

LITTLE WITLEY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING  
25.09.19  
COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

## Council Affairs

At Council two weeks ago, we considered two matters of countywide importance. The first established how Worcestershire Children First (WCF) will be brought into being on October 1<sup>st</sup>. This is the wholly owned company of the county council that will look after all our children's services and education matters that are determined by the council.

Full details can be found on the council's website, but suffice to say at this stage that our most recent Ofsted inspection has demonstrated that our children's safeguarding activities have continued to improve. So they are not rated "requires improvement to be good". While WCF will continue in existence for probably 5 years, we anticipate that the service may come out of intervention in the near future.

The company will have a budget in excess of £110 million a year, and will carry our vital work with the 800 or so children taken into council care. It will remain under the supervision and scrutiny of the County Council officers and Cabinet

The other matter that was adopted was an organisational redesign of the top three tiers of management of the County. These will consist of the Chief Executive at tier 1, four strategic directors at tier 2, and thirteen assistant directors at tier 3. This will mean a saving of two posts and should make the policy forming area of the county council structure more effective and efficient.

There will then be further reorganisation at the lower tiers of management and activity, resulting in further savings and greater effectiveness.

In these circumstances, I would be very pleased to hear of any experiences of residents who have dealings with the council, so that I can know of both good and bad outcomes. The intention would be to seek ways of improving the good and eliminating the bad. Your cooperation would be welcomed.

## Local matters

I am acutely aware of the poor broadband speeds suffered by some members in our rural areas. Our officers are working hard with BT Openreach to ensure good coverage for the whole county and progress is being made. I am sure we all realise that there are competing claims across the country for the limited resources available to install the necessary infrastructure.

Nevertheless, I think that our performance so far has been among the best in the country. The Prime Minister's announcement of an accelerated timetable for the provision of fibre to the premises is welcome, but will require much greater resources being made available. In these circumstances, I am very keen that Worcestershire should be near the front of the queue for the extra effort, to satisfy, especially, people like some residents, probably not including Little Witley people, who have been "neglected" so far.

You might want to bear in mind that the Prime Minister has expressed dissatisfaction with the 2033 deadline for everyone in the country to receive fibre to their premises, and has said he will bring that forward to 2023. That would mean a huge amount of work between now and then, but once achieved,

it would mean the much easier deployment of assistive technology with remote monitoring for Adult Social Care. We have to hope he will achieve his stated intention.

## Rural Services Network conference

I was able to attend some of the above conference in Cheltenham three weeks ago. There was attention given to the need for a rural strategy that makes appropriate provision for the problems of sparsity in rural areas.

This means seeking to ensure a balanced population of people in rural villages, to keep village schools open and appropriate services for local people. It should be recognised that in my Tenbury division, there are 17 parish councils, as well as Tenbury Town Council. In those 17, there are only three that have shops - Great Witley, Abberley and Clifton Upon Teme. This means that many people will need to use some form of transport to get to the sort of facilities that we all regard as essential.

In consequence, I was dismayed at the conclusions of the Select Committee of the House of Commons for Science and Technology. They recently decided, for all sorts of reasons, connected with climate change and advanced technology, that personal transport would have to be banned or restricted.

I wrote to the Conservative members of the committee to indicate that this would be impractical for many of those living in the 14 villages without a shop like Little Witley, not to mention their needs to get to towns and railways stations and the like. I have not had a single reply. Indeed, Sam Gyimah has now decided to become a Liberal Democrat!

I am very keen to see that rural areas are helped to thrive by sensible expansion of housing and support for rural schools and services. I hope that that policy will be endorsed by our national government, and recognised in the future funding proposals by the Chancellor.

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