

1. Social housing in the rural areas has always been an issue because of the shortage of properties and lack of land supply to build on. There is now a further issue as existing stock, a lot of which is old, maybe not of standard construction is unable to be bought up to a minimum EPC C for energy rating which is now a government requirement by 2025 on Social housing stock and by 2028 on private rented properties. This is having an impact on local housing supply - a social housing provider is selling two houses in Cleobury as the issue comes to a head. This is an issue across the rural county. I also believe the issue regarding private rented housing is a ticking timebomb as new contracts for EPC below C will not be legally allowed post 2028.
2. The Budget will go to cabinet on the 15th February and then on to Full Council on the 2nd March. It is proposing a Council tax increase of 4.99% - the maximum allowed. Obviously with inflation still above 10% and a huge rise in demand for care for Adults and Children, there are major issues for the Council which this increase will not by itself resolve. The Budget, therefore, proposes a further £50 million of savings through doing things differently (ie more efficiently) and digitalisation – we are looking for more ways to make our funding go further.
3. A submission has gone into the boundary commission regarding Unitary Councillors Divisions. The commission is adamant that there will be no dual member Divisions. Two options have been put in for the current Cleobury Division. One that splits Cleobury town and Oretton/Farlow parish in half (east and west) and has each new Division covering a portion of the town and the parish – the town and parish boundaries will not be affected. The other submission is for a new Division covering Cleobury town and three parish councils from the south/west and then all the other parish councils coming together as a single Division - which is a large rural geographical area. Both options also include removing Wheathill and joining it with Brown Clee Division. The aim is to get each Division to within 10% of 3600 voters, which in our area will be a struggle. We will await the outcome from the submission and what emerges as the preferred option - which will then come for open consultation.
4. From 4 May 2023 voters in England will need to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections, including local elections, parliamentary by-elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections, and recall petitions. From October 2023 this will also apply to UK General elections. No elections are planned in the Shropshire Council area this year, but from late January anyone who does not have one of the accepted forms of ID will be able to apply for free ID – known as a **Voter Authority Certificate** at www.voter-authority-certificate.service.gov.uk/ or by completing a paper form. Accepted forms of ID include a UK, European Economic Area (EEA) or Commonwealth passport; a UK, EEA or Commonwealth drivers' licence; and some concessionary travel passes, such as an older person's bus pass or an Oyster 60+ card. Voters will be able to use expired ID if they are still recognisable from the photo. It is important that electors understand this change so that they are not in any way disenfranchised.
5. Last August Shropshire Council submitted four projects for funding from the Levelling Up Fund round 2 distribution; seeking a total of £104 million. The bid for £18m to support the regeneration of Shrewsbury town centre has been successful. The funding is confirmation of the value and jobs that this scheme will bring to Shropshire's economy. It means that the Council can now proceed with its plans to redevelop and regenerate the Riverside area of the town ie supporting its investment in various shopping centres. However, the Council is disappointed that the three other bids for levelling-up funding were unsuccessful – and this includes the bid for public transport funding to support a new on-demand bus service.
6. Shropshire Council has produced a draft Sustainable Affordable Warmth Strategy. This sets out the importance of tackling fuel poverty, improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions from domestic dwellings. The draft Strategy has three objectives: **Raising awareness of the importance of tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency** – cold homes can worsen health problems and contribute towards excess winter deaths. It is estimated that in 2020 16.5% of households in Shropshire were in fuel poverty; **Establishing a pathway to zero-carbon housing** - the Climate Change Act 2008 set legally binding targets to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. It is estimated that it will cost over £4 billion for all Shropshire's domestic dwellings to reach net zero; this includes an estimated £477 million to decarbonise all the county's social housing; **Attracting funding to deliver affordable warmth and improve energy efficiency**- the Council provides an energy advice service, which includes provision of energy efficiency measures to eligible households; and seeks to access central government funding for energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures for eligible dwellings.