

Councillor's Monthly Report January 2022

1. Happy New Year! Debt Burden after the festivities. January can be a very bleak month – it can seem a long time until the next pay packet arrives. It is easy (too easy) to run into debt, and this can be overwhelming. And it can be very hard to break from the cycle of debt. Shropshire is fortunate to have a non judgmental charity that can assist – for example by advising on long term financial planning to ease day to day, month to month stress. Christians Against Poverty (capuk.org) have a local branch in Bridgnorth and can be contacted on 0800328006, the Hub in Cleobury has leaflets. As community leaders please signpost this charity – they are there to assist all.

2. In February 2022 Shropshire Council will launch an initiative to identify housing needs across the County. All residents in the parishes (initially Hopton) will receive the survey through the post, and are encouraged to complete it as soon as possible. *Right Home, Right Place*, which is part of Shropshire Council's Affordable Housing Team, have been running surveys in Shropshire's towns and villages since 2018; the responses they receive are invaluable in helping Shropshire Council identify whether there's a hidden housing need in the area or not.

Edward West, Shropshire Council's Planning Policy & Strategy Manager, said: "Throughout Shropshire, as with the rest of the country, we're seeing a growing gap between the average salary and the average house price, which is making it very difficult for people to stay in the areas they've grown up in, gone to school, have family in or now work in.

This can result in people moving elsewhere, which then has a knock-on effect on our towns and villages; schools close, pubs shut down, and we begin to lose various aspects of what makes our local communities thrive. There are many people who may be in housing need, from young professionals who are struggling to get on the ladder to families who need a larger home but can't afford anything nearby, and older residents who need to downsize for cost or mobility reasons but can't find anything suitable locally.

Our job is to help identify what type of housing people need, and where it's needed most. So even if people don't currently have any housing needs, we still need to know - so we need everyone to take the survey. It's an invaluable chance to have their say on the future housing in your parish."

For more information or to take the survey online, visit www.righthomerightplace.co.uk

A survey was completed for Cleobury in Jul 2019 and I can forward it if you are interested.

3. Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funding – how it can be spent. There is a new chair of the Council's Internal Infrastructure Group (IIG). He has reminded us that one of the main tasks of the IIG is to administer the spend of CIL monies; subject to an Expression of Interest (EoI) process - which often is initiated by Parish and Town Councils.

This process is still considered an effective mechanism as a means to allocate CIL funding. However, it is now particularly important for the IIG to more fully, ie better, understand the implications for the County's strategic infrastructure development when considering the EoI process – and a review is underway. The strategic infrastructure needs are likely to be focussed on a number of areas including highways/transport, education, health, climate change, digital and green infrastructure. The review is to assist the IIG to be better equipped to prioritise CIL funding to meet these needs.

To support this review, and to allow the IIG sufficient time to collate additional evidence all future Expressions of Interest for CIL funding are now 'on pause' - until April 2022.

This three month pause will allow the Council to consider the implications of a number of on-going relevant work streams, notably: the draft Local Plan; the emerging Local Transport Plan and School Place Planning, as well as reflecting upon the Council's emerging Financial Strategy.

Importantly, this pause of future EoIs will NOT impact on any decisions already made by the IIG. Therefore, where CIL funding has been committed to projects this will continue to stand.

I have checked with the Officer currently responsible for several CIL projects eg highway improvement found in the Place Plan on the B4117 and B4363, where work (desk work) has started. These will not be affected by this 'pause'.

4. Shropshire Supports Refugees – last summer we were asked to assist refugees / evacuees from Afghanistan as they were airlifted to the UK. Approx 200 people were housed in hotels in Telford, where they, by and large, remain – it now seems possible that only one family will settle in our County; but the situation is fluid. Shropshire's response was overwhelmingly generous and over the Christmas period clothes and toiletries were distributed; homeless charities also benefitted. Furthermore, work continues to assist in upgrading English language skills. Shropshire has declared itself a City of Sanctuary – see cityofsanctuary.org. If anyone has any ideas on what this can mean in practical terms do let me know.

5. Vaccinations and Boosters with the advent of the rapid spreading Omnicrom variant it is now increasingly important to get jabbed - to protect yourself and others. The Cleobury Medical Centre has assured me that all you need to do is get in touch; they will help you to stay safe. If you have not had a first or second jab these are available.

Simon Harris : Councillor Cleobury Mortimer Division 5 January 2022