

District Councillor report

Lighthorne Parish Council Meeting 14th June 2022

SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE MERGER TALKS END

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) and Warwick District Council (WDC) have jointly decided to end their political merger talks to form a South Warwickshire District Council, without securing an agreement.

Whilst there was a clear strategic logic to the merger, the move to bring matters to a close recognised the significant differences in the approaches of the two Councils in respect of financial risk and borrowing.

The context for the due diligence request was the level of borrowings WDC has at an estimate of £405 million this showed a £100 million increase in 12 months. At a time of rapidly rising interest rates this appears to be an area of a very substantial risk. Therefore, the Cabinet at Stratford District Council felt that under the circumstances, it would not be in the interest of its residents to continue with the merger.

Early analysis shows that Stratford District Council have spent around £162K and estimated £271K worth of savings has been achieved, which equates to a net benefit of £110k of this joint working. This does not include the one-off savings relating to the Local Plan, that will be achieved as well. This means, that at this stage there is no need for an emergency budget. Our future budget plans and targets will depend on the Government settlement that we receive later in the year. The joint working that will continue includes:

- Business Rates Administration
- Information Governance
- Joint HS2 Liaison Officer
- Legal Services
- Development of the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP)
- Development of the South Warwickshire Economic Development Strategy
- Joint Waste & Recycling Contract
- Climate Change

Energy Rebate Scheme

Stratford-on-Avon District Council has now paid out over £4.26 million to 28,445 eligible households for the £150 council tax energy rebate. These payments have been made to those residents who currently pay their council tax by direct debit.

For those eligible households that don't pay their council tax by direct debit, they will be receiving a letter providing them with all the information needed to make a claim.

These 9,000 residents will be required to complete an on-line form, which is now available on the District Council's website – www.stratford.gov.uk/energyrebate

The Government have given Stratford District Council until 30th September 2022 to make all the payments.

District Leaders Column

Tony Jefferson, Leader of Stratford District Council predicts “a storm is coming” as inflation is raging and projected to get above 10%, a level unheard of in a generation. Energy prices are set to be by world markets and the Russian invasion, sanctions and Russian response are making the situation worse.

Both energy and food are basics: The impact of price increases in these will be felt most heavily by the poor and those on fixed incomes. Obviously, this will impact people on benefits while pensioners may also be badly affected. Nevertheless, and despite the increasingly bleak outlook, Stratford District Council are continuing their efforts to support economic growth and business development in the District. Because of this, the aim of Stratford District Councils is to cushion the impacts of national trends by being proactive locally and focused on job creation while encouraging prosperity. Nearly 850 jobs have been created or safeguarded in Stratford District as part of a £1.2 million government funding scheme to help businesses with their post-Covid recovery plans.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council contacted the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) Growth Hub after receiving the major seven-figure sum from The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) scheme.

The full £1.2 million was distributed to 39 businesses based across Stratford District, ranging from Studley to Alcester and Shipston-on-Stour to Southam.

The funding has led to the creation of 135 jobs and 703 jobs being safeguarded, with each business receiving just over £31,000 on average.

Chris Mills
District Councillor, Kineton Ward