

## **Leader's announcements**

### **25 September 2019**

Since July, Councillor Helen Dyke has chaired a meeting with each of the three town councils to discuss their ambition to take over various local assets and services under the localism agenda. I have attended all three meetings and can report to Council that the discussions have been constructive and positive. Further information is being provided to assist the three councils in confirming how they wish to proceed. This process provides a massive opportunity for the town councils to work with the district council to secure the financial viability of important local assets such as parks, nature reserves and toilets. In many cases, this would see the return of ownership of assets that were taken from the towns as part of the local government reorganisation in 1974: our proposal is that the asset transfers would be free.

We have also outlined our desire to work with parish councils on the same issues and will be happy to progress discussions with them on relevant opportunities in due course.

The Council has received a planning application for a new medical centre in Stourport-on-Severn. This centre would bring modern premises and a wider range of treatments and services for two expanding GP practices. Full consultation is taking place and the application is likely to be considered at the December meeting of the Planning Committee. It would not be appropriate to comment on the planning issues.

However I am delighted that, in our role as a land owner, we have been able to work with the GPs and NHS to help Stourport residents to enjoy facilities similar to those now available in Bewdley and Kidderminster. This builds on the approach in Bewdley where the Council made land available for the new medical centre in that town. Wyre Forest Health Partnership has undertaken an extensive and thorough process to find a suitable site for the development which can be delivered in the tight timescale to benefit from the NHS Funding and the only suitable land they found is the Dunley Road site which is owned by the Council. Colleagues will be aware from the confidential Part II report that the Cabinet on 16 July agreed to sell the land once planning permission had been obtained.

Planning for Brexit has been reinvigorated by the new Government, and I provide a brief summary below of the arrangements in Wyre Forest. The new Secretary of State's first act was to announce on 3 August that each council should have a Brexit lead officer. The Chief Executive is performing this role and for over 12 months has been the lead chief executive on Brexit for the District Councils' Network. The latter role means, among other things, participation in the regular telephone conferences that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government holds with various representative bodies in the local government sector, and thus gives early insight into issues facing councils.

The national, regional and local planning and communication arrangements include:

- Secretary of State's Brexit Delivery Board – attended by lead political representatives from the Local Government Association, including DCN. Meets approximately monthly;
- A network of nine regional lead chief executives. The chief executive of Solihull covers the West Midlands, and feeds issues identified by councils in the region into MHCLG and acts as a conduit back;
- The (usually weekly) MHCLG telephone conferences with sectoral bodies, mentioned above;
- Each Local Resilience Forum – in our case for West Mercia – also has reviewed readiness and prepared plans against the now famous “Yellowhammer” national planning assumptions. In March/April, weekly telephone conferences of senior officers were held (the strategic coordination group, commonly known as “Gold command”) and these commenced again in mid-September;
- Local planning on issues relevant to Wyre Forest.

The local planning arrangements take the form of regular meetings with a small group of staff from North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, Worcestershire Regulatory Services and media team. There follows a very brief summary of the issues considered and actions taken:

- a) WFDC has very few staff from other EU countries, therefore impact on workforce not expected to be significant;
- b) Environmental health– main issue likely to be food exports to rest of EU, which will require export health certificates. There is no accurate information about the number of businesses that export to the rest of the EU (because there is no need to know that within the single market). Worcestershire Regulatory Services is looking at enhancing its capacity to cope with potential demand, costs for which might be recouped from businesses. WRS & NWEDR are working together to identify and raise awareness among relevant businesses;
- c) No other services identified as of concern at present;
- d) In terms of businesses and residents, it is difficult to predict impact on businesses with confidence. This could emerge over a period and is expected to involve more negative economic impacts in the event of a “no deal” exit. Government communications/advice is being routed via NWEDR. There is no evidence as yet of community cohesion issues.
- e) The main action has been to develop a Brexit page on NWEDR, WRS and WFDC websites giving relevant links to gov.uk pages for businesses (NWEDR, WRS) and general public (WFDC) as appropriate.