

Lighthorne Parish Council

District Councillors report

October 12th 2021

Residents to receive a visit about electoral register

Residents in Stratford-on-Avon District who have yet to be confirmed on the new electoral register will be visited by Stratford District Council officers reminding them of the importance of submitting their details. Although residents are not obliged to vote at elections, it is a legal requirement that their details are submitted for inclusion on the register as it is used to provide credit checks and jury service selection. "Voting is an opportunity to have your say on important issues which affect your everyday life. Not only could any omissions cost them the right to vote in any elections next year, but it could also affect their credit rating and have serious repercussions for things such as mortgages, phone contract and credit card applications. In July, 65,178 households in the District were sent a canvass communication

In August, 6,194 reminder canvass communications of different types were sent and now visits will have been made to the 4,225 households whose details remain outstanding.

From 5 October, Stratford District Council officers will visit residents at home to ask them to provide or confirm their details. Residents will be asked to complete a canvass form and perhaps an individual invitation to register to vote form. For this their date of birth and national insurance number will be required to confirm their identity for the register. Officers will be identifiable with photographic identification which can be confirmed by calling the District Council on 01789 260208 and will have regard to COVID-19 safety measures.

Council completes Covid-19 Community Recovery Plan and prepares future Social Inclusion work

Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Cabinet has given the Revised Social Inclusion Statement Action Plan a seal of approval.

This follows the completion of the Covid-19 Community Recovery Plan, which was drafted with partners to address the impact of the pandemic was having on

local communities. Grants awarded to four local organisations to deliver projects to improve young peoples' mental wellbeing.

The funding of a development officer hosted by Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) who has supported voluntary groups to secure over £250,000 of external funding since April 2020

Some actions were delivered by, or with, members of the Stratford Social Inclusion Partnership. The group is chaired by Stratford-on-Avon District Council and brings together voluntary and community sector organisations to tackle social exclusion in the district.

The Community Recovery Plan was only ever intended as an interim guide in how the District Council responded to the social challenges of the pandemic. With the plan now complete the District Council has developed a new social inclusion plan to take the work of the Social Inclusion Partnership up to March 2024. Priorities remain broadly the same with the addition of the delivery of the work to support refugees and Afghan citizens.

Stratford and Warwick District merger

With just a fortnight to go until the end of the public consultation, the Leaders of Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils are urging all sectors of the community to have their say whether the two Councils should formally merge.

Through an online survey, residents are invited to share their views on the creation of a single South Warwickshire Council to carry out services such as waste collection, local planning, housing, management of parks and sports facilities, licensing, business support and environmental health, currently delivered separately by the two district authorities.

Cllr Andrew Day, Leader of Warwick District Council says: "Council services touch all our lives in many ways, so it matters that we get them right. These are challenging times, that offer an opportunity to renew and update local government across South Warwickshire. We are focused on meeting the changing needs of communities today, to take practical steps to address the local impact of climate change and to foster new business growth.

“To do this effectively, we need to hear from our residents, community groups and businesses so we know what’s really important.”

Cllr Tony Jefferson, Leader of Stratford-on-Avon District Council says: “The world is changing rapidly, and we cannot stand aside from that. With both Councils facing financial challenges, we need to find solutions. This is an extremely important consultation that relates to vital local services and the future of our local democracy.”

“This decision on whether to merge needs to be made with the backing and consideration of the views of the wider community, it is therefore vital that as many people as possible take the opportunity to get involved.”

The consultation document and online questionnaire can be viewed and completed at: <https://www.southwarwickshire.org.uk/> until midnight on **Sunday 24 October**.

Further information on how to take part.

Questionnaires for completion on paper, as well as in different languages and formats can be requested by emailing: swconsultation@stratford-dc.gov.uk or calling 01789 267575. The paper questionnaires are returned using a FREE-POST address.

Questionnaires are also available to pick up at the following locations:

- Town Hall, Parade, Royal Leamington Spa CV32 4AT
- Council Office, Church Street, Stratford-upon-Avon CV37 6HX
- Whitnash Library, Franklin Road, Leamington Spa CV31 2JH
- Kenilworth Library, Smalley Place, Kenilworth CV8 1QG
- Alcester Library, Globe House, Priory Road, Alcester B49 5DZ
- Shipston-on-Stour Library, 12 Church Street, Shipston-on-Stour CV46 4AP
- Southam Library, Tithe Place, High Street, Southam CV47 0HB

What happens next?

The findings from the consultation will be considered, along with any other evidence, at a meeting of the councils on 13 December 2021. A decision will be

taken as to whether they want to formally ask government to allow the councils to merge.

The deadline for completing the survey is **Sunday 24 October 2021**.

Why we are doing this?

Both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick councils are facing a very uncertain financial future. Government funding for all councils has reduced in recent years and it is estimated that both councils will have shortfalls increasing to around £4-6m per year by 2025/26.

Across the two councils this means that annual savings of around £10m each year are needed over the next five years. This level of annual savings is about one-third of the combined costs of the councils.

Whilst some financial reserves are held by both councils these have already been reduced by the impact of COVID and are largely ear-marked for essential future expenditure. It would not be prudent or financially sustainable to use these reserves to supplement annual running costs.

Faced with this financial pressure, and with a determination not to reduce the current level of services, both Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils have been exploring several options, including:

- Do nothing
- Each council attempts to reduce costs individually
- Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils begin to share some services
- Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils merge
- Some new unitary government solution

The Councils believe that merely sharing some services does not make sufficient financial savings and still leaves considerable duplication.

Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils are therefore considering a proposal to merge, in which case a new District Council would be established covering the whole of South Warwickshire (the areas currently covered by Stratford-on-Avon and Warwick District Councils).

The Councils have appointed Opinion Research Services (ORS), an independent social research company, to manage the consultation and objectively report the outcomes.

As well as the public questionnaire the research agency, ORS, will be undertaking a telephone survey with a sample of residents selected to match the profile of both districts. Focus groups will also be held with residents, again matching the profile of both districts. There will also be focus groups with businesses, Town and Parish Councils, plus voluntary and community groups.