

## County Councillor Report

Local elections will be held this year on May 6. Councils are being indemnified for anyone catching Coronavirus due to attending a voting station, but the advice is to seriously consider a postal vote. Postal vote forms must be posted to Stratford on Avon District Council offices, Elizabeth House Church Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 6HX. Forms can be downloaded by typing "Apply for a postal vote" into your Internet search engine. Otherwise contact me (tel. 01926 842068) and I will get one sent to you.

The election will be for the Council and any elections postponed last year due to Covid-19. In Arden this includes Police and Crime Commissioner and Parish Council elections if required. The confirmation came due to the sound progress being made on vaccinations across the Country. Speed of roll out of the vaccination at individual sites is driven by the schedule of deliveries of the vaccine from the NHS to locations. This is causing differences in speed of each area moving forward, and can be frustrating for those living in the slower areas who hear their friends have already had the jab.

The County Council decided its budget at a meeting on February 8. The Government has only told Councils how much they will be getting next year rather than over the next four years and so the focus was very much on the coming financial year. WCC will increase its share of your Council tax by three percent. Two percent will be for all purposes and an additional one percent will be added to be spent in addition on Adult Social Care. Although taxes will increase 3% the County still has to make savings of £48 million from a budget of £700 million. This means Social Care will be around 79% of the discretionary budget in 2021.

As a result of the Covid-19 epidemic and the impact it has had on the economy the focus of the entire budget is to maintain employment. I had argued for more capital investment towards local road schemes and flood alleviation, but the will of the Council was to focus on jobs for next year. The Council will increase its borrowing and offer loans and grants to help companies get back on their feet. The Council also has agreed to borrow additional sums to generate a future income, create social value and maintain Council assets. One proposal is to be a co-developer of housing being built on Council land rather than simply sell the land to a private developer.

WCC has provided in excess of 2,375 laptops to school children to help them with their lessons during lockdown. This is in addition to a Government scheme that can be accessed via the Department for Education. The County Libraries Service has been making doorstep book deliveries to residents who are shielding during the lockdown. It also operates a befriending service where a member of staff calls the resident to check on how they are getting on and offer support.

The Government have recently signed an agreement with a UK based vaccine manufacturer to develop new vaccines to combat any variants of Covid-19, or any other coronavirus, that appear in UK going forward. According to the NHS on February 8, the Pfizer and Oxford vaccines both work well against the current strains seen in UK.

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