

**Council**  
**30 July 2012**  
**Agenda item 6a refers**  
**Leader's Report - JULY 2012**

The New Finance Act is a major piece of legislation for all Councils, along, indeed, with the whole country's precepting agencies. Harborough District Council is now working hard to embed its clauses in our budget in sufficient time for Council Tax Bills next April. Given the fundamental changes to the Welfare system under the Unified Tax Credits scheme, plus the localisation of Council Tax Discounts, there is great pressure upon the systems suppliers for IT to deliver programs which operate these issues. The requirement to synchronise our working with other partners too, has become very clear, and is a further pressure on decision making for Members. It may well be that time and available IT defeat our implementation plans.

Increasingly, Transformation begins to mean a fundamental change in the culture of the organisation; a new beginning, a realisation too that with a new headquarters, new staff structures, new priorities, new channels of communication with our residents, and a new flexibility of approach, Member involvement will radically alter.

Transformation can only work if we as Members totally embrace the changes. "Do," as they say in the vernacular, "Members truly get it?" In the end is not about processes or buildings, it is really about how we relate to the real world. Process and assets are only the manifestations of the tools we employ to provide our people with power.

The Localism Act is gradually unfolding with its massive shifts of potential freedoms. The right to bid, right to challenge, a general power of competence: Democracy is being let out into the green pastures of intellectual politics. Can it survive? Only if we as Members act responsibly to shepherd it forward with sensitivity, and that we understand that risk is a human condition to be managed, yes, but exploited, not feared.

There is a much practical work being undertaken by the Portfolio holders and Officers around the recommendations on staff structure, on the redesign of the HQ, on developing an initiative to bring unused property into use, the review of electoral governance is also something we have not heard the end of yet. A practical way forward is being sort for a first time buyer mortgage scheme, moving towards a cashless front office, and we continue to work behind the scenes on the Market Traders initiative to run their own show, plus the Welham Lane business case review, and a continued strengthening of links with all our partners in all areas.

We welcome Ann Marie Hawkins to the senior team in her capacity as Policy, Performance and Partnerships Officer, to scan the horizon for us, as well as keep our compass reference true. Shared with Blaby, she replaces one of their Officers, but we have never had such a resource at Harborough for many years, so this will be highly

beneficial. She will be involved in every area of our business.

Lastly, I want to mention our poor farmers. This sector, in our predominately rural environment, is often overlooked when Members talk of business growth. In terms of wellbeing, food supply, and costs, we rely on their efficiency and productivity. Make no mistake the rains we are currently experiencing could have a devastating impact on next year's prices. If the rape harvest cannot be combined on time, the wheat harvest will be late coming in, and the drilling or planting for next year will miss its efficiency window. This will inevitably mean higher grain prices next year and even shortages. Potentially we do have real cause for concern, and I want to highlight the dedicated work that all farmers in our District achieve on the county's behalf, day in and day out all year round.

They surely do not need milk price reductions, standing water in the fields, or the level of bureaucracy we surround them with.

**Cllr Michael Rook (Leader HDC)**