

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

1 April 2025

Town Clerk's Open Report

Agenda Item 13

1) Devolution and its Impact on Town and Parish Councils

- **To consider the update on devolution and its impact on Town and Parish Councils.**
- **To approve the establishment of a Working Group to monitor developments and assess the implications for the Town Council.**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 16 December 2024, the Government published the English Devolution White Paper, setting out its ambition for both devolution and Local Government reform.
- 1.2 Subsequently, on 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to the Leaders of the six Councils in Warwickshire to invite them officially to work together to develop a joint submission with proposal(s) for local government reorganisation in their area.
- 1.3 The invitation sets out guidance for the development of any proposals and the criteria against which proposals will be assessed. It also sets out the timeline for the process, namely that an interim plan be submitted by 21 March 2025, followed by full proposals to be submitted by 28 November 2025.
- 1.4 In requesting proposals, the Government has set out clear criteria for reform. Local councils must ensure that:
 - Proposals establish a single tier of local government for the whole area.
 - Unitary local government is of a suitable size to achieve efficiencies and withstand financial shocks (population of 500,000 or more).
 - New structures prioritise the delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services.
 - Proposals demonstrate that councils have worked together and taken local views into account.
 - New unitary structures support devolution arrangements.
 - Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment are enabled.

2. Warwickshire County Council Position

- 2.1 Warwickshire County Council (WCC) Cabinet met on Thursday 6 March 2025 to approve their submission to Government for local government reorganisation in Warwickshire. [Information and Documents – Warwickshire County Council](#)
- 2.2 Their decision followed a unanimous resolution by the Council to support the progression of unitary local government for the county. Two potential options are under consideration:
- A single unitary council for Warwickshire.
 - Two unitary councils, with one covering North Warwickshire, Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Rugby Boroughs, while the other covers Warwick and Stratford Districts.
- 2.3 The Leader of WCC, has indicated that the initial work suggests a single unitary model best aligns with the Government's criteria, particularly in terms of economies of scale, service efficiencies, and the risks of separating established countywide services. WCC have indicated over the coming months they will engage with District and Borough councils, local businesses, health and police services, the voluntary and community sector, and residents to refine proposals.

3. Stratford-on-Avon District Council Position

- 3.1 Stratford-on-Avon District Council (SDC) met on Thursday 17 March 2025 to approve their submission of a proposal to Government for local government reorganisation in Warwickshire. The Council recognises the significant implications of any structural changes, including the potential dissolution of the District Council itself, should a unitary model be pursued. [Agenda for Council on Monday, 17th March, 2025, 2.00 p.m. | Stratford-on-Avon District Council](#)
- 3.2 The Council has acknowledged the need to balance financial efficiencies with local democratic representation and service delivery. While further engagement and consultation are planned, the Council is particularly focused on ensuring that any new governance model provides robust local leadership, safeguards essential services, and maintains strong connections with communities.
- 3.3 The interim plan approved has been agreed by North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby, Stratford upon Avon and Warwick District Councils. The plan identifies that two potential options which will be considered for unitary government within Warwickshire, a single unitary and a two unitary solution based on a North (North Warwickshire Borough, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough and Rugby Borough) and South Warwickshire (Stratford upon Avon and Warwick District Councils). The interim plan also briefly identifies three potential options for which strategic authority could cover the area, these being:

- The West Midlands Combined Authority
- A single County Strategic Authority (Cumbria Model)
- Other County areas (in whole or in part)

3.4 Further work will be required in analysing and evaluating all the options before SDC is required to make a final decision and submission by 28 November 2025. SDC has indicated that they will continue to engage with WCC, town and parish councils, and other key stakeholders to shape the future governance structure.

4. Impact on Town and Parish Councils

4.1 Town and parish councils will play an increasingly important role under a unitary system, as they will remain the closest level of government to local communities. The potential abolition of the District Council means that functions previously carried out at this level may either transfer to the new unitary authority or be devolved further to town and parish councils.

4.2 Key considerations for town and parish councils will include:

- **Increased Responsibilities:** Potential transfer of assets, service delivery, and governance responsibilities from the District Council.
- **Funding and Resources:** Need for sustainable funding mechanisms to support any additional duties assigned.
- **Local Engagement:** Opportunities to strengthen community-led decision-making and service provision.
- **Capacity Building:** Requirement for training, support, and potential structural changes to ensure town and parish councils can effectively manage new responsibilities.

5. Proposed Next Steps for the Town Council

5.1 Establish a Town Council Working Group

Consideration be given to setting up a working group of Councillors to monitor and assess the implications of devolution and local government reorganisation as it progresses and how the Town Council can best position itself for any increased responsibilities.

5.2 Warwickshire County Council Working Group

The Town Clerk has indicated her keenness to participate in Warwickshire County Council's proposed working group to be part of discussions proposals

2) Highways Community Action Fund

- To consider the scheme

1. Introduction

Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has launched a new £1 million [Highways Community Action Fund \(HCAF\)](#) (HCAF) to support local community-led improvements to roads and streets. The fund is designed to empower town and parish councils, as well as recognised community groups, to address highway-related issues in their areas.

Successful projects must demonstrate community support and include a financial contribution from the applicant.

The fund supports a range of highways-related capital projects, including:

- Local Highway Maintenance – Resurfacing roads and footpaths, improving cycle routes
- Road Safety Measures – Speed reduction initiatives, improved signage, school zones, and safe routes to school
- Environmental Enhancements – Public realm improvements, gateway signs, way-marking
- Climate Change Adaptation – Local drainage improvements to mitigate surface water flooding

While all proposals will be considered, feasibility is subject to technical, safety, and policy considerations. WCC's highways and road safety engineers will assist in refining and developing project ideas where possible.

Town and Parish councils are encouraged to take the lead on applications. Community groups may also apply if they can demonstrate broad local support. Before proceeding with an application, applicant must ensure that:

1. The project provides a clear benefit to the community, with supporting evidence.
2. The proposed work is within the highway boundary (not on private land).
3. The community is prepared to provide **match funding** for the project.

2. Proposed Next Steps

Town Councillors and community groups are invited to put forward their ideas and make use of the available funding. All Town Councillors have been notified in advance and are encouraged to share this opportunity within their communities.

3) Purchase of land - additional allotment space

- **To consider the acquisition of land for allotment use**
- **Approve the commissioning of a feasibility study by Local Council Consultancy**

1. Introduction

Councillor J Fradgley, as Chair of the Climate Change Group, has submitted a suggestion from Net Zero Stratford who have identified a piece of land that they would like the Town Council to consider purchasing for allotment use.

Should Councillors be minded to support the purchase of the land at a cost of (approx.) £95,000, various funding options and long-term considerations must be assessed. In the first instance, it is recommended that a full feasibility study be conducted to ensure informed decision-making.

2 Feasibility Study Proposal

The Town Clerk has made initial contact with Local Council Consultancy (LCC) regarding carrying out a feasibility study. LCC has expressed willingness to provide a proposal that would include the following key elements:

Advice on potential sources of funding for the purchase.

- Suitability of site
- Exploration of various conversion possibilities and recommended uses.
- Assessment of long-term management implications for the proposed uses.
- A site visit or video inspection as appropriate.
- Climate change consultancy to ensure environmental sustainability.

The indicative day rate for their services ranges between £390 and £430 per day. It would be anticipated that the study's findings will enable the Council to make an informed decision on the purchase and future management of the land.

3 Other considerations

There are understandably other notable considerations which would require addressing in assessing the project, and these are available to Councillors under Exempt cover (Exempt Appendix A)

4. Options

To agree to consider the proposal and instruct the LCC for a feasibility study, to not consider the proposal or to suggest an alternative.

4) Town Website

- To consider hosting a Town Website

1. Introduction

To consider the request received for the Council to fund and manage a dedicated 'What's On Stratford' website, providing a comprehensive platform for event listings and local information.

2. Background

It has been recognised that, unlike many other towns, Stratford-upon-Avon lacks a central, freely accessible website where organisations can submit event details and local information free of charge.

There are currently other websites in operation:

- A privately run website that provides local event listings and information.
- A county-based website managed by Shakespeare England, which is partly funded by the District Council and serves a broader geographical area than the town.
- Various others – which do not look complete or up to date.

The proposals

1) **What's On website** - The proposal is that this would consolidate events, performances, and opportunities for both locals and visitors. It will showcase the quality and choice of cultural offerings. It will be free for all organisations—professional and voluntary—to upload their events, ensuring inclusivity.

(Exempt Appendix B of full proposal attached)

Funding & Management Plans:

- Currently gathering quotes for setup costs and personnel requirements.
- Seeking town-wide funding support to ensure long-term sustainability.
- An appropriate organisation will need to take ownership.
- Possible future funding from leaderboard ads, but only after site management is established. **NOTE** – Legal advice would need to be sought on this if the Town Council was responsible for site as there is legislation which prohibits commercial advertising.

However, there is also an alternative proposal that is being introduced and being supported by the Strategic Partnership.

2) **Stratford-upon-Avon BID** has identified a re-branding exercise as a key priority. A central component of this initiative is the development of a comprehensive website platform designed to showcase the town's offerings for visitors and tourists. BID has recently engaged with interested parties and

in the process of arranging a workshop session following a recent Business Networking event.

BID would be looking to fund this.

In addition, the Town Clerk has spoken with Shakespeare England

3) Shakespeare's England

Shakespeare's England (SE) already have a Stratford town page:

<https://www.shakespeares-england.co.uk/places/stratford-upon-avon/>

SE, are now offering the following on their website:

- Free Listing feature which would allow all businesses to have a free listing on their site; and,
- Free Event listing which would allow all event organisers to upload onto the site at no charge

SE have also indicated that they would be happy to consider adding any additional info that may be required onto the Stratford page.

3. Considerations

While there is a recognised need for a consolidated 'go-to' website, it is sensible to ensure that any Town Council's involvement does not duplicate existing efforts.

Good examples of other towns that have successfully implemented similar initiatives are:

- [Visit Falmouth](#) – BID and Falmouth Town Council
- [Original Shrewsbury](#) – Shrewsbury BID
- [Visit - Royal Leamington Spa](#) - Leamington BID
- [Welcome to Trowbridge - The County Town of Wiltshire | Trowbridge Town Council](#) – Trowbridge Town Council combined with Council website

Given the BID's forthcoming plans for a re-branded online platform, introducing an additional website could risk fragmentation and dilution of visitor engagement rather than enhancing it. Shakespeare's England indication that they are now able to facilitate free event listings to all is also a welcome addition.

4. Financial Implications

At present it is a little uncertain of who will fund the What's On Stratford project. However, if the Town Council were to directly fund and manage a dedicated 'What's On Stratford' website, there would be costs involved which would include:

- Initial Development Costs: Website design, development, and setup costs - varying depending on complexity.

- Ongoing Maintenance & Hosting: Annual costs for hosting, security, and updates
- Content Management: A dedicated staff member or outsourced service to manage submissions, update content, and moderate contributions
- Marketing & Promotion: Any associated costs with promoting

5. Options

To explore the provision of a Council dedicated Town Website or to consider further the BID's proposal and SE current offering.

Town Clerk
26 March 2025