

COUNCIL, 26 FEBRUARY 2020

LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

I would like to start by extending thanks on behalf of all colleagues to the Council's staff, staff of the emergency services, county council and other organisations including the voluntary sector and members of local communities across the district who have been involved in responding to Storm Dennis and this week's renewed flooding. Bewdley is set to experience the highest recorded river levels in this millennium but the impact has been felt in other areas including Stourport and Wolverley. A rest centre is operating again tonight in Wyre Forest House. I am sure that colleagues have found the updates provided by the Emergency Response Team leaders to be useful, and welcome the swift moves to provide financial support to affected residents and businesses. Colleagues may have heard me being interviewed on "The World at One" on Radio 4 last Friday where I was able to refer to the support that we are providing, and also to call on the Government to unveil financial support for farmers as they did when there was flooding last November. All the current information can be found at this link

<https://www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk/flooding>

Council tonight is being asked to approve the medium term financial strategy 2020-23. Again I would like to extend thanks to the finance team led by Tracey Southall and the rest of the Corporate Leadership Team for their hard work on this. We have discussed not only the Cabinet's proposals but also the alternative proposals from the Conservative Group in detail in the Strategic Review Panel, which all members were able to attend if they wished, and the Cabinet has been able to incorporate one of the Conservative Group's suggestions in our final recommendations. I am grateful for the thought and consideration that members have given to the financial strategy in the run up to tonight's meeting.

In early February I attended the annual conference of the District Councils' Network with the Chief Executive. There was considerable discussion of the forthcoming devolution white paper. This is expected to be published after the elections in May and, based on what we learned and other reporting, it seems likely to focus on the creation of mayoral combined authorities as the means to unlock greater local control over powers and resources, including control of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This might also be accompanied by encouragement to consider local government structural reform into unitary authorities. I will be discussing these issues with other Worcestershire leaders over the coming months. If Worcestershire councils want to have access to greater local powers and more local control over funding, previous concerns about elected mayors and perhaps even local government reorganisation may have to be put to one side.

Finally, Government Ministers wrote to our two Local Enterprise Partnerships on 4 February to ask that they should resolve the overlap of the two LEPs by the end of

this month. It is very unlikely that any such agreement will be reached between the LEPs and therefore the leaders of the seven districts in the GBS LEP have asked that the district councils should be empowered to take the decision before the end of March on which LEP each district wishes to remain in. This is preferable to a decision imposed from Whitehall. We are yet to receive a response from Ministers to this offer. I will provide a further update to colleagues in due course.