



Leader's announcements to Council – 22nd February 2017

The Council is being asked tonight to approve the medium term financial strategy for 2017-2020 and to freeze council tax for a further year, which will benefit local residents. I welcome very much that the public consultation demonstrated support for all the proposals in the strategy including the council tax freeze. I would like to thank again all members and staff who have contributed to the shaping of the strategy, in particular the Cabinet Member for Resources, Councillor Nathan Desmond, Chief Financial Officer, Tracey Southall, and the Corporate Leadership Team and members who attended meetings of the Cabinet's Financial Strategy Advisory Panel.

Mark Garnier MP and I went to see the Local Government Minister, Marcus Jones MP, in January to raise concerns about the proposed changes to distribution of new homes bonus. It is exceptionally disappointing that the Government has not amended its initial proposals following the points raised forcefully by the Local Government Association, District Councils' Network and many others as well as this Council. No new Government money has been provided for social care and the transfer of £240m of resources from new homes bonus, including £75m being taken away from district councils, has been confirmed in the final settlement.

Earlier this month, the Cabinet approved the approach for selecting a development partner for Parcel 1 of the Lion Fields development – this is the site of The Glades, demolition of which is well under way. The Cabinet has set clear expectations for the development agreement to see a mixed use leisure development incorporating a cinema.

The largest development site in the district at present is Silverwoods, the former British Sugar site. Councillor Ian Hardiman represented me at the official opening of Silverwoods Way on 17 February, the ceremony being performed by our local MP. This has been an excellent joint project, led by the County Council. We worked with the two local enterprise partnerships of which the District Council is a member, to help secure funding towards the project.

The success of the overall site will be celebrated further with the official opening of Berrington Court by Community Housing Group at the end of March. The Wyre Forest Leisure Centre has already proved exceptionally popular and I know that Places for People Ltd are delighted with the high level of usage. We have responded quickly to the issues relating to parking on the site and Cabinet will be invited to approve proposals to increase the number of spaces at its March meeting, prior to submission of a planning application which will be considered by the Planning Committee.

Worcestershire councils have delivered on their commitment to accept 50 refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict in 2016. However there have been a number of concerns we have raised about costs of housing and access to education. We are reviewing our experience with a view, if necessary, to pressing for further clarification from the Government before we confirm acceptance of a further 50 refugees in 2017.

Finally, as the Chief Executive's annual report mentions, we will soon lose the services of three senior managers, who are leaving to pursue new challenges: Rebecca Brown, planning policy manager, Alison Braithwaite, head of transformation and communications, and Trevor Jones, financial services manager. I would like to extend my personal thanks to them for their contribution to the Council's work in the time that they have been with us and the many achievements in which they have played a part. I am sure colleagues would join me in appreciating their service and wishing them well for the future.

Cllr Marcus Hart
Leader of the Council