

September Report 2023

1. The Childe Endowment Trust has recently had its round of applications and interviews. It has distributed just under £8000 to 12 local applicants to help them with their further education. The trustees were particularly impressed with the quality of the applicants and the variety of talents we have locally for budding professionals.
2. The first quarter financial report ending June 23 goes to Council Cabinet on the 6th September. This will show that the Council has already delivered over £11 million of savings and identified a further circa £23 million that can be delivered by Financial year end. This is a great start to our target of £51 million reduction in spend but we cannot be complacent and we already seeing an increase in budgeted demand on Social Care of around £20 million; which will be mitigated over the next 18 months. Identifying the remaining £17 million will become more difficult with difficult decisions having to be made.
3. At the beginning of the financial year we were able to increase our reserves by £19.9 million to over £25 million following a better than expected annual settlement from Government. This, along with our cash account currently having balances of around £69 million, clearly indicates that the Council is in control of its finances; has a plan to deliver reduced spend; has higher reserves; and is NOT in a perilous position as suggested by the Administration's Opposition.
4. Gwilym has been appointed Chair of WME (West Midlands Employers) which oversees and helps with all areas of staffing for Local Government and some schools, as well as Police and Fire where engaged. WME is a key National Organisation which drives Policy and delivers helps meet staffing needs across the West Midlands.
5. The Local Government Association (LGA), the body that liaises between Government and Local Government, has appointed Gwilym to a full Member of the Innovation and Improvement Board which will scrutinise government policies as to how they work with Local Authorities. This is a cross party board of a round 12 people nationally and substitutes.
6. On the 13th September Gwilym is attending the House of Commons and has been invited to an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and LGA panel to discuss the future of The Household Support Fund; from which Shropshire has received over £4 million annually over the past two years. These monies have been used within Shropshire by a joint commissioning group chaired by the Council but including several partners including Age UK, DWP, Citizen Advice Shropshire, the NHS, and Poverty and Hardship group. The monies are allocated where the best results can be

achieved. He will be lobbying for the importance of this fund in the Rural Shires. He will also be pushing to ensure that the freedom that currently exists to distribute these monies, via the joint commissioning group, continues ie with as few ties and restrictions as possible – recognising that rural funding can be completely different to the needs of urban funding.

7. In recent months the Council has struggled to respond in a timely manner to the number of requests for Freedom of Information (FoI) that have been received. The Council recognises its legal duty and intends to address this by both new recruitment and ensuring that the information that is most frequently requested is available on its website.
8. A recent FoI from the Cleobury Division wanted to know the amount of money that had been paid out over the last 4yrs as a result of claims arising as the result of vehicles hitting potholes - payments of £526,958 against 1,824 claims (average of £288.90 per claim) have been made. The break down is:

Payment Period	Claims paid	Payments	Average payment
Year to July 2020	260	£79,540	£305.92
Year to July 2021	562	£164,602	£292.86
Year to July 2022	701	£199,879	£285.13
Year to July 2023	301	£82,937	£275.54
Total over 4 years	1,824	£526,958	

9. There is sometimes the sense that Council employees basically have ‘jobs for life’ no matter how incompetent their performance maybe. At a recent Audit Committee Simon asked for some figures: in the 22/23 financial year 8 staff were let go on capability grounds whereas 11 were released for disciplinary reasons.
10. The Cleobury Mortimer medical centre is re launching its Patient’s Voice in September. This is an important volunteer body that offers patient feedback to the centre’s business managers and medical professionals. It is a link between the NHS and the community that it serves. Please contact Cate, who is the Business Manager at the surgery cate.tolley@nhs.net ; please encourage anyone from any walk of life to get involved. The Patient’s Voice meets at a maximum once a month.

Cllrs Gwilym Butler and Simon Harris

Cleobury Mortimer Division

