

DECEMBER REPORT 2022

1. The Government's Autumn statement brought no surprises and little help to the Council. Understanding the Fiscal situation, and the major impact inflation is having, certainly highlights the importance of keeping inflation down; which seems to be the key to any future stability. In Shropshire we have a very low wage economy and an ageing population so maintaining the Triple Lock and inflation linked increases in benefits will help. The Council does understand the tax burden in an inflationary environment but is also aware of the help that was given through Covid and currently with Fuel bills; which as we all know ultimately has to be paid for. From the Council's perspective there appears a bit more funding for Adult Social care now available but nowhere near enough. The Council now can increase the Council tax by a further 1% to a maximum of 4.99%; which appears likely to have happened across all Local Authorities - but in our case will only be decided over the winter.
2. Please be aware of the help available over the winter and take a look at the Council's website www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help for more information. For those not online hard copies of the leaflet explaining the partnership work, and the help that can be accessed, are available. We have a limited amount of leaflets for circulation to Parish Councils to display (ie for notice boards, pubs, shops, etc) and these can be given to any individuals known not to be online. Please contact us if you require some for circulation .
3. Part of the cost cutting measures the Council will be taking is to look at the number of Public meetings that need to be held and condense them where possible. This will free up room hire, Administration support, officer attendance, and all the background work from Agenda setting to minutes being taken and printing; however little is done these days . It maybe the time for the Town and Parish Councils, with ever rising costs, to condense how they meet and work.
4. Shropshire now has two hotels accommodating Asylum seekers. One in Shrewsbury and one north of Oswestry. The decision on these placements had no Shropshire Council involvement and were done directly via the Home Office and Serco . However, we have a responsibility to ensure all residents are registered with a GP and any children are schooled accordingly. The residents in Oswestry are all single men, with Shrewsbury more mixed I believe to date.
5. The Council's (£2b plus) Pension fund continues on its journey to net zero carbon by 2050. The Fund manager's Nov22 Climate Risk Report explains that by realigning its investments the carbon emissions (that is total carbon rather than emissions measured by carbon intensity) have reduced by 42% from Mar22 to Jun22. This remains very much a work in progress.
6. The work on constituency boundaries continues and the current Ludlow Constituency will probably be renamed as South Shropshire and now stretch further north towards Shrewsbury – the aim is to ensure that our MPs represent the same number of people. There is a final consultation process underway but this ends on 5Dec22. Check out the website: bcereviews.org.uk
7. The ward boundaries of Unitary Councillors is also out for consultation, We submitted a recommendation for 76 Councillors up 2 to represent the huge increase in houses and population across the county . However the Boundary commission has come back at 74 with a recommendation that each ward has circa 4000 constituents . This is up 500 per ward. This may be suitable in the urban areas but will make rural areas even larger wards than they are now. Our ward in a large rural area being a two person ward only has circa 6500 constituents so whether the ward is made larger or not we will have to wait and see. After the unitary wards are sorted it will then be a further chance to streamline the parishes if suitable within the new wards .
8. In Jan22 Council passed a motion to look into the health of Shropshire's waterways and has now established a Task & Finish Group to better understand what needs to be done to move our waterways to a good ecological status; sadly the river Rhea in Cleobury is classified as being of 'bad ecological status' – though this is not primarily due to sewage discharge at times of heavy rainfall. Simon has joined the Task & Finish group and is happy to share information and relevant websites with Parish Cllrs and members of the public.

We both wish you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Healthy and Happy New Year .