**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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**Local government reorganisation**

Separate councils for North and South Warwickshire – rather than a single Warwickshire council – is ranked as the better option for the county under the government’s plans for unitary local authorities by a study from management consultancy Deloitte.

The study ranks a Warwickshire-wide unitary council as better in just one regard, namely financial strength. Judged against the other five government criteria, the two-unitary approach ranks higher (see Table).

Rankings of each option against the six government criteria

Single unitary Two-unitary

Establish a single tier of local government 2 1

Sufficient size to achieve efficiencies and

to withstand financial shocks 1 2

Deliver public services 2 1

Meet local needs and local views 2 1

Support devolution arrangements 2 1

Achieve stronger community engagement 2 1

Overall ranking Score: 11 Score: 7

2nd Place 1st Place

Separate unitary councils for South Warwickshire – comprising Stratford and Warwick Districts – and for North Warwickshire, containing Nuneaton and Rugby Boroughs, will be better able to deliver public services and meet local needs as well as achieve stronger community engagement, says the report, which was commissioned by the five District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire.

These five bodies – North Warwickshire, Stratford and Warwick District Councils as well as Nuneaton and Rugby Borough Councils – will disappear under the government’s plans for a single ‘unitary’ tier of local government.

What is not clear at this stage, however, is whether the government places equal importance on its six unitary criteria. It may, for example, consider business efficiencies and financial strength to be more important than providing services that better meet local needs.

In this context, Deloitte points out that the single Warwickshire unitary is less costly to implement and will yield greater cost savings, although the figures are comparable.

The report estimates that taking a single unitary approach will cost £12.3 million to achieve, while a two-unitary approach will be more expensive at £17.2 million. Similarly, savings in annual running costs will be better for the single unitary model at £20.3 million, compared with £17.8million for a two-unitary approach.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) will be discussing the report’s findings at its next full meeting on Monday, 14th July. The two options – for a single Warwickshire unitary council or separate unitary councils for North and South Warwickshire – will then be the subject of a ‘public engagement’.

The full Deloitte report has been posted on the SDC website.

**SDC slashes housing land supply figure**

SDC has severely reduced its five-year housing land supply figure to just 5.06 years as a result of government changes to the way the figure is calculated in the pursuit of new homes.

The figure is highly significant because local planning authorities must have enough land to meet their projected housing needs over the next five years. Failure to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply weakens a local authority’s ability to refuse inappropriate housing developments.

SDC says recent government changes to the way the housing land-supply figure must be calculated are responsible for the change. A few years ago, under the previous calculation method, SDC had about a 25-year housing land supply, but this has fallen to just over five years today.

Late last year the government changed the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and introduced an updated methodology for calculating local housing need. As a result of the latter, SDC’s annual housing requirement has risen from 730 to 1,126 homes per annum.    
  
In response, SDC has reassessed its housing land supply assumptions, particularly regarding delivery expectations from key sites.   
  
SDC insists that, as a result of the review, its adopted Core Strategy retains full weight in determining planning applications.   
  
Cllr George Cowcher, Development Portfolio Holder, has pointed out SDC’s strong track record of delivering new homes, including much-needed affordable housing, across the District. Recent changes to government policy, particularly the significant increase in housing requirements, had impacted SDC’s supply position, he conceded, but the District Council remained “in a robust place.” 

Looking ahead, he added that SDC was “actively progressing” the new South Warwickshire Local Plan to ensure future housing needs were met in a “co-ordinated, sustainable, and locally appropriate way".  
  
A fully-updated five-year housing land supply figure, based on the position as of 31 March 2025, will be published later this year.