

Unitary Councillor Gwilym Butler's September Report

1. The boundary review of Town and Parish councils has taken an unexpected turn as the Boundary Commission have contacted us to advise they wish to undertake a review of the Unitary divisions from October 2022. We had requested this last year and they had refused! Around many market towns with large property growth the populations have grown and the equality of population to elected councillor in some areas is out of average in excess of 30%. We don't at this stage know what formula they will use and whether it will result in less or more councillors or stay the same. It will be an open consultation once under way and I will keep you updated in due course.

2. We currently have a budget deficit in the current financial year of between £2-5 Million against an operating budget of circa £570million. Digital by default and other initiatives are being bought forward to help the situation whilst also being mindful of the Climate change agenda to see if we can create savings and cut carbon at the same time.

3. We all know that communication is key and the issues we have had historically however a new statistic came out this week. Council officers in July read 2.2 million emails before they undertook the day job and this doesn't include the ones they didn't get to read! It does ask the question is it necessary to copy everyone into every email and we need to understand expectations on how soon things will be replied to and look at how we can get better portals of communication. I know there is a working group of clerks set up and the new App Fix my street will help. As the world changes I can see the ability for more working by Apps on Planning, Licensing, Education enquiries etc etc.

4. In our future budgetary requirement we try to estimate budgetary demand especially around Adults and Childrens care. We take into account as many statistics and demographic changes as possible and we are looking at present of a 12% increase in demand over the next financial year and need to try and budget for that so it doesn't catch us out. The formulas used have been accurate in previous years I just hope our demand is not that high moving forward as it is increasingly unaffordable.

5. The government has recently announced proposals for Adult Social care from 2023. No money as of yet for Local authorities to help with existing pressures. The Devil will be in the detail not yet seen. If it is the case that Local Authorities have to monitor and assess every applicant by means this may create a huge level of back office work for which no budget has yet been identified.

It may also create a different market in the care sector for residential and nursing care. At present Councils pay a lot less for permanent care in homes than the open market who effectively subsidise the sector, if this changes with fair prices for all two things may happen, overall prices will rise, more pressure on Local Authorities or the market will collapse as unviable. We watch with anticipation.

6. The Cleobury Mortimer and Highley Branch of the Conservatives met recently to re launch the Branch and anyone interesting in joining or more information please Facebook me or email on Gwilbutler@aol.com or 07801099015. Social and informative events will be arranged in due course with the attendance of Philip Dunne MP where possible.

7. Cornovii the Councils property developer arm has now got its first site up and running with 17 properties already reserved for completion by the year end. There is a call out for land in the South of the county and if anyone knows of any local ambition to build small local need houses to need, these could be 2 bed starter homes, bungalows 3 bed semis etc not in high volumes and can be restricted to local ownership rented or freehold and delivered at a far reduced price to the open market. The purpose of this is to create a far fairer local housing market for local people and key workers to be able to live and work locally. In South Shropshire by 2030 we will have more people over 65 than under and we need to address the problems that will bring.