

November Briefing

1. Prior to the pandemic most of you will be aware that we were lobbying Government for a fairer funding review for the rural areas to which we were gaining great support. This was done through our membership of RSN (Rural Services Network) which I sit on for Shropshire Council which is an independent lobbying organisation with membership across rural bodies and councils to lobby Westminster and has support of over 100 cross party MPs and within the House of Lords. The fairer funding review was about to be launched changing its existing formula of funding being given to density of population and switching it to sparsity and ability of access to service. This would I believe have helped our cause immensely. I attended a Webinar recently to understand where we are at now. It as expected has had to be pulled with the government being unable to endorse any review, and are we believe, just maintaining a one year local government settlement in line with previous year both for next year and it is assumed the following year. This is understandable as no one can predict the state of affairs until we get the pandemic under control. However it does not solve SC problems in respect of funding.
2. In relation to the above we are now seeing an implosion in Safeguarding clients. This is both in Adult social care and Children services. With the schools been shut for some months normal safeguarding activities and signposting were not able to take place. This mirrored with schools re opening and the down turn in the economy and large rises in Universal credit applications in our area we are heading for a perfect storm. In Adult Social care delayed medical treatments, mental health and isolation, job losses etc are causing great concern. Irrespective of your politics we as a country need to fund Social care centrally like Education and the NHS and have to pay for it. We just need some politicians to deliver a policy which whatever it is will be a hard pill to swallow but has to be done. We cannot keep relying on Council Tax for this issue it will not cover it and it is unfair against sparsely populated rural areas like Shropshire where 57% of our population due to age or medical history are vulnerable! How we will budget the books will be interesting, but we are not alone and this is a national problem which central government will have to address.
3. On a positive note All schools reopened as planned in Shropshire and attendance has averaged 93% above the national average.
4. SC has finally signed a new contract with Teme Leisure which will ensure the sports and health facilities at Cleobury and pool in Ludlow will continue for the foreseeable future.
5. The council is leading on a major project with STWA and the Environment agency around flooding and although this is mainly in relation to the River Severn it will look at all flooding across the county including Ludlow and the Rea locally. It is estimated the Severn will rise by around 80cm by 2050 and this will cause major issues when flooding. Defra have already got involved and funding of over £30 million has been secured as part of the initial project. With the building of the North West Relief road west of Shrewsbury which goes over the river opportunities are being investigated as to whether some kind of dam or river control can be put in place to control river flow further down in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth, Bewdley etc . It is early days but needs to be addressed. The Eden Project from Cornwall are involved because if we have to create new flood plains or a different environment up stream we also want to turn it into an opportunity for wildlife, tourists and address the Climate Change agenda.

6. Turning to Covid restrictions, SC now has an intelligence page where you can log any concerns regarding businesses or employers or organisations not adhering to Covid restrictions, officers can then address any issues in a constructive manner. It is also an opportunity to celebrate success and tell us where things are going well and how people or businesses are going the extra mile to keep us going.
7. SC has agreed to distribute food parcels over the Christmas holidays to all children who would have been in receipt of free school meals. This is more targeted than vouchers as our teams will also be able to take a safeguarding view at the same time as delivery and help signpost for other issues with partner organisations.
8. COVID . This is a worry. Winter pressures are bad at the best of times and we are heading I believe for the perfect storm. I know we are so lucky for where we live and our wonderful communities. I am sure it is already on your agendas but if not would urge you perhaps to put some thought into how we dealt with the first wave and how and what we may need to do this time with dark nights, cold weather etc. Perhaps we need to think about phone a friend or neighbour campaign or just something that will address the loneliness or isolation that winter can bring even more so if you are restricted on movement which I would not be surprised if it gets to that.

Stay Safe

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