

County Councillor Report

July 2025

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1. The composition of the County Council is 22 Reform members, 14 Liberal Democrats, 9 Conservatives, 7 Green 3 Labour and two Independents. The new Reform administration at the County Council elected with Conservative support has not started well and the Leader of the Council has resigned after 40 days. Some Portfolio Holders are absent and I am particularly concerned about Planning and Transport. The new administration has no manifesto and to date there is no clear indication what they wish to do. The next full meeting of the Council is on 22nd July when a new leader will be appointed. If it is a replacement Reform then it is assumed that the administration will remain the same.
2. I am a member of the Regulatory Committee and I am appointed shadow portfolio holder for Planning and Transport which sits well with my responsibilities as a Stratford District Councillor.
3. The Government in its financial statement did not address one of the key issues facing the Council. That is the “statutory override” created by the previous Government to ensure deficits incurred, particularly on SEND provision were not included in the Council’s accounts. This debt increases month on month and is now in excess of £40million. This Government has extended arrangements until 2028 but so far has given no indication on how this financial instability will be dealt with.
4. Local Government Reorganisation is a key issue for both District and County Councils. The Government has announced that in shire counties the existing arrangements of two tier authorities (District and County Councils) should be abolished and its place should be the establishment of unitary authorities to cover all areas. Unity Authorities would be grouped together in “Strategic Bodies” governed by a mayor. The preferred option of the County Council as expressed by the previous administration is that Warwickshire become a single unitary authority and it joins the West Midlands Combined Authority. I do not believe that a single authority for Warwickshire would serve residents in Stratford District well - the economies of north and south are very different, Council tax in the districts in the north are higher than in the south and there is no obvious solution to the strategic authority conundrum because the Mayor of the West Midlands (who would have to consent to any change to the WMCA) has said he is not interested in seeing any changes to its boundaries. There is a better case for two unitaries for Warwickshire with Stratford District combining with Warwick District to form a South Warwickshire District. A South Warwickshire District could more easily become a strategic body with another adjoining county the most obvious being Worcestershire.
Once the District and County Councils have decided on their preferred arrangement there will be an awareness raising round of consultation and discussion.
5. There is to be a review of Parish Council boundaries, particularly for smaller Parishes that might wish to merge. I will ensure that all Parishes are briefed about this
6. I have meetings pending with officers to discuss outstanding highways issues and my discretionary highways budget, also the highways fund which can be bid for. My County Council Division has three area officers which is an indication of the fragmentation of the service. I have already asked for a review of structure and organisation, and I am meeting the new head of Highways who has just been appointed, shortly

7. Several parishes have asked me to chase outstanding highway maintenance issues and I will report on them verbally as appropriate.

George Cowcher

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