

## **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 23 FEBRUARY 2022**

### **POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

#### **County Deal**

I welcomed the publication of the Levelling Up White paper three weeks ago and the news that our bid for a County Deal was announced as one of the first 9 areas to be invited to enter talks with Government.

The Conservative Group agreed that our bid would propose an Elected Mayor for Leicestershire and this would give us the best opportunity of maximising new powers and new funding available from a County Deal. We were grateful for the support of the Opposition Group Leaders, the County's MPs and the seven District Council Leaders.

Discussions with representatives from Government have confirmed what I took from the White Paper, that the Deal for which we bid is only available over what Government calls a 'Functional Economic Area' or FEA. In our case the FEA could not be Leicestershire only – it could be Leicester and Leicestershire, or Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The fact is that there is an Elected Mayor for Leicester already and he will not accept having another Elected Mayor over him.

I have discussed the situation with the City Mayor, and with the Leader of Rutland County Council. They are both really interested in seeing what can be negotiated with Government which, as leaders of neighbouring unitaries, the White Paper encourages.

At their invitation, we have started to discuss with Government what the White Paper calls 'a new form of combined authority model to be made up of upper tier local authorities only'. This is from the stand-point that we want to try everything possible to get additional funding and a greater say over capital funding for highway schemes.

We want to get a Deal which in White Paper terms is as close as possible to Level 3, unlocking the powers, funding and opportunities that Levelling Up envisages. I am doing everything I can with the Deputy Leader to get MP support for this.

If we do not succeed, we will be negotiating a combined authority model for Level 2, which would be second best in terms of powers and funding, but could give the opportunity to negotiate further powers in future. As

an Administration, we will not be turning down an offer from Government of a County Deal.

## **Net Zero and the Green agenda**

As I have reported previously the County Council has made significant progress in reducing its own carbon footprint. We will build on this and the Council's leadership role by working in partnership to tackle climate change and create a greener and more resilient County.

Late last year we commissioned independent research consultants to help us develop a 'Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan' aimed at being a net zero County by 2045. The key findings of the consultant's report were that: -

- The net zero carbon 2045 target for Leicestershire cannot be delivered by the Council working alone;
- The pathway to net zero is challenging but feasible if all available policy levers are employed at pace and scale;
- Investment will be required from all sectors.

A draft 'Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan' will be the subject of extensive consultation with the public and stakeholders during the spring. This is extremely important as we need to get as wide an agreement as possible on the way forward.

In terms of what we are doing ourselves, I'd like to take this opportunity to inform the Council that we have launched a new project to support households at risk of fuel poverty to keep warm and cut their bills by installing cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, solar panels, air source heat pumps and other energy efficiency measures. We are now working alongside district councils to secure up to £4million of additional funding to extend the scheme for another year and reduce the impact of the cost of living crisis for our most vulnerable residents.

We are also developing a new Council run tree nursery to secure tree stock for the Council's tree planting commitments and address issues of biosecurity and local provenance.

## **MTFS**

Later on we will be debating the proposed MTFS for the next four years. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the staff of the County Council, our statutory partners and voluntary and private sector providers with whom we contract for their hard work and dedication in providing services for the people of Leicestershire. Their continued efforts to find new ways of working and delivering high quality services at a time of significant resource constraints have enabled us to deliver a balanced budget for next year, when almost all other principal authorities are struggling to do so.

## **Queen's Platinum Jubilee**

Further to the Chairman's announcement I would also like to congratulate Her Majesty the Queen on her historic achievement of being our monarch for seventy years.

As the Chairman has announced there will be a number of celebrations over the bank holiday weekend in June and I am sure local communities will wish to hold street parties. To help facilitate this, the County Council will waive its fees in relation to the processing of road closure applications and associated restrictions, as well as offering the loan of signs and cones. However, I need to advise Members that the deadline for applications is Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> April so it is important that they communicate this within their electoral divisions.

In addition, I am also pleased to inform the Council that if any organiser needs support or guidance in completing their application, officers in the Environment and Transport Department will be on hand to help.

This is truly a momentous occasion for our country and Leicestershire.

## **Storm Impact and thanks to staff**

Finally, I would like to thank staff for all their hard work and efforts in keeping the County running and cleaning up after the unprecedented triple storms of Dudley, Eunice and Franklin.