

## COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 5 DECEMBER 2012

### POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

#### Group Leader Meetings

Since I was elected Leader I have now had two meetings with Simon Galton and Max Hunt and they will continue on a regular basis with everyone free to put items on the agenda. So far I have found the meetings to be extremely worthwhile, with open conversations enabling views to be shared in a way which has not always been the case previously. However, I am somewhat disappointed that the Labour Group and its Leader in particular have chosen to table a number of questions today when I thought we had agreement to a different and more productive approach.

#### Meetings with Local Authority Leaders

I have met with the City Mayor and the majority of Leicestershire District Council Leaders in recent weeks. I hope that meetings with the remaining two District Leaders can take place shortly.

The meeting with the City Mayor was productive and I hope has set the tone for future joint working arrangements on matters as diverse as the City Deal, local transport and Richard III.

Although a number of District Leaders hold senior positions within the County Council, it is always good to discuss matters from both County and District perspectives and I would envisage these becoming regular meetings. As one indication of the commitment of the County and Districts to collaborate for the benefit of local people, it is good to note that we are one of the relatively few areas to have agreed a proposal to the Government on Business Rate Pooling. Even better, that proposal includes the City Council.

#### Meetings with Leicestershire MPs

I have also met with all the County MPs bar one (due to diary problems) and again I am very pleased to report a set of constructive discussions, particularly around the importance of growing the local economy. In the past the Council has probably not capitalised on the influence of MPs as we should have done and there is now mutual agreement that we should do so.

## **City Deal**

This deserves a separate reference. Members will be aware that this is a policy central to the Government's objective of increasing economic growth. The Government recognise that local geography means that interdependencies between city and county, which are so relevant here, mean that the City and County Councils, with our District colleagues, need to work together to present a case to Government which can encourage additional investment into our area and additional local responsibilities for the Councils. There will be a report to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> December but Members will be interested to know that we have received some very positive feedback from Government officials in the last few days about our draft bid.

The bid is also being worked up in full co-operation with the Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Partnership. Yesterday evening I met with the Chairs of all the LEPs in the region and with a number of County and City Council Leaders. We agreed that there is considerable scope for co-operation between the LEPs without in any sense wanting to return to a regional agenda which was characterised by extensive bureaucracy, pointless meetings and expensive strategies gathering dust.

## **Lend a Hand in Leicestershire**

Thanks to the County Council's support, people are getting a chance to buy their own homes, transforming their lives and boosting the local economy. I am pleased to report that so far under this scheme:

- 53 mortgage applications have been approved worth £5.9 million.
- 7 families have completed purchase of their homes.

The full allocation of £10 million by the County Council will enable more than 400 first time buyers to enter the housing market, both prompting further house moves and freeing up houses for rent.

## **Supporting Leicestershire Families**

We will shortly be circulating information to all Members about progress on the Supporting Families Project. In the meantime I can inform the Council that the work we have done in Leicestershire is recognised as best practice by Government and that in turn has led to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government saying that he wants to visit us early next year to see progress at first hand. I hope it will be possible for him to take in a visit to Melton in order to see their successful multi-agency work which is a model for everyone.

## **Stand Easy**

The war memorial unveiled on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012 has rightly brought considerable praise to the County Council. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the elected members whose joint initiative some years ago led to the memorial and to rethinking and extending the support which the County Council offers to serving and former soldiers, their families and veterans, and to the wider community in their own recognition of our armed forces, current and past.

Two of those members, Peter Roffey and Mike Griffiths, are still (just!) on the Council, and it was good to see the third, John Legrys, at the unveiling. I am sure that all three will join me in thanking the officers for their support in giving practical shape to their ideas. Collectively, the County Council can be very proud of its achievements.

## **Movember**

I need to give John Legrys a second mention, as he was the single biggest donor to my prominent campaign to raise awareness for men's health issues! I would also like to thank everyone else who contributed.

## **Christmas**

This is the last meeting of the Council before Christmas and I want to take the opportunity of wishing all Members and all employees of the County Council very best wishes for the festive period and the New Year.

I will not be repeating the habit of my predecessor by sending out expensive Christmas cards. Instead, I will be donating to LOROS a sum equivalent to the cost of postage. It is only a small gesture but I think it is the right thing to do and perhaps others will want to follow suit.