

# **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

Full Council (Council Tax & Budget Setting (2021/22) etc.) |

Thursday, 18 February 2021

## **Leader's Statement**

Let me start by thanking all staff for the exceptional response to the COVID-19 outbreak. I think our response has been excellent and I cannot thank our staff enough. Their work along with the many Councillors who stepped up, has significantly raised the reputation of this Council.

This council along with many others is facing a difficult future with many uncertainties. This statement is designed to underline the decisions taken tonight whilst acknowledging the challenges we face. Also, to look at the longer-term positives we and our residents can look forward to.

### **Income Generation**

The Council will widen its charging for Car Parking in the Borough. It will endeavour to make the changes as pain free as possible for the residents, we will look at all the available options whilst ensuring we raise the revenue required. The scheme will be reviewed by members on an annual basis.

The Council has introduced a change to the charging for green waste, an additional charge of £10 per bin, plus £5 for additional bins starting in April 2021.

I do accept these are unpopular measure, but the Council must strive to be financially secure. A more positive approach by the Government would be a significant boost.

### **Control of Costs**

It is important that every Council controls its costs. This Councils task is to ensure each service is providing good value for money.

The council has come under severe pressure regarding our finances. We have incurred significant pressure on our income and our expenditure has risen to meet the COVID-19 challenge. Once again may I thank the officers for rising to the challenge whilst working hard to minimise additional expenditure.

### **Service Delivery**

As part of this process a review of the waste and recycling service will be carried out. Once this is complete the Council will decide on the long-term operation of the service. The review will consider all aspects of the service. This is likely to take a few months and any change will reflect our financial situation at the time.

### **Staff Resources**

The Chief Executive, as head of Paid Service is required to keep under review the resources required for the discharge of functions and the organisation of Officers.

This is a continuous process, and the current focus is on the need to increase capacity to deliver services. The management structure and deployment of officers will be reported to Council.

We will look to find collaborative shared services, but the opportunities appear to be around resilience and not cost. Our officers are a valuable asset and their views on cost saving and efficiency will always be sort. As business cases are developed, they will be reported to Council.

### **Customer Service Centre**

The physical Customer Service Centre has been closed since March 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. Since that time, the CSC technical officers have all worked remotely providing a 'business as usual' service without detriment to residents. On this basis the lease on the Bell Street premise which runs out in June 2021 will not be renewed.

This will realise a saving on the annual lease and ancillaries. However, we will continue to improve our Customer Service offering in the virtual environment by leveraging technology and will continue to focus on channel shift and working with our partners. The offering will also be considered alongside our plans for relocating the council offices.

### **Customer Service Excellence Award**

It is especially important we will continue to build on the recent success of being awarded Customer Service Excellence Award. We will continue with the work involved

through this award as it drives forward reviewing our processes and systems to demonstrate continuous improvement on delivery of our services.

One of the successes of the Coronavirus Emergency has been our Community Hub. As a result, we have recently been awarded £88,000 to continue to provide further support to our residents.

It is important to support the continued involvement of the Hub to provide resilience around many of our services which we provide to our residents. It should be remembered that much of the hub's work is with the most deprived and vulnerable residents of the Borough.

This shows our continuing commitment to giving our residents the service they deserve.

### **Future Sustainability Initiatives**

I will now identify some of the medium- and long-term actions the Council will take to ensure its sustainability.

### **Assets to Generate Income**

The assets register has been published on our website for several years. The register will be presented on an annual basis to a Committee. This will ensure members can understand and comment.

The Council will bring forward plans to use our assets for the good of our residents. It must be understood we do not

possess boundless assets, but we do need to focus on getting the best we can from them.

## **Growth and Development**

Over £10 million will be invested in the Borough by this Council. This will bring both jobs and housing.

This will be for the good of residents and businesses. For the Council it will bring in both capital receipts and income generation.

We will bring forward the development of the old Oadby Pool site to include community provision, it is intended to start construction by 31st March 2022.

We will bring forward the Housing Sites on Horsewell Lane and in South Wigston. These sites will be ready for construction by 31st March 2022.

We will redevelop land in South Wigston to include a new Community Health Centre. This will be in partnership with the CCG with at least planning permission by 31st March 2022.

We will bring forward the depot as a replacement for Bushloe House, this will be by 31st March 2022. As part of this process, we will check if moving to Brocks Hill and leasing the depot makes more financial sense. However, this would need to take into account the limitations of the Local Plan given it is designated green wedge land.

We will bring forward plans for the redevelopment of Bushloe House by 31st March 2022.

We will use Council owned land in Oadby and Wigston Town Centres to contribute towards the Local Plan. Provision of new housing in the town centres will be a priority. In the immediate term we will focus on bringing forward housing development on Paddock Street in Wigston with future consideration to be given to Sandhurst Street and/or East Street in Oadby.

Other opportunities for looking at the opportunities/viability for commercialisation of our assets in the future include our housing stock (realistically this would not be possible before 23/24); cemetery provision; allotment sites; community/pavilion sites.

### **Private / Public Sector Opportunities**

As well as the efforts being made by this Council there are also developments coming to fruition provided by the private sector. A new prison is now under construction in Glen Parva, this could have a positive impact on job opportunities.

There are houses being built at several locations in the Borough these will bring new residents in as well as additional revenue to the Council and even more with the direction for growth.

An experienced and successful enterprise is actively pursuing the provision of small business units in part of the Borough, again this will bring in jobs and revenue.

Our officers are also working on other employment opportunities within the Borough which hopefully will become public knowledge in the foreseeable future.

## **Overview**

We need to achieve a sustainable revenue account as quickly as possible so can start saving. We will look to invest these savings in such a way as to give a return to be used for revenue purposes. We will continue to invest in the Borough to improve facilities for the good of residents.

It is important to acknowledge that by making difficult decisions now, we can provide long term and sustainable services for our residents in the future.

Thank you.

**Councillor John W Boyce**

Leader of the Council

**Dated:** Thursday, 18 February 2021