

Leader's announcements

21 September 2022

This month has brought the most extraordinary scenes following the much-lamented demise of Her Majesty The Queen. It was inevitable that this sad event would happen but it has been intensely moving and impactful nonetheless. The Chairman and Group Leaders have joined me in paying tribute to Her Late Majesty earlier in the meeting. On behalf of Council, I want to extend thanks to staff who have helped, often at very short notice, to ensure that events have been appropriately marked in the district, including lowering and raising of flags, provision of books of condolence and places for people to leave flowers and the proclamation event that was held in Kidderminster. I would also like to thank staff of other organisations including Kidderminster Town Council, St George's Hall and the county council for their assistance.

The ordinary business of Government has been disrupted since early July and recent events have led to further delay. We and other councils look forward to early clarification about important policies and legislation and about arrangements for local government funding in 2023 to reflect the much higher costs that councils face as a consequence of inflation – which also impacts on demand for services, such as welfare support and homelessness. The short-term measures that have been announced to assist with energy costs apply for only six months. While the support is welcome, it does not provide councils with long-term certainty about their finances. In the short term, councils will use reserves if necessary but that is not a sustainable solution. Unless inflation turns negative in a significant way during 2023-24, the inflationary increases in goods, supplies, energy and so on will be “baked in” and we need credible recognition of that by Government providing higher levels of resource in future years.

The car parking advisory panel held its first meeting on 16 September, under the chairmanship of Councillor Claire Barnett, and I am grateful to her and other members for the work that they will do. Further meetings are planned for October and November, and the Cabinet and I look forward to considering the panel's recommendations thereafter.

Since Council last met, the Council's plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been submitted. I am grateful to the private sector-led ReWyre Board for their support in developing the plan and the projects within it. However we are now awaiting formal approval from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities before we are able to make announcements and go ahead with the investments set out in the plan.

Finally, last night's Planning Committee and tonight's Council are the first formal meetings when we have used the new microphones and cameras for webcasting. I would like to thank staff in the ICT team for their hard work with public-i on installing the new equipment and I know that they will be on hand to assist members or others with training if required.