

January 2023 Report from Cllrs Gwilym Butler & Simon Harris

1. The council before Christmas passed their proposed budget which proposes a 4.99% increase in Council tax. It also confirmed that from 2023/24 a 200% levy will be applied to second homes and that there will be a further increase in Council Tax for empty homes not bought back in to use. We are also aware that there has been a big move of property into holiday lets and then the owners not paying Council Tax but Business rates instead. Many of these properties have been valued at a low rate for Business rates and get full relief - therefore the council does not receive any funding / income. It is intended that an officer will be employed to police these properties to ensure they are available to let for a minimum of 140 days a year and physically let for a minimum of 70 days to ensure they qualify for Business rates and not Council Tax. These moves estimate that there will be an increase in revenue to the council of around £2.2 million. Also that properties will be bought back to long term rent or be sold on the open market sale ie to improve local housing supply. The budget consultation is online and/or can be viewed at local libraries.

2. The Council before Christmas, at their full meeting, unanimously supported a motion regarding opposing the proposed cuts to BBC Radio Shropshire. Subsequently, the Leader will be lobbying the appropriate Secretary of State advising them of how important the local station is; which was certainly shown during the covid pandemic.

3. The initial response from the Boundary commission has come out with initial proposals. These are showing Unitary Councillor wards of 3600 population and solely single Councillor wards. The current proposal looks at splitting the Cleobury Mortimer ward into two, Cleobury East, Town Council and East, and then Cleobury West which will then go further towards Tenbury and Burford taking in areas which are currently under Clee ward. We would welcome your comments on whether the ward should be split or not. At present we feel it runs well as it is - with input from parishes that surround a nucleus which is Cleobury town. The proposals would certainly make Cleobury West a very rural ward with no natural centre as it would look towards both Cleobury and Tenbury. It is also noted that Highley ward will take over parishes towards the north east.

3. Refugees and Asylum Seekers: The Council receives funding from the Government to assist with several resettlement programmes. These include: Syrian refugees where 10 families making up 22 individuals have been settled, though none in south Shropshire; Afghan evacuees where none have settled in Shropshire though it is expected that one family will arrive soon; Ukrainian refugees where 444 individuals have been hosted by 251 hosts, 13 families have recently moved into temporary accommodation as long term solutions are sought; Underage Asylum Seekers where 50 are currently in care and a further 37 have been classified as care leavers. There is also a Hong Kong migrant scheme though it has no recourse to public funds and therefore data is limited as to how many have arrived in Shropshire. Finally, there is the recent migrant dispersal scheme which is run by the Government and 60 individuals have been placed in a Shrewsbury hotel.

4. Homelessness: the funding for homelessness is separate from the funding for (refugee) resettlement and it is the Council's role to ensure that funding is correctly used. During the cold spell in mid Dec 16 rough sleepers were accommodated by the Council; though by 16Dec (it was still very cold) only 4 continued to use the hostel.

5. Cost of Living Crisis: the Council has started to reach out to residents it suspects may be struggling eg those that have a dispensation not to pay their Council Tax. Should any Parish or Town Cllr be approached for assistance and should you be unable to find the correct support on the Council's website please contact us and we will endeavour to help. We want to ensure that everyone in need has full access to the assistance that is available.

6. Mould in Council properties: The Council is committed to providing good quality safe homes to its tenants. It is important that any problems in Council ie Shropshire Town and Rural Housing (STAR), properties are reported straight away. If Cllrs are approached about damp, mould or any other issue the direct contact is: 0333 32 12 200 or email us at repairs@starhousing.org.uk. If there are problems with social housing and the Housing Association involved is not taking the necessary action – please let us know.

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