

COUNCIL, 21 FEBRUARY 2024

LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tonight, the Council takes the most important decisions that it considers each year, about its budget and the level of council tax. We are a member of the District Councils' Network and it was good that intensive lobbying by the DCN and others saw the Government change its provisional settlement proposals, delivering an increase in core spending power from 3% to 4% for all councils. This benefitted WFDC to the tune of over £120k in 2024-25 but it is a one off measure and we look forward to future settlements providing certainty about funding over longer time spans. The DCN continues to lobby for a change in how councils are funded for temporary accommodation costs, currently based on 90% of local housing allowance figures for 2011 – which means, each year, a greater proportion of costs falls on housing authorities. We hope the Chancellor's budget in early March might see updating of these arrangements.

I know that colleagues will want to join me in thanking the Head of Resources and Section 151 officer and her staff and all other officers for the hard work that goes into the preparation of the medium term financial strategy and the papers for tonight's meeting.

Last week saw two positive steps forward with important capital projects.

We completed the purchase of the listed Piano Building, using grant from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. The building will be brought back into a sustainable commercial use with a food, beverage and leisure offer on the ground floor and in the modern extension and office space for letting on the upper floors. It is excellent news that we have been able to move forward at last with this element of the LUF programme. The opportunities are already being marketed to potential tenants so that they can take up occupancy swiftly after the refurbishment works that will now be procured.

Work also started on the temporary accommodation units at Castle Road. This will mean that the council has more suitable provision for homeless households than hotels and B&Bs, and will also help keep the cost of providing temporary accommodation at more manageable levels.

Work continues on the refurbishment of the former Magistrates' Court into the creative hub with works expected to be completed by December 2024.

I would like to congratulate Councillor Liam Carroll on his new role as leader of the Labour Group on the Council.

Finally, colleagues will be aware that the LGA's corporate peer review team, led by the Chief Executive of Runnymede Borough Council and the Leader of South Holland District Council, will visit Wyre Forest between 5 and 7 March. The follow up visit after the previous review was in 2019 so it will be valuable to have colleagues from comparable organisations hold a mirror up to what we are doing now and our plans for the future. I am grateful to colleagues who will give up time to speak to the

Agenda Item No. 7

review team. In line with the LGA's expectations, we will publish the report of the review and our action plan within three months.