

## **WALC meeting with town and parish councils re unitary authority, held on Zoom on 10<sup>th</sup> March**

The meeting was chaired by Ja'Neen Day for WALC. Most of the information was supplied by Monica Fogarty (WCC CEO), with further explanations and information from Izzi Seccombe (WCC Leader). It was attended, at its peak, by 120 people, mainly parish councillors and representatives of parish meetings, most of them from the south of the county, but there were attendees from Austrey and Mancetter Parish Councils, as well as NWBC's Chief Executive.

An interim plan will be submitted by 25<sup>th</sup> March (next week), with the full business case finalised by 28<sup>th</sup> November. The new system would be in place by 2028. The number of councillors would double to 140, one per 4000 residents (currently one per 8000).

The initial part of the meeting was a Powerpoint presentation about potential changes from Monica.

Criteria for the new system include stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, meeting local need, delivery of high quality and sustainable public services, being the right size (500,000+ residents) to achieve efficiencies and withstand financial shocks.

Town and parish councils would not be affected structurally by the proposed changes. There would be a strong emphasis on community power and a re-wiring of the relationship between them and higher tiers of government.

The new structure should facilitate local planning, scrutiny and decision-making. It should link local power with broader strategic thinking to improve service delivery.

In some instances, there would be scope to devolve resources, powers and decision-making to town and parish councils, where there is the will and capacity ("a flexible menu of options").

Regular meetings of the existing Town and Parish Council Reference Group would be held to discuss reorganisation and devolution before the final submission.

Most of the meeting involved questions from parish and town councillors, ranging over a large number of issues. These were some of the responses:-

- We were assured that there was no danger of our being absorbed into the West Midlands.
- There would be additional money for local budgets.
- Small councils would not need to find more money.
- Town and parish councils will not have input into the initial submission.
- The transition would be costly, but subsequently there would be savings.

- There would be the opportunity for new dialogues with residents regarding libraries, leisure, health etc.
- The forthcoming election would not impact the submission.
- There would be no impact on local plans.
- Implications for council tax seemed unclear.

The meeting was recorded, so it is to be hoped that recording and the Powerpoint will become available.

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