

Letter to the Editor of the Stratford Herald

15 May 2020

Dear Sir

Your article in last week's edition, *Councils furious as aid cash is withheld*, concerning an open letter sent by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to those who serve on Parish and Town Councils was based on a misunderstanding.

Your report stated that:

In a letter to town and parish councils, Mr Jenrick suggested £1.6bn of the fund should be shared between lower-tier councils delivering virus-related services, such as town and parish councils.

Having praised parish and town councils for their work in contributing to supporting their communities in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic, what Mr Jenrick actually wrote was:

As Local Government Secretary I want you to know that I am behind you and will support the vital work that you are doing in your communities. That is why I have made £3.2 billion of additional funding available to councils, with the latest tranche of £1.6 billion including a larger share for lower tier councils. If you have questions regarding funding I would encourage you to speak with your principal council.

Of the first tranche of £1.6 billion, Stratford District Council (SDC) was allotted £43,508 whilst Warwickshire County Council (WCC) was allotted £14,070,810. Of the latest tranche SDC was allotted £1,299,602 whilst WCC was allotted £10,610,611. These amounts, taken together in each case, are far below the amounts that SDC and WCC had respectively indicated to Mr Jenrick's ministry that were needed to recoup the additional costs and lost income that both councils would suffer as a result of the pandemic. In allocating these sums to SDC and WCC, there was no indication that any provision had been made within them to meet any subsequent requests for support from parish and town councils. Indeed, as the Leader of the Council has already made you aware, in a subsequent video conference with the District Council Network it was clarified that any such requests should only be considered where there were circumstances of parish or town councils being in financial distress. Mr Jenrick's letter made no suggestion of any portion of the funds allocated being distributed to parish and town councils, merely pointing them to their 'principal council', in this case SDC, as the council they might approach.

As a generality and in common with SDC, all parish and town councils hold reserves that can be allocated for unanticipated expenditure. In current circumstances SDC does have reserves that will be called upon to help meet the demands of the current crisis. Similarly, for example, Stratford Town Council's accounts published last year show that it had total reserves of £825k of which £520k was unallocated for any specific project. The residents of Stratford might care to ask their own town councillors why they are sitting on such piles of reserves in the face of the need to meet the challenges arising from the pandemic. It should come as no surprise to parish and town councillors generally if SDC has regard to their councils' level of reserves when responding to any request driven by alleged circumstances of 'financial distress'.

Yours faithfully

Dr Trevor Harvey
District Councillor, Shipston North
Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets



Elizabeth House
Church Street
Stratford-upon-Avon
CV37 6HX

telephone 01789 267575

minicom 01789 260747

website www.stratford.gov.uk

DX700737 STRATFORD-ON-AVON 2