

County Councillor for Necton & Launditch

Annual Report 2016 - 2017

Governance:

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the County Council in May 2016 the leadership of the Council changed. Since May 2013 an alliance of 4 political parties had run the Council but due to a Conservative bye election victory and other factors the AGM reversed the alliance majority on 2 committees and elected Cllr Cliff Jordan as leader. A member recently changed allegiance to the Conservative group and another sitting member unfortunately died leaving the distribution of seats as follows: Conservative 42, Labour 14, UKIP & Independent 12, Liberal Democrats 10, Green 3, Non-Aligned 2 and one vacancy. All 84 seats on the County Council will be contested at the election to be held on the 4th May.

In May 2014 the Leader and Cabinet system of running the Council was replaced with a Committee system. Under this system 5 committees make decisions that are ratified by Council. However, the major flaws in the Committee system; lack of scrutiny (the decision of a committee can only be changed by that committee) and a 6 week time interval between meetings makes decision making less accountable and cumbersome. Under the current rules return to the Cabinet system cannot be achieved until May 2019, potential amendments to the constitution are being investigated to allow more streamlined and accountable decision making.

Budget:

In February 2016 the Council agreed the budget, which with amendments that saved the closure of libraries, fire stations and maintained the opening hours for recycling centres, was agreed by all parties. The budget was presented as being robust and any savings identified were achievable.

When the leadership of the Council changed in May 2016 a £800k in year overspend was admitted. Under a robust investigation a potential £20m in year overspend was identified mainly in the Adult Social Care and Children's Services budgets.

Therefore the budget for 2017/18 which was set by Council on the 20th February had to address this overspend, a reduction in government grant of

£30m and £40m of savings identified in previous budgets that were not achieved. The Council tax increase for 2017/18 comprises an Adult Social Care precept of 3% (specifically authorised by government) and a rate of inflation increase of 1.8%. this will allow all budgets to start at zero debt for the forthcoming year, address the revenue funding shortfall from government and make achievable savings of £44m.

Children's Services:

The social care side of Children's Services has been under pressure from the government to improve its procedures for the protection of children and its services to Looked After Children (LAC) after 2 critical OFSTED reports in 2013. Improvements have been made but recruiting social workers and training them, amending procedures and changing the culture within the service takes time. In July 2016 the Council announced a partnership with the charity Barnado's with a view to using their expertise in foster child care. Norfolk County Council currently have nearly 1100 LAC in their care, Norfolk take more children under 18 into care per 10,000 population than Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

On the education front the percentage of good or outstanding schools in Norfolk has risen over the last 3 years from 63% to hit the national average of 89%.

There was a mini "baby boom" 5 or 6 years ago which has required the provision of extra school places, Norfolk County Council is legally required to provide new school building where places are required this year's budget for this is £359m.

Adult Social Care:

Norfolk is one of the most popular places for people to retire to, this has meant that over the last few years Norfolk has become the centre of the fastest growing ageing population. We all now live much longer than our predecessors and many more elderly people need care either in their own homes or in secure accommodation. An extra £25m was allocated to the Adult Social Care budget for 2017/18 making a total of £370m. Pressures on this budget in future years is inevitable.

20,205 people received care packages during the year and 67,926 people were supported to remain independent through the Early Help scheme.

Loneliness can cause ill health and reduce people's ability to lead fulfilling and independent lives. In November 2016 NCC launched the In Good Company (IGC) campaign - working with partners, including charities and the local media - to combat loneliness and raise awareness of the wide range of support on offer in Norfolk.

Community and Environmental Services:

The Parish Partnership Scheme which contributes 50% to the cost local highway improvements identified by parishes, who contribute the other 50%, has been successful over the years and 2016/17 saw "trods" built on verges to provide cost effective pedestrian footways and more SAM2 devices purchased. SAM2 devices display the speed of approaching cars and more importantly record time and speed data for all cars that pass the device. The data can be used to support requests for enforcement action by police.

The winter has been remarkably mild (so far) and very few gritting operations have been carried out. The usual damage to roads caused by very cold weather has also been relatively light. During 2016 only some 7,000 potholes were repaired on the 6,000 miles of roads for which the Council is responsible.

The latest tranche of Better Broadband for Norfolk (BBfN) will see high speed broadband coverage reaching more than 95% of Norfolk homes and businesses by 2020. The total investment in the BBfN so far is £68m since the project was launched in 2012. Currently high speed broadband coverage is 87% more than double, 42%, that of 4 years ago.

Waste:

The Councils 20 recycling centres recycled, composted or re-used 40,000 tonnes of waste.

140,000 tonnes of residual waste is sent to an energy from waste plant near Ipswich.

Your Councillor:

As well as attending meetings of the full Council I also sit on the Children's Services Committee and the Standards Committee and have contributed to the Working Groups set up to discuss school exclusions and road crossing patrols at schools. I also attend meetings of the Friends of Gressenhall Museum and the

A47 Alliance. The Division of Necton and Launditch contains 22 parishes 18 of which have active parish councils and I endeavour to attend their meetings whenever I can to assist with Norfolk County Council related queries and problems. I have an office in my home which is used to conduct Council business.

Mark Kiddle-Morris

Member for Necton and Launditch

Norfolk County Council.