



Leader's announcements Council, 27th February 2019

Earlier this month, the peer review team from the Local Government Association undertook a follow up visit to look at the progress the Council had made since the full review in March 2017. I would like to thank those members who gave time to speak to the review team, and I know that they were grateful for colleagues' input and honesty about what we have achieved and where there may be scope for further improvements. The peer review team's initial feedback was generally very positive and we will share their report with members once it has been received.

In January, Ostop Paparega joined us as the head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, and he has been able to move forward with filling other key roles in the new structure of this successful joint service.

NWEDR is responsible for our involvement in or overseeing a number of important development projects affecting the district. Among these, it is good to see the works well under way on re-opening Worcester Street to traffic and the drainage works at the station prior to construction of a temporary ticket office and removal and replacement of the current building. Earlier this month, Cabinet approved the exciting vision and master plan for phase 4 of Lionfields, the current Bromsgrove Street car park site, and we will now approach the market to test developer interest while seeking funding from the Future High Streets Fund to ensure that a development is viable. The NWEDR team has also been working with Homes England to ensure a positive outcome to an application for Housing Infrastructure Fund to open up the Churchfields site for a major housing development, which already benefits from planning permission. An announcement to confirm the HIF contribution is expected in March.

I was delighted that we were able to announce yesterday that we have now signed a deal with Telereal Trillium under which the company will demolish Crown House within 18 months at no cost to the Council or the taxpayer. This was a key objective which the administration had set and which has now been delivered as a result of standing firm in the negotiations that have happened in recent months. Our determination to secure this outcome has been vindicated. I would like to pay tribute to Mike Parker, Corporate Director: Economic Prosperity and Place, and other Cabinet colleagues and staff who have helped to achieve this breakthrough. We can now start looking ahead to options for developing the site once it has been cleared, and to assist with the regeneration of this part of Kidderminster.

Colleagues will have seen that we announced the proposed purchase of Forest House on the Hoo Farm industrial estate recently, to allow us to relocate our successful SPACE initiative for start up businesses: another purchase of commercial property in Kidderminster. We announced this prior to legal completion because we have had to notify tenants of the move. Colleagues will be aware from confidential reports to the scrutiny committee and Cabinet in recent months that another major purchase in the district has been approved and this will be published when the purchase has been completed. Scrutiny and Cabinet are expected to consider a further proposal for a purchase within the district at meetings next month.

Works at Green Street for the Depot 2020 project commenced on 19th November. Practical Completion within the contract is set to 31st May 2019. Generally progress has been good although works to Block B have been delayed as result of a fallen roof beam. Timber treatment to the remaining beams has commenced and the new steel beam has now been ordered. Externally, trenching for the drainage and works in relation to incoming services are ongoing. Interclass PLC have reported a 6 week delay to programme and the completion date has been revised to 12th July. This will not cause any difficulty as we have agreed flexibility with the Town Council about the date when the customer service centre will relocate from the Town Hall.

Members will appreciate from the medium term financial strategy that significant decisions lie ahead of the council elected in May further to address the financial gap. We have made significant progress over several years in reducing the net cost of the Council and implementing innovative arrangements, such as Wyre Forest House and the new leisure centre, to reduce costs and grow income. On 1 April, Kidderminster Town Council will take over operational responsibility for the Town Hall, the latest example of the good work that we have been doing on localism. The drive to transform the Council will need to continue and, as part of that, I have agreed with the Leaders of Bromsgrove and Redditch that a programme of reviews should commence in 2019 in order to look at whether to build on the range of existing successful shared services that we have with those councils including NWEDR. This should be our starting point but we should continue to seek out other opportunities to work with the wider local government family if they would be mutually beneficial. We expect to look with Redditch and Bromsgrove at a range of areas including planning (development management and forward planning), revenues and benefits, and environmental services including waste collection. We do not know what the outcome will be yet and no decisions have been taken but the reviews may identify that there is a business case to form further shared services. If so, there would be consultation with staff and unions and then decision-making by all three councils well after the May elections about whether or not to implement such changes.

I would like to thank Tracey Southall, Corporate Director: Resources and all her team together with other members of the Corporate Leadership Team on the hard work that has gone into the budget proposals that are before Council tonight for debate and approval. A huge amount of work goes on behind the scenes in producing the medium term financial strategy, and I am sure all colleagues would wish to echo my thanks to officers for their contribution.

Finally, this will be the last Council meeting before the whole council elections on 2 May 2019. I have been grateful for the Council's support to me in my role as Leader since I was first appointed in 2014 and again following the elections in 2015. I would like to wish luck to all colleagues who will be standing and extend my best wishes to those members who are standing down at the elections following distinguished service, all of them being current or former Chairmen or Leaders of the Council – Councillor Stephen Williams, Councillor John Champion and Councillor Jeff Baker. In addition, our youngest member, Councillor Nick Harris, is stepping down to pursue another career. I am sure colleagues would join me in wishing those who will be leaving our ranks well for the future.

Cllr Marcus Hart
Leader of the Council