

Councillor's Monthly Report September 2021

In the last weeks of August it would have been impossible to miss the humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Kabul. This isn't the place to comment on geo politics or the UK's foreign policy – however, local government (in our case Shropshire Council) is involved in the fall out. It is my understanding that the UK has committed to accept 20k Afghan refugees over the coming years – though I am unclear as to whether this includes those that have arrived as a result of the evacuation.

The central government has offered Local Authorities financial support as they assist the resettlement of these refugees. It is worth bearing in mind that these people are NOT economic migrants and have not attempted to come to the UK illegally. The UK government has brought them here; they have worked with the UK's extended mission to Afghanistan.

Shropshire Council has offered to house a small number (single digit) of refugee families building on its experience resettling Syrian refugees. The aim is to offer quality resettlement. The Council is looking for private landlords to offer their properties ie 2/3 bedroom houses – rather than asking the Housing Associations for help. The contact is jacki.carney@shropshire.gov.uk . Once a property has been identified the Home Office will approve its suitability. It is only then that a family is likely to arrive and will need furniture, etc.

The Council is working with ShropshireSupportsRefugees - which was established when the Government offered sanctuary to Syrians escaping the conflict there. ShropshireSupportsRefugees have a FB page and can be contacted through amanda.jones@shropshiresupportsrefugees.co.uk or on 01743216758. They will offer guidance as to what can be done now.

The refugees may well have arrived here with very little indeed and, although housing is the major issue, donations of clothing are currently welcome. It is early days but these shell shocked people may well need 'befriending' to help them settle – and perhaps just to get some respite. This is a work in progress and I'd like to think that our community will be ready to offer a hand of friendship.

The debate over the possible (probable) closure of the Bridgnorth Highways depot (nb this is not the Street Scene depot!) has rumbled on throughout August. I am concerned that the existing level of service (particularly when it comes to winter gritting) will decline and have sought assurance from the senior team at the Highways Dept that this will not happen; the same assurances have been given to at least one of the Cleobury Division's local Parish Councils.

A petition has been 'got up' to keep the Depot open, or rather, in fact, to ensure that there is a debate at full Council as to whether it should be kept open. It now seems that there will be a not insubstantial cost of £400k to undertake the necessary repairs that are required to keep the depot in a safe working condition; and I believe that this funding would have to come from the Highways Dept's budget ie that is used to improve the dreadful state of our roads.

Simon Harris : Councillor Cleobury Mortimer Division 31August2021.