

County Councillor Report – September 2020

Government in Westminster is due to release a white paper of local government reform next month and I have reported previously the County Council will be debating the merits of creating unitary authorities in Warwickshire this month. A unitary authority is a single council that assumes all the duties of the County Council and the District Councils. Parish Councils would remain as they are.

The choice before the Council seems to be boiling down to either one unitary council covering the whole of Warwickshire or two unitaries, one covering Stratford and Warwick Districts and one covering Rugby, Nuneaton and Bedworth and North Warwickshire.

When this matter was debated about 5 years ago the Conservative group voted for one unitary and Labour and Liberal Democrats voted for two unitaries. One unitary was estimated to save Warwickshire residents about £25 million a year and two unitaries saved around £13 million a year. At the time there was no appetite in Westminster to push through unitary government and so nothing happened. However given the impact of Covid-19 on the Government finances we can expect more enthusiasm for cost saving and so must assume something will happen.

Arden Division Clerks and Chairs will be meeting on October 7 and will be receiving a special briefing on the role and activities of the police Rural Crime unit, a regular update on the performance of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and a County officer will discuss how Parishes and the County can work together on roads maintenance, speeding and flood alleviation.

During my time as County Councillor I have received many justified complaints about speeding and road safety, roads maintenance, flooding and anti-social behaviour. Last winter's weather and the more recent severe thunderstorms and Lockdown have highlighted shortcomings in the County's response to these issues. There are options that are open to the Parishes to address this. Parishes could fund their own dedicated team of private community officers to suppress anti-social behaviour and prosecute speedsters, and they could also hire contractors as "lengthsmen" to carry out roads and flood maintenance. The downside is that it would require everyone paying a higher Parish precept, but this is a choice we will have to make if we want to improve things. Paying a higher County precept would not guarantee the money would be spent in the Parish.

John Horner

Tel. 01926842068