

Upton Snodsbury District & County Cllr. report for Parish council on Jan. 21st 2025

Happy New Year to you all.

So here we go for my first report of 2025. I hope you all enjoyed a break over Christmas. I was heartened to see so many of our villagers across my Division embracing the various activities that were held over the festive season and would like to thank all those who worked hard to make them happen.

The engineers at Wychavon need to capture details of any internally flooded properties in Wychavon. This has been requested by WCC its role as lead Local Flood authority (contact Martyn Cross at WDC)

I have attached a statement I have prepared re proposals towards Unitary proposals and hope it offers some clarification but would stress that nothing is definite at the moment. I think we can safely say though that change is coming!

WCC have released some interesting stats on their Facebook page over Christmas one of which is that 45 kms of tarmac have been laid on footways across the County. I am glad to see that some of yours have benefitted from this achievement.

Pershore Education Planning Area review- forthcoming changes.

(Having just received this from County I thought it might be of interest)

Decisions have been reached to extend the age ranges of all the first schools in the Pershore Education Planning Area to become primary schools. The middle schools in Pershore will no longer have a point of entry into Year 5 for September 2025, and Pershore High School's intake will be expanded to accommodate all Year 7 pupils in the area from September 2027.

School	Age range in 2025	Age range in 2026	Age range from 2027
Abbey Park First & Middle	2-12	2-12	2-11 (Year 7 closed)
Crowle CE First	5-10 (Year 5 added)	5-11 (Year 6 added)	5-11
Defford-Cum-Besford CE First	5-10 (Year 5 added)	5-11 (Year 6 added)	5-11
Fladbury CE First	3-10 (Year 5 added)	3-11 (Year 6 added)	3-11
Pinvin CE Academy	2-12	2-12	2-11 (Year 7 closed)
St Barnabas CofE First and Middle	2-12	2-12	2-11 (Year 7 closed)
Upton Snodsbury CofE First	5-10 (Year 5 added)	5-11 (Year 6 added)	5-11
Pershore High	11-18	11-18	11-18 (all Year 7 places for area)

More information about these changes is available at

<https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/pershorereview> but if you have any questions, please email [persshorereview@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:pershorereview@worcestershire.gov.uk)

Devolution

1. Prior to Christmas the government announced major changes to how local government will operate in the years to come, following the publication of its White Paper. Nothing has been decided but the government's

intent seems to be clear, and I would suggest these changes will happen.

I will try to outline the proposed changes and how these changes are likely to affect Worcestershire.

- a. The government wants to abolish District Councils and County Councils and replace them with one Unitary Council. This would mean that the six District Councils and the County Council in Worcestershire would all disappear to be replaced with one Unitary Council. Town Councils and Parish Councils will not be affected.
 - b. The timeline for this is very short. The government want “letters of interest” by interested parties by 10th January 2025. It is my understanding that the government will make its decision early in March as to which counties will proceed in “the first tranche”. If Worcestershire was in “the first tranche”, it is likely that elections in May 2025 to the County Council will be cancelled and elections to the new Unitary Council may be held in May 2026.
 - c. The above is further complicated because this is the first phase of the government’s proposed changes. Once the counties have become Unitary Councils, the government then wishes to create Strategic Authorities. It is proposed that each Unitary Council will represent approximately 500,000 people; Worcestershire has 600,000. Strategic Authorities will be made up of a number of Unitary Councils (2 or 3), headed by an elected Mayor.
 - d. A letter of interest has now been submitted to the Government by the leading political group at County. It was felt that if Worcestershire was to have any say in shaping its own future it is imperative that we are in the first tranche. It remains to be seen if Worcestershire itself will remain united as a single unitary authority or is linked with other shires.
- a. The Cabinet met to discuss the government’s proposals and we decided it was clear that these were not really proposals, they were changes which the government intends to implement. With the “majority” which the government has, then of course, any legislation would pass through Parliament with ease.
 - b. We decided that if Worcestershire was to have any say in shaping its future, it is imperative that Worcestershire is in “the first tranche”.

COUNCIL tax is set to increase as the county council looks for ways of balancing its books.

Councillors were told a “tsunami of demand pressures” had taken the council to the edge of bankruptcy at a cabinet meeting on Thursday.

Cabinet members have approved a draft budget worth £495 million but the council faces a funding gap of £33.6m for 2025/26, rising to £43.6m the following year.

Despite using £15m worth of reserves to plug the gap, the council will have to effectively declare itself bankrupt if it doesn’t get exceptional financial support from the government.

This means getting permission to sell off council assets or borrow money.

Cabinet will also recommend to full council a council tax increase of 4.99 percent. This is made up of two percent for adult social care and 2.99 percent for other council services.

For an average Band D property, the change would equate to an annual council tax increase of £76.79 or £1.48 a week.

The council says it would benefit from £21.366m in increased council tax income.

At the moment, about three quarters of Worcestershire County Council's budget is spent on adult social care, children's services and home to school transport.

COUNTY Hall could be sold to help Worcestershire County Council balance its books.

The council is facing an unprecedented funding gap of £33.6 million next year and will effectively declare itself bankrupt if it doesn't get exceptional financial support from the government.

That support comes in the form of a capitalisation direction - permission for the council to bridge its funding gap by selling assets or borrowing.

At a cabinet meeting on Thursday (January 16), council leader Simon Geraghty said chief financial officer Phil Rook had already written to the Ministry of Health, Communities and Local Government to ask for exceptional financial support.

Cllr Geraghty said this was "right and proper" and not a decision that was taken lightly.

"The pressures are unrelenting," he said. "Our income is growing but is not keeping pace with demand."

Cllr Geraghty said the council had embarked on a £37m "savings and efficiencies" programme this financial year and was on track to deliver at least 75 percent of that.

He warned that further cuts would have to be made next year as well as the "disposal of capital assets and land or property".

"This is not a long-term solution," he admitted. "It buys us time."

County Hall has been closed completely since June when legionella bacteria was found in the building.

Parts of the council's headquarters had been off-limits since September 2023 when reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) was found on site.

In recent months, the council has been carrying out exploratory work to find out whether a return to County Hall is feasible.

At Thursday's meeting, Cllr Geraghty said bringing the building back into use would cost significantly more than the £1.5m figure the council had set aside, so the work would not be done.

The building is therefore "surplus to requirements", he said.

"It is right we make a decision on what to do with it. It is a large building and the good people of Worcestershire will expect us to look at it."

He said a report on County Hall will come before the next cabinet meeting in February.