**Stratford on Avon District Councillor’s Monthly Report**

**for June 2025**

**Mike Rice, Liberal Democrat District Councillor for Henley-in-Arden**

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**Devolution timetable slips behind**

The government’s timetable for it to provide feedback on Warwickshire’s preliminary proposals to reorganise local government in the county has already slipped behind.

Feedback was expected in the week commencing 28 th April, but has still not been received. It is now expected on 3rd June, but it has already been twice delayed until now.

No change has been made to the government’s deadline for formal submission of final detailed proposals of 28th November 2025.

Two preliminary proposals were submitted by Warwickshire County Council (WCC) and jointly by Warwickshire’s five Borough and District Councils before the 21st March deadline.

Both proposals considered a single unitary authority for the whole of the county and two unitary bodies for North and South Warwickshire. While the joint proposal was neutral on the two proposed alternatives – as requested by government – the WCC proposal was firmly in favour of a single unitary for the whole of Warwickshire.

However, WCC’s administration has changed since the proposal was made and it may now take a different view. North Warwickshire now has Reform UK councillors in the majority, while South Warwickshire is predominantly Liberal Democrat.

The government’s delay in responding has been blamed on the fact that it is working through the proposals in alphabetical order. Worcestershire has also not received any feedback to date.

Neither has a decision yet been reached by government on how to allocate the £7.6million set aside for paying for the work involved in producing detailed proposals. SDC is expecting about £380,000 as there are 20 local authorities involved.

The consultancy Deloitte has been commissioned by the Borough and District Councils to produce a report which primarily addresses the costs and possible savings from the two different unitary proposals. This should be finalised by the five Boroughs and Districts – North Warwickshire, Nuneaton, Rugby, Stratford and Warwick – in early June.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council’s preferred unitary option will be decided by the full Council at its 14th July meeting. There will then be an eight-week consultation involving the public; Town & Parish Councils; other public sector organisations, including Integrated Care Boards and the Police & Crime Commissioner; businesses; and the county’s two MPs.

Local government reorganisation is part of the government’s wider devolution plans to increase decision-making powers in the regions. More strategic authorities and/or mayoralities will be needed to make these decisions.

Warwickshire’s position is unclear in this regard and a formal letter is being drafted to ascertain the position of the Mayor of West Midlands Combined Authority, which has Birmingham, Coventry, Solihull and Wolverhampton as full members. It has been reported in the past that the idea of admitting all or part of Warwickshire into full membership has not been favourably received by the Mayor.

Three broad possibilities are possible for Warwickshire: one or other or both unitaries join WMCA; the so-called Cumbria model, in which a single unitary for Warwickshire is also the strategic authority; or the two unitaries go their own ways, with North Warwickshire looking to Staffordshire and Leicestershire, and South Warwickshire viewing an arrangement involving Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.

**Consultant to be chosen for South Warwickshire Local Plan**

Approval to bring in a “multi-disciplinary” consultant to move the South Warwickshire Local Plan forward to the next stage will be decided by SDC’s Cabinet on 2nd June.

A budget of £300,000 has been set aside for the consultancy work, split equally between Stratford and Warwick District Councils.

The consultant’s role will be to evaluate the 12 potential new settlements and 24 potential strategic growth locations identified in the Plan last November.

Henley’s former golf club to the north-west of the market town, together with two smaller adjoining sites, is considered to be one of the strategic growth locations.

‘Concept Masterplans’ will be prepared by the consultant, backed by supporting evidence of a number of planning factors, including ‘deliverability’ of the site for development.

**Henley has high fuel poverty**

Beaudesert and East Henley area has households with fuel poverty well above the national average, according to a new report using data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

It is among the areas with the highest rates of fuel poverty in Stratford-on-Avon District with 18.6% of households meeting the government’s definition of fuel poverty. It has 144 households in fuel poverty out of a total of 773 in the area.

West Henley, by comparison, has fuel poverty of 12.6% – 105 out of 833 households – which is still above the national average of 11.4%.

Overall, Stratford District had 14.9% fuel poverty, compared with 16.7% in the West Midlands, the region with the highest fuel poverty in England.

Fuel poverty is defined by the government as living in a property with an energy efficiency rating of band D, E, F or G – as determined by the most up-to-date Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Rating – and with a disposable income, after housing costs and energy needs, below the poverty line or less than 60% of the national median. SDC has produced the District report from ONS estimates for 2023.

Within Stratford District, Ladbroke & Priors has the highest rate of fuel poverty with 25.1%. This makes it among the top 750 areas for fuel poverty out of the nearly 35,000 defined areas in England. South Wellesbourne has the lowest fuel poverty with 5.9%.

Perhaps surprisingly, Aston Cantlow, Claverdon and Tanworth all scored higher than Beaudesert and East Henley, with all three areas having more than 20% of households in fuel poverty. Similarly, Wootton Wawen has a fuel poverty rate of 19.8%.

**Meet your District Councillor**

Please come along on **Saturday, 7th June**, when I shall be at the Community Library, Methodist Church, 115 High Street from 10.00am until 12 midday.

If you have any personal or local issues you want to discuss, or want a face-to-face chat about what’s going on in Henley, please come along.