

Members will be aware that one of the challenges facing us as a new administration was the need to tackle the funding gap for the next Council year and beyond, to avoid the possibility of this Council becoming insolvent. We are now part way through that process and have been working with officers to identify where savings can be made, and how we propose to make up any shortfall. It is too early to brief members on the outcome of these discussions, but all members should be aware that no option is being left out of our deliberations.

Although not the subject of a report this evening I would like to update members briefly on this Council's actions in regards to the constantly evolving Refugee crisis which is affecting the whole of Europe and beyond. Cllr Boothby has been working with Housing officers to ensure that this Council is able to do its part in supporting genuine refugees, and in particular to respond to the immense pressure from Syria.

A letter has been received from the Home Office requesting cooperation with regard to discharge of obligations around accommodation of those claiming asylum. Further information has been gained by talking to the Lead officer for the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership. The initial "ask" of councils is in terms of post code checks of potential private rented properties being acquired to accommodate, to check for any issues in terms of standards of property/ASB/community issues etc. Therefore the burden of this work would fall on the private sector housing team, particularly in terms of enforcement of standards. Any refugees resettled do receive support and there is currently a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in place which details the support. Depending on the capacity needed, in terms of accommodation and availability in the private rented stock, requests could be made for assistance for accommodation within landlord stocks, but this isn't being requested at this point.

I am aware that the Chief Executive will be meeting with his County and District Council colleagues at a coordinating meeting this coming Friday, after which I expect there will be greater clarity in the overall arrangements. In the meantime, if Members of the Council or of the public wish to offer accommodation to refugees, they should contact the Private Sector Housing Team on 5734.

At the last Council meeting we established a working party to provide a response to the Court Service consultation on the closure of Hinckley Magistrates Court. This was a very useful meeting, with members contributing to a list of suggestions of what could be done to keep the court open, but also in the likely event of its closure, what we as a Council could do to support the Court service in the future. Together with officers we are in the process of creating a response, which will include suggestions for accommodating current court employees, and possibly running court sessions from Council-owned buildings in the town.

Many members will have received an e-mail from residents at Springfield Park. The Council's position is one of not getting directly involved in the purchase of the site whilst offering housing advice to residents. Senior Officers including the Deputy Chief Executive (Community Direction) recently met with representatives of the owners and recommended that any future proposals for the site should include provision for the existing residents either by continued occupation for a period or off site provision for the units. Officers from the Housing Service will be visiting individual residents next week to discuss their housing options up to and post March 2016 and to give appropriate advice.

The Heart of England Co-op has announced the closure of stores across the region. Our Chief Executive met with senior Co-op staff to discuss the timing of the plans, and to see what, if anything, could be done to prevent the closure of the Hinckley store. We are keen that if closure is the only option that we see a new store open in the Co-ops place as quickly as possible. I will update Members at the meeting tonight.

Included in tonight's agenda are the minutes from Scrutiny Commission, and I'm very supportive of the suggested work programme, and in particular the Committee desire to look at the impact of Governments proposals for Council rent changes and the importance of our housing repairs and future housing stock needs.

We also have an update on the progress being made with the West Midlands Combined Authority. This is a rapidly changing situation, with costs, likely benefits and voting rights at this stage all being still to be agreed. Tonight I am seeking member support to continue with these discussions and for the Leader and Chief executive to be delegated with the authority to provide this councils commitment as to its' intentions in respect of joining a West Midlands Combined Authority.

In recent weeks, in addition to meetings in Hinckley, I have attended meetings on behalf of the Council in Nottingham, Coalville, Groby, Coventry, and Birmingham. These trips in total have resulted in an expense claim for just over 300 miles of personal car travel and £12.80 in parking fees.