



Agenda Item No. 8

Leader's announcements to Council – 14th December 2016

On Monday, the Cabinet's budget strategy for 2017-18 and beyond was published. We will consult the public about it following the Cabinet meeting next week. Members of the Council will have the chance to comment on the budget in meetings of the Cabinet's Financial Strategy Advisory Panel in January and all members will be invited to vote on the proposals at the next meeting of full Council in February.

In my foreword, I have described the budget as "a budget for growth": it has bold ideas to grow income for the Council while also supporting regeneration, housing and economic growth in line with our priorities to "support you to contribute to a successful local economy" and "support you to live in clean, green and safer communities". The Cabinet is seeking support from Council for ambitious plans to borrow up to £35m to strengthen the Council's capital portfolio and to lend money to third parties to help them to realise regeneration and housing projects. This would reinforce the important role that the Council plays in shaping future growth and investment in Wyre Forest and beyond; and importantly generate revenue income for the Council to protect the front-line services that communities value and to deliver the Administration's commitment to keep taxation low.

By growing other income, including taking tough decisions on fees and charges, we can freeze Council Tax in 2017-18, which benefits every local resident. This means that Wyre Forest's share of Council Tax will have been frozen for five years out of seven, with the increase in council tax since 2010 remaining well below the rate of inflation across that period. The Administration is committed to keep council tax below the rate of inflation over the medium term, and the proposals for modest increases beyond 2017-18 are consistent with the commitment that we have given to local communities.

Our approach to transformation has used and will continue to use three main levers under the banner of the Wyre Forest Forward programme:

- Making the Council as efficient as it can be internally: for example, simplifying processes, making best use of technology and digital solutions to deliver services to local residents and businesses, and seeking procurement efficiencies;
- Growing our income;
- Using alternative delivery vehicles, working with others to deliver projects or operate services or valued local assets.

An excellent example of the latter is the fantastic Wyre Forest Leisure Centre which opened on time in July and was officially opened by the Chairman and Rebecca Adlington OBE in October. This was a high profile event which achieved significant media coverage and portrayed the Council and district in a positive light. I would like to thank members who attended the official opening event.

There are many projects that we have under way to secure further regeneration in the district. The most important of these is the Lion Fields development. We have taken proactive steps to build market confidence by awarding a contract to demolish The Glades leisure centre: we are now seeking a development partner for Parcel 1 and plan to select a preferred developer in the first half of 2017.

Worcestershire continues to play its part in accepting refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict. A total of nine people in two families arrived in Kidderminster on 29 November, bringing the total accommodated in Wyre Forest to 17 out of a Worcestershire total of 47.

Since the last meeting of Council, I have announced a further change to membership of the Cabinet. In the press statement, I paid tribute to Councillor Sally Chambers' contribution since joining the Cabinet in May 2015, particularly her work on growing income from our commercial offer, and it is a matter of regret that she could not continue because of her new full-time job. This demonstrates the demands of the role of being a Cabinet member. I was delighted that Councillor Juliet Smith accepted my invitation to join the Cabinet, although I regret any inconvenience for Council and the Chairman in that she had to give up her role as Vice-Chairman as a consequence. I look forward to working with the newly appointed Vice-Chairman for the remainder of this municipal year.

Finally, I would like to wish all members of Council and staff a Blessed and Peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Cllr Marcus Hart
Leader of the Council