



1st February 2008

From your City Councillor

News update

The Budget

The results of the Simalto consultation are now in and have been presented to the Council. Twenty one services were covered in the exercise ranging from Arts & Culture to Street Cleaning and the questions and subject matter were drawn together in collaboration with our consultants, "Research For Today", a company that has experience of over one hundred such consultation exercises with local authorities.

Whilst the results would more than fill two or three editions of News Link, it might be worth drawing out three important sections for this edition and they are as follows:-

Those consulted said the following services should not be reduced

- Arts & Culture
- Riverside litter and enhancement
- Flood defences
- Toilets
- Litter & dog bins
- CCTV
- Homelessness
- Street cleaning

They said the following enhancements would cause the most satisfaction

- Flood defence – Hylton Road permanent barrier
- Riverside litter – dedicated week end service
- Riverside enhancement – extend improvements
- Homelessness – increase support
- Litter, dog bins – 10% more
- Play areas – increase refurbishment + new opportunities
- Toilets – refurbish those outside the City Centre, no charge

They said the following reductions/changes would cause the least displeasure

- Guildhall – Improve use, example as a café, conference centre
- Residents magazine – reduce to one per year
- Museum, art gallery – merge with County
- Car parking charges – 10p increase short & long stay
- Christmas lights - cut funding
- Youth centres – merge with County
- Council access – no Saturday opening
- Parks & flowers only at main sites
- Play area – close 10% least used
- Sports facilities – reduce subsidy

Whilst the above must not be taken as definitive list of actions to be taken by the City Council, it is the view of responders resulting from the consultation process and will help informed decisions to be made as the process moves forward. There were some surprises and a lot of information was gained about residents priorities, the process will prove an invaluable resource in developing the 2008/9 budget.

What does this all mean for us, the charge payer? Well with the deep reaching reductions and efficiencies, to bridge the budget gap, outlined in the Council's Budget Digest, the City's portion of the Council Tax is likely to increase by 4.34% for this coming year, on a Band D property that would amount to £6.27 per year, and 3.9% for the two following years. The forward view to 2013, the Medium Term Financial Plan, rests heavily on projected efficiencies being achieved in future years, not least through shared services and collaborative working with other councils, particularly important in years 09/10, 10/11, and 11/12. You may remember that there is a budget shortfall of £1.686 million for 08/09 and £2.86 million over the next five years.

Looking forward it's probably worth saying that apart from the obvious need for the City Council to tightly control its purse strings over the coming years, it must increase its income and develop services in collaboration with partner councils, if we are to ensure essential services remain at a good level and the budget balanced and sustainable.

Multi Use Games Area

The reality moved a little closer today with the scheme being granted planning permission. We now have the land, the money and permission to proceed; hopefully it will be completed by or just after Easter this year. My thanks to the Officers of Worcester City Council for their ongoing help and support with this project.

The Village Hall Committee, the group who commissioned this project supported by the Parish Council, plan to allow open use of the games area at no charge to users subject to how it is treated. If it is abused or vandalised it will be locked and only available through a booking when a fee will be payable. Hopefully our youth will take it under their wing and see that it's looked after.

The Village Hall Committee would prefer to leave the facility open and free for general use, although if a team event was arranged and exclusive use required for that period, it would need to be booked through the Village Hall Manager. A reserved or booked session would have an option to use the lighting which will be installed during the installation, although this facility would not be available during general free use periods and would not be permitted, for any reason, after 9.00pm.

In addition to the MUGA a youth shelter will be set up, some seating provided and the area generally tidied up.

Village Hall

Our application to County for a grant, to assist with youth provision in the Parish and to tidy up the Village Hall, has been successful, (largely thanks to help from Michael Cairns our County Councillor). This together with the use of some reserves will allow us to re-decorate the Hall, something it's really in dire need of.

Take Care.

Regards,

Roger Knight.