nine of the twelve targets included in the original submission have already been agreed between officers and civil servants (with only minor amendments being required). Success is also expected shortly in negotiating the Waste Recycling and Cost-Effectiveness targets. However, in terms of the mandatory national transport target, the Authority has had to substitute its reserve target of Road Safety for the original proposed Bus Usage. This is because of the Government's emphasis during the negotiations on the (less controllable) commercial element of the target and the problems with determining the baseline performance for bus usage. In contrast it is considered that the Road Safety target presents a better balance of cost and risk being predominantly based upon County roads.

The negotiations have not been entirely straightforward. The Government's timetable has been subject to considerable slippage as congestion has built up in progressing those agreements from earlier batches. The Government has also been very much preoccupied with the 'value for money' of each target area on a unit cost basis, rather than acknowledging the Authority's existing high level of performance in some targets areas or the very innovative nature of the local targets. Although the 'stretch' targets, which have been negotiated with the Government, are (as you would expect) challenging, [they have been designed so as to be](#) deliverable in partnership with others.

I will ensure that all Members of the Council are informed of the full list of target areas, once final agreement with the Government has been reached.

### **Leicestershire Community Strategy**

Good progress is being maintained to finalise the Leicestershire Community Strategy.

A first stage of consultation on the strategy took place last November. This used the first wave of 'Leicestershire's Voice' (the new Citizens Panel), the Young People's Citizens Jury and some consultation directly targeted at specific groups such as people from ethnic minorities, small business people and older people. As a result the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership has amended the Strategy by revising the list of key issues and adding a range of actions that will address these issues. The key public priorities of children and young people, traffic and transport and crime and community safety are fully reflected in the draft strategy.

The Cabinet has approved the Strategy for a second round of consultation that will begin next week. I am also pleased to report that the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership is working well to bring together a wide range of partnerships and agencies to co-ordinate the provision of public services for the benefit of Leicestershire people. The Community Strategy will help us in this aim.

### **Concessionary travel**

Members will be aware that the revenue budget for 2003/04 contains a contingency sum of £125,000 to allow pensioners in the County to use their bus passes for travel at all times, not just after 9.30 a.m. in the morning. We offered this funding on the basis that the district councils would pay the other half of the cost of securing this valuable improvement to the jointly financed scheme. I am pleased to say that four districts - Blaby, Charnwood, Harborough and Oadby and Wigston - have already agreed to join us in this initiative. This means that pensioners living in those areas will be able to use their passes for half fare travel before 9.30 a.m. from Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May; we will be informing pensioners individually.

I have been told that Hinckley and Bosworth and Melton Councils will be taking a decision on funding during April. I regret to say that North West Leicestershire District Council has decided not to join us in this initiative.

### **Meeting with National Farmers' Union**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> March the NFU hosted a meeting to discuss agricultural issues in Leicestershire. The Council was represented by myself and Mr P C Osborne and the appropriate officers. The NFU explained the continuing difficulties in the agricultural sector and highlighted the continuing numbers of farmers leaving the industry. Farming continues to be an important industry for Leicestershire carried out on about 74% of Leicestershire and is valued at 1% of GDP.

Future concerns of the industry that we discussed included:

1. The proposed next stage of Common Agricultural Policy Reform is intended to come into effect from April 2004. Whilst the aim of encouragement of market oriented production and improved environmental incentives is generally welcomed; the introduction of fixed payments to farmers, the extension of non production based payments and the roll out of European enlargement may mean a reduction of subsidy of 19% by 2012.
2. From 30th April farmers will no longer be able to bury fallen stock on their own land. Whilst the hunt kennels currently take such stock this outlet is itself threatened by the proposed abolition of hunting. Significant costs are involved in disposal to incinerators. In the meantime there is joint concern that once again regulations are being introduced by the Government before adequate arrangements have been made to cope with the consequences.

Discussion focussed on measures that the County Council could take to ensure a vibrant rural economy. There is strong support for the work of the Leicestershire Rural Partnership and the range of initiatives that are currently operated. Projects discussed included Business Buddies, Redundant Building Grant and Wood Fuels. The future contribution of the LSEP was discussed and the NFU suggested ways in which it can help ensure appropriate rural support. The NFU welcomed the approach taken by the County Council in managing Rights of Way and seeking to ensure that the public has access to the network. The approach to the establishment of a Leicestershire Local Access Forum was discussed and the NFU confirmed its willingness to provide a representative.

We also agreed to explore how additional school visits to farms could be encouraged and how the growth of Ragwort on the County's highways could be controlled.

### **Review of County's Citizens Advice Bureaux**

Following a meeting of the County and District Leaders in June last year, the County Council agreed to lead a review of arrangements with the Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Aston University's Business School's Centre for Voluntary Action Research was commissioned to conduct a review of current arrangements. This took place between September and November 2002.

There was a process of consultation undertaken with all parties to the review. This included representatives from the County Council, the District and Borough Councils, Leicestershire's Citizens Advice Bureaux, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Legal Services Commission.

The report makes recommendations for a partnership approach to support the provision of a generalist and specialist advice service through the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The County Council's budget includes growth monies in relation to the outcome of the Citizens Advice Bureau review. This will facilitate the implementation of some of the recommendations of the report, once these have been discussed further.

As a first step, Cabinet has agreed the release of the consultant's report for distribution to the District and Borough Councils, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and the Legal Services Commission, for their comments.

Cabinet will decide on how best to take this matter forward once all responses to the report have been collated.