

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 20th FEBRUARY 2002.

This Report is written prior to the Executive Meeting of the 13th February which I have no doubt will be the most important Executive Meeting held since the last full Council as it will recommend to Council the Budget for 2002/3.

Whatever recommendation is made at that meeting, it is unlikely to have a dramatic effect on the proposed Council Tax increase of 17.25%.

I doubt that few members expected such a swingeing proposed increase but nonetheless the facts which have been made clear in our recent publication should leave no one in any doubt as to the necessity to have such an increase if we are to fulfill the expectations of the Council Tax Payers and at the same time address the reduction in Government support that we have received over recent years.

The level of Council Tax does, I think, highlight the fact that working in partnership with other Local Authorities is "probably the only way forward in ensuring adequate service delivery as well as holding out a possibility of substantial cost saving."

The Welland Partnership is therefore fundamental in my view to the future direction of this Council.

At an informal Executive meeting held on the 30th January prior to the Executive, concerns over the Welland Partnership were discussed in some detail both in terms of the financial implications for Harborough District council and in general terms regarding the democratic representation on the proposed Executive Board and concerns that we were perhaps dancing to other people's tunes.

The recommendation to Council regarding the financial arrangements in respect of the Welland Partnership, which was contained within the Agenda of the 30th January, Executive went some way to alleviating the fears of some members of the Executive and I hope that full Council agree the recommendation and endorse it with enthusiasm.

This has to be seen in the light of the final bid for SSP status which had been submitted by the Welland Partnership on the 16th January.

The Executive Meeting held on the 16th January considered the Notice of Motion by Councillor Taylor regarding pre 9.30.a.m. Concessionary travel. This had been referred to the Executive by Full Council.

Councillor Taylor addressed the Executive to amplify his concerns and after hearing this and debating the issue at length, it was decided to approach all other Councils and the County to endeavour to gain agreement to reinstate this concession.

As I write this Report only North West Leicester have come out categorically against the concession and it seems almost certain that all the remaining Districts with County Council support will achieve a scheme of pre 9.30.a.m. travel for the disabled.

I think that perhaps, in retrospect, both the Executive and Full Council should have realised that the disabled should not have been excluded from the original proposals but, nonetheless, the progress made on the issue is a very positive contribution to our strategy of well being for the District as a whole.

At the Executive Meeting held on the 30th January there was a full and frank discussion on the Government's proposals for the developing role of Parish and Town Councils and in particular the concept of quality councils.

As can be seen from the Minutes, the Executive expressed their view that a distinction needed to be made between large and small parish councils and that the Government Paper may well have the effect of frightening off potential Councillors who are hard enough to find at the best of times.

Additionally the extra cost associated with quality status could fall on Parish Councils, which would not be to their benefit.

The Executive had a full explanation of the present position of Lutterworth Sports Centre at the 30th January meeting and it will be seen from the Minutes that the additional capital injection of £210,000 be deferred until the outcome of the tender result is known. At the informal meeting held on the 6th February the Executive agreed that Councillor Fewkes be allowed to sit on the project team to ensure that the financial implications of the project could be kept at the forefront of the Executive Agenda now that we are entering a critical period in the realisation of the scheme.

New arrangements are now in place for informal meetings of the Executive. These will be monthly on Wednesdays when the Executive does not meet.

The Agendas will be created by myself and Cllr Totten, following the official Executive Meeting.

I would ask that all members try to raise issues, which can be discussed at these informals.

So often one hears that all members are not privy to all that is discussed and need to have an input. Well, here is a mechanism that allows members to air their views and concerns and I recommend it to all members.