

Cllr Gwilym Butler - December 2020 Briefing

1. A good measure of the local economy in Shropshire is the level of land searches being requested usually for when properties change hand. As part of my Cabinet portfolio I have to review the budgets on a regular basis. On reviewing the budget at the end of November we are at 85% of target year to date and this takes into account the fact that no business was being transacted from April until mid June. This represents a very strong come back by the local economy in this sector which in itself leads to other economic growth.
2. The Lengthsman scheme has been confirmed for the 2021/2 financial year and is available for all councils to apply for to enhance their own council areas. Councils can include it therefore in their next precepts.
3. The Mens shed project which a lot of local parish councils have supported is getting back on track with the Shed being fitted out with insulation and electrics. Further grants have been awarded including the Postcode Lottery. I look forward to it opening Post Covid when I think it will be of great need following the pandemic.
4. We are currently expecting local elections next May. As Councils will need to set their precept in the coming months please keep election costs in mind just in case. Shropshire Council will provide a repayment programme where needed but it is always best to plan.
5. I am currently talking with officers on how we could support Town and Parish Councils with I.T. post COVID following on from the success of Zoom, Teams meetings etc. If Councils could put infrastructure in place to be able to continue remote meetings or a hybrid of face to face and remote meetings it will open up opportunities for more people to become councillors who cannot currently commit to evening meetings for whatever reason. It would also provide the ability and availability for officers from the Council and other organisations to attend meetings remotely and reduce time and costs involved and hopefully speed up outcomes.
6. If you know of any areas that have broadband issues "not spots" please let us know as we have the opportunity through the council to provide vouchers to obtain alternative solutions. This will only happen where there is a cluster of users who would benefit. The vouchers can then be merged together to provide suppliers funding to provide the alternative solution.
7. The spending review has been announced which is only for one year where previously they were for three years to enable us to plan. Prior to Covid we were awaiting the fairer funding review to come out with a fairer distribution to the rural areas as promised. This would then help with our budget pressures and council tax costs. To date this has been delayed because of Covid but we are maintaining the pressure with my Membership of RSN (Rural Services Network) which lobbies MPs and Westminster on behalf of Shropshire Council. I am hopeful it will be included in the levelling up agenda.
8. Following the second lockdown our Covid infection figures have dropped but we need to keep a strong regime in place until the vaccinations are well underway and the figures have dropped again. There is light at the end of the tunnel and Shropshire council Public health team will be coordinating vaccinations hopefully starting in December. Another round of grants are available to effected businesses and there is a new discretionary fund for any businesses that have fallen through the gaps on previous grants. Stay safe and follow national guidance.

I understand it is not easy at the moment with restrictions etc but would like to take the opportunity to wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Healthy and prosperous New Year. Remember to telephone or face time your friends, neighbours and anyone who maybe alone , check in for a chat with them when you can and we will all get through this and look forward to a brighter 2021 .