

THE SHELSLEYS PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

12.01.21

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

1. Corona Virus effects

No doubt like everyone else, you are seeking to adjust to the third lockdown that started last week. The new variant of the coronavirus has clearly caused revision of most of the plans across the country as to how to react to the infection, and this latest lockdown needs to be taken very seriously.

The watchword is to stay at home, if at all possible. Some people will need to work away from home, and we are grateful for all their efforts to bring us services, food, newspapers and all sorts of deliveries for goods bought online. You will all realise that for every one person you see in those contexts there are as many as 20 to 100 others working behind the scenes, seeking to keep our lives as stable as possible.

There is hope in the distribution of vaccines and these will go to the most vulnerable first. While this is being organised by the NHS and not local councils, we are aware that there are anomalies in the ordering of vulnerable people. It would appear that the local surgeries will be administering the vaccines and in consequence some will seem to be doing better than their neighbours.

In all these considerations, it is crucial to follow the national guidance and recognise the rapidly changing situation, which means that government advice and orders appear to change without reason or much notice. It would be foolish to imagine this is happening through incompetence or carelessness.

2. County matters

At last month's Cabinet meeting, Marcus Hart presented the details of the schools funding settlement. It is important to note that he refuted the requests by three members of the public who asked that the County should ensure there was teaching about climate change in the county's schools.

We only pass on the Dedicated Schools Grants, the DSG, and do not intervene in deciding how schools should spend their allocation. It would be inappropriate for the county to seek to dictate to schools on matters of curriculum of this nature. Naturally this applies as much to the current situation with all schools closed as it does in normal times.

You may have seen the comments from Cllr Peter McDonald, claiming that more laptops should be made available to disadvantaged children. My colleague, Cllr Marcus Hart, has challenged this strongly, giving details of the variety of provision for such children to assist in home schooling.

The recently published results of the viewpoint survey show that traffic congestion is still one of the most important problems for residents and we need to re-emphasise that we are spending a lot of capital sums in seeking to improve our road system.

You will not need reminding that the coronavirus situation has played havoc with the state's finances, nationally and locally. We will aim to keep our council tax as low as possible but recognise the need to respond to the changed needs and priorities at this difficult time.

The budget for 2021/22 was discussed at the Cabinet meeting last Thursday. The 56 pages of the agenda can be read on-line and you can listen to the webcast.

We hope to be able to balance the budget, despite the difficult financial situation we are in, bearing in mind some £9.5 million being made available in special one-off grants from the government. The Cabinet are proposing a 1.5% increase in basic Council Tax, plus a 1% surcharge for Adult Social Services. This is below the maximum we are permitted to raise but is in anticipation of continuing financial constraints in the coming years.

There will be a council meeting on Thursday, the 14th January, where there will be a full discussion of the performance of the Council in annual reports from the Leader, Simon Geraghty, and the Chief Executive, Paul Robinson.

This will include reference to the budgetary situation as well as all the activities of the council over the last year. It may not include as much attention to the current concern about the climate, as desired by the five public participants at last Thursday's Cabinet meeting, as written up in Monday's Worcester News.

We are grateful for the Chancellor's help in getting money to our business community, in order to keep these businesses afloat during this difficult period and also to help those who may want to start or expand their enterprises. The County's Here2Help Business programme is the channel for some of this assistance, with the help of the district councils as well.

3. Local Matters

Please take the chance to look at the Environment Agency website, to see what is planned to protect Tenbury from flooding. You may take part in the consultation this month, to seek to ensure the best possible solutions are found to the problems the town faces. The provisional budget also includes a capital sum to help control flooding in Bewdley.

I hope that after the discussion at last months' meeting, there has been some progress on the provision of broadband across the parish, although I recognise that the holiday period and the current lockdown may well slow developments in this area.

If you have any local concerns, please let Hannah Davies know in the first instance, but let me know if the response seems inadequate.

Apart from all of the above, much of which is rather negative, I would like to wish you all a very Happy and Prosperous New Year. Better times lie ahead...

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12.01.21**