

# **CLIVE PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL PARISH MEETING**

## **Report from Shropshire Councillor Simon Jones**

Much of the first year of the New Administration has been taken up with trying to get things right, improving our highways, our communications both inside and outside the council. We've also been trying to ensure that we work more closely with our town and parish councils.

Getting things right is not a simple task but improvements have been made. We are not at the end of the road by any means and there is still lots to do. Our limited resources are a major factor in the speed of change, but we are doing all we can.

As part of the election campaign, we promised three things:

1. Local housing for local people - when our housing company (Cornovii) build houses they're offered to local people first. Cornovii are now delivering on this promise.
2. Secondly, we promised that we would put £40 million into the Highways Capital Programme, we've now increased this to £60 million, and
3. We promised a third wheelie bin which will take all your plastics, cans, and glass, and stop it blowing all over the road. For those of you that have registered they will be delivered over the summer months. If you haven't already registered for your third bin, then you can still do so but it won't be delivered until the autumn. We have started to deliver the new bins in the south of the county

### **Covid and Ukraine**

I am extremely grateful to the staff at Shropshire Council who continue to manage our Covid situation. Many officers were doing one job one day and doing something completely different the next, some staff have not yet returned to their original roles.

However, the last two years has taken its toll on the staff and for some staff they've had no break whatsoever, because as Covid has become more manageable unfortunately we now find ourselves in the middle of a humanitarian crisis. We are trying to arrange for as many Ukrainian evacuees to come to Shropshire as possible. I am sure you can imagine that there is a lot of pressure on our staff to ensure that all the safety checks are put in place, it's a responsibility we take incredibly seriously.

Shropshire has 100+ individual hosts registered which makes up 155 offers of accommodation, one of the highest offers in the West Midlands. We have started DBS checks and we have also started triaging the property offers. The schools team continue to liaise with head teachers. The setting up of community hubs is well and truly up and running now and is being led by Amanda Jones from Shropshire Supports Refugees and Chris Childs from Energize. Our refugees have now begun to arrive in Shropshire and we have commenced making emergency £200 payments to them as they arrive with nothing, not even bank accounts.

A huge amount of time has been spent over the last year trying to ensure we produced a balanced budget for the 2022/23 financial year. This work also included looking ahead to

23/24. It will be no surprise to you that financially Shropshire Council is in a very precarious position. It is worth repeating the issues, we spend over 75% of our net budget on social care, i.e., Adult's or Children's Services and yet only 3% of the population actually benefit from these services. On average, each year our adult social care bill goes up by £12M. This year our care providers (residential and domiciliary care) are also in financial difficulties, and we are having to increase their payments. Therefore, our already high costs will be even higher. This is simply not sustainable.

The Government's social care scheme, which they launched last year and came into effect recently, whereby extra national insurance payments go towards social care will not help us. For the first three years only a fraction of this money will come to local government, the majority will go to the NHS. The additional difficulty we face at Shropshire Council is that 85% of the adults who seek Adult Care Support do not receive it as they are signposted to other organisations who can help them. This help might come from the voluntary sector or other sectors. This type of support is almost always better for the person, and it is these partnerships that enables us to keep our social care costs as low as possible. The difficulty we now face is that the government has stated that every adult is entitled to a social care assessment so the 85% is likely to plummet. If that 85% plummets, then our costs will increase significantly.

Over Covid we also saw a significant increase in the number of looked after children coming into our system. Despite our current financial circumstances, we have invested further in prevention measures. Preventing children coming into our system has to be the best thing, it's better for the child, it's better for families and ultimately it is more cost effective. We have an excellent record with fostering and adoption, this leaves us with the very complex cases. These young people can be extremely expensive to place, very often out of county. We have one young person whose placement costs are over £1M per year. For local government this is unsustainable.

Shropshire Council's net budget for 21/22 was £208M of which £163.5M was for Social Care leaving £44.5M for everything else. At least half of the £44.5M is spent on the Waste Contract. So, the remaining £22.5M covers everything from Libraries to Pest Control, Highways to Environmental Health and it is this area that gets squeezed every time as social care costs increase.

Shropshire Council is constantly in contact with the government and ministers to try and alleviate the situation but if nothing changes, we will not be able to provide a balance budget for 23/24. This is not news; we have said this many times. We are facing a £60 million deficit in 23/24, if the Government funds us to the same level as for this financial year it will come down to £30M. Although in all honesty I expect our deficit figure to rise significantly due to the social care costs that I mentioned earlier.

You have also heard the Council talking about fair funding. Providing services in a rural area is far more expensive than providing them in urban areas. You will be aware that we did not receive a Bus Back Better grant, we don't deny that it will be more difficult to deliver services

in rural areas but that is exactly why we needed that money because it does cost more to deliver bus services in the rural area and for many of our residents it is not about improving a service it is about keeping it or initiating a service.

Urban areas are funded so much better than us in many different ways. Telford and Wrekin are funded far better because they have large urban areas and the data shows areas of deprivation. Shropshire has deprivation too and much of it is masked by rurality. We suffer from poor funding in many areas due to the urban/rural divide, our public health budget is the third worst funded in the West Midlands and we are in the bottom 10 nationally. Shropshire may be leafy green but there are many pockets of deprivation and this will become even more significant with the rise in the cost of living.

So as I said earlier most of the Council's time is spent chasing funding, talking to ministers, talking to civil servants to ensure we are funded properly, that local government is funded satisfactorily.

### **Council Tax Rebate**

Earlier this year the government announced that all Council Taxpayers living in properties Band A to D will be eligible for a £150.00 Council Tax Rebate. If you already pay for your council tax via direct debit you do not need to do anything, the £150.00 will be credited to your bank. If you do not pay by direct debit, you will be written to with further instructions as to how to claim the rebate.

### **It's Not All Depressing News**

It's not all doom and gloom, Shropshire Council has some extremely high performing service areas and Adult Social Care is one of those services. We regularly receive visits from other Councils keen to learn from us.

Only three weeks ago our Children's Services retained its Good OFSTED rating. Bearing in mind that this is two years of which we have been in a pandemic, we were absolutely delighted, and I pay tribute to how hard the staff, especially our social workers, worked throughout the pandemic.

We have also won many awards, we've had more awards for our housing services, we had awards for our children's services, and we had had awards for adult social services. It may shock you, but we have even won awards for highways especially the work that we are doing to try and make our highways repair programme carbon neutral.

### **Climate Change**

In terms of climate change there has been good progress made this year. The Cabinet and Exec Management team have undertaken and passed carbon literacy training, and this will be rolled out to all councillors and staff in the near future and all reports now have to make a significant effort to look at how our policies impact on climate change. We are one of the top councils for producing our own green energy and this year we will be opening another solar

farm and extending another. Shropshire Council is only directly responsible for a very small percentage of Shropshire's overall carbon footprint, but we can certainly do what we can to encourage others and currently there is a lot of work being undertaken on our procurement policies and procedures.

As always it has been a pleasure to attend meetings of the Parish Council and I look forward to working with you over the next 12 months

Simon Jones,

Shropshire Councillor representing the Shawbury Division