



meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003

agenda item number

## REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER

### Purpose of Report

To outline key current themes and issues from the Deputy Leader's portfolio.

### Information and Advice

#### Connexions Nottinghamshire

Since its inception, I have been actively involved in the development of the local Connexions Service which provides advice, guidance and support to all young people aged between 13 and 19 years. The key aim of Connexions is to ensure that all young people make a successful transition from statutory schooling to the world of continuing education, training or work. This aim is, of course, key to the future economic and social well-being of the county.

I am a member of the Connexions Nottinghamshire Partnership Board, which has oversight of the whole service (County and City) and I also chair the Nottinghamshire Local Management Committee which has specific responsibility for the county area. I am delighted to be able to report that the service across the county is making very good progress, and this is a testament to the excellent partnership working that exists between the Connexions Service, the County Council (Youth and Community Service, Education and Social Services), the Police, Health and a wide range of voluntary and statutory agencies.

It is particularly encouraging to report that over the last year this partnership working has brought about some significant improvements in the outcomes for many young people. This is perhaps best illustrated by the reduction in the number of young people aged 16 – 18 years who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). During the period from May 2002 to May 2003, across the whole of Nottinghamshire (county and city) there was a 24% reduction in this group. This equates to approximately 500 young people. The data has yet to be analysed on a County: City split, but I am confident that when it is, we will see that many of the young people concerned live in the county.

Connexions Nottinghamshire is on course to meet its key targets agreed with Government, and this achievement should quite rightly be applauded. But of equal

importance is the manner it has set about its work. From the outset there has been a clear commitment to involve young people in the decision making affecting all aspects of the service. The County's Youth and Community Services have played a key role in developing this work, particularly by supporting young people to empower them to take on a variety of roles. Examples of what this means in practice include:

- 14 young people sit on the County Local Management Committee, this equates to half the total membership. The Vice-Chair is a young person. The County Youth and Community Service supports a programme of peer mentoring for all young people who join the LMC. The adult members of the Committee have also received training to ensure that they work effectively with the young people.
- 2 young people sit on the Partnership Board.
- Young people have been consulted on all aspects of service development, this includes:
  - the design and development of premises used by the service
  - information, advice and marketing materials: young people have been consulted on the design and wording of a broad range of materials
  - business Plan: a young people's version has been produced
  - the design and content of the Connexions Nottinghamshire web-site
  - the development of a policy to deal with compliments and complaints.
- Young people have been involved in the selection process for all new staff.

The work to engage young people in Nottinghamshire has now gained a national reputation, as evidenced by the following recent achievements:

- 2 young people have been awarded the Princess Diana Memorial Award for their contribution to Connexions Nottinghamshire;
- M Power Event: Celebration event led by millennium volunteers;
- Young people from Nottinghamshire led a national Conference on involving young people: "Youth Connect 2003", in London, earlier this month.

The degree to which young people are actively involved in real decision making is very exciting, and complements existing developments in the county, for example the Youth and Community Services support for youth forums. I am sure that as a County Council we can learn from these initiatives to ensure that more young people take an active role in the local democratic decision making process.

### **Youth Offending Service (YOS)**

The Youth Offending Service has recently been the subject of an audit of "Effective Practice" carried out with the Youth Justice Board (YJB). The audit revealed that there are good examples of effective practice being carried out in the County, but

that there also needs to be a more consistent approach, supported by more training for staff. The audit also suggested that the management capacity of the service needs strengthening in order to keep up with its rapid expansion.

The development of effective practice will be assisted by the new certificate qualification being developed by the YJB - the intention is for 90% of staff to have attended regionally based courses by 2006. This will, in the long run, go some way to solve the current (national) problem of a shortage of suitably qualified staff, but will cause some short-term strain as existing staff are freed up to study.

South Team still continues to provide a service despite difficulties some partners are experiencing in providing seconded staff, and the existing case managers are coping well with work on a priority basis. Steps are being taken to increase the case management capacity in the short term. In the longer term, the review of services which has been commissioned will enable the YOS partners to review resourcing arrangements.

### **Information Technology**

A project has been defined and funded which will create a common platform for telephone communications across all the major offices of the County Council. A common numbering system will eradicate the need for special access codes between County Council locations, and will ensure that all telephone users on the network have access to the same features and functions. The total number of available extension numbers will be increased from approximately 10,000 to 60,000, and the project will be implemented by November 2003.

### **Equalities**

The Corporate Equality Plan has been approved by Cabinet and Corporate Joint Forum and is now on the Council's website for public consultation and information.

External validation from the Audit Commission has now formally assessed the Council as having achieved Level 2 of the LGA Equality Standard (BVPI 2a). The only other authority to be assessed at this Level in the East Midlands is Leicester City Council. The highest Level reached nationally is Level 3, though only a handful of authorities, mostly London boroughs have achieved this. We are aiming to be at Level 3 by October 2004.

The Chief Executive has become Equality Champion for the Council and will be joining me in monthly liaison meetings to discuss equality and diversity issues with the Chair of Corporate Equality Group and the Corporate Equality Officer.

### **Local Area Forums and LSPs**

Consultation with colleagues, partners and communities regarding new proposals for LAF and LSP structures is continuing to make sure that we get the model right for each area. During these discussions, particular concerns have emerged from some colleagues about the way the Council works with parish councils, particularly in the light of the introduction of the national Quality Parish Council initiative. This will be a matter for further consideration and, if appropriate, proposals for change in the Council's approach.

Related to this area of work, at the recent Community Leadership seminar, We identified a few areas to look at in more detail including officer support, access to information, joint training with officers and the need for more clarity about priorities in partnerships.

### **Registration Service**

The Government has embarked on a public consultation exercise over its proposals to modernise the Registration Service. The consultation is entitled “Delivering Vital Change”. The proposed changes to the Registration service will:

- Enable citizens to register births and deaths on-line, in person and by telephone
- Allow people to use any register office for civil registration services
- Provide couples with more choice of where and when to marry
- Give responsibility for the delivery of face-to-face services to local authorities
- Provide new arrangements for access to registration information.

The modernisation of these services will mean that existing registration records can be computerised and added to a central database which will contain new records of births, marriages and deaths. Members of the public will also find it easier to apply for a passport or driving license or deal with a relative’s estate after death, using this electronic information.

If implemented the proposals will have a significant impact on how we plan and deliver our Registration Services.

### **Emergency Planning**

The Government has now issued its Draft Civil Contingencies Bill. The proposals contained therein are intended to improve the UK’s resilience to disruptive challenge. The draft Bill will deliver a single framework for civil protection in the UK. It will modernise the legislative tools available to government to deal with the most serious emergencies, providing greater flexibility, proportionality, deployability and robustness.

The framework will enhance existing regional resilience by delivering a new regional civil protection tier. A clear role for the regions in civil protection is intended to ensure consistency of activity across and between the tiers, and set out clear expectations and responsibilities – from front line responders through the regions and to central government departments.

### **Trading Standards Service**

Consumer Direct

In 2004 DTI will launch the first phase of a new, national, telephone and on-line consumer information and advice service – Consumer Direct. Operated in partnership with existing providers, including local authorities and Trading Standards bodies, Consumer Direct will give consumers across Great Britain access to advice and information, help in identifying and reporting scams, and will empower consumers to be able to resolve issues themselves.

Local Authorities are being invited to work in partnership across the English Government Office regions, and in Scotland and Wales, to establish contact centres at region/nation level. There will ultimately be 11 contact centres. DTI will contract with a single body in each region or nation to implement the centres, but will expect to see a partnership approach with local authority and other advice providers for information sharing and referrals.

EMCOTS our regional Trading Standards Group has been developing its Consumer Direct proposals for the East Midlands and in the Autumn a regional meeting of portfolio holders responsible for Trading Standards will be held to discuss the way ahead. Once operational, Consumer Direct will have a significant impact on how consumers access consumer advice and the Trading Standards Service.

#### Anti-Counterfeiting Enforcement

County Hall was the venue for the recent Anti-Counterfeiting Group Roadshow. Around 150 enforcers and company representatives from across the region were present. Companies whose products were being counterfeited were able to display examples of the latest counterfeit items and discuss current issues with Trading Standards officers.

Shortly after this our Trading Standards Service received further media coverage on their Anti-Counterfeiting activities following a number of successful raids across the County resulting in the seizure of counterfeit CD products and the equipment used to manufacture them.

#### Recruitment and Retention

In line with most Trading Standards authorities, we continue to have severe problems in the recruitment and retention of staff, notably Trading Standards Officers. Nationally I am pleased to support the LGA Regulatory Services Partnership which is committed to raising awareness of local authority public protection regulatory services and enhancing their performance so that they can make a full and effective contribution to the well-being of citizens and their communities.

Closer to home we have converted four vacant posts of Trading Standards Officer to Trainee posts. The time and effort from our existing staff to supporting these Trainees will be considerable.

**Cllr David Kirkham**  
**Deputy Leader**