

County Councillor's Report to Lavenham Parish Meeting, Thursday 13th April 2017.

This will be my last report to your Parish Meeting as your County Councillor since the Council comes to an end in early May.

Looking back over the past four years I wish that I had a more exciting record of achievement at the Council to report. Unfortunately however the very difficult financial circumstance in which all of local government finds itself has meant that the activities of the council have been necessarily limited. The main focus therefore has been on measures to cut costs while doing as little damage to council services as possible and on the whole I believe that this has been achieved.

Over the past four years our funding from Central Government has been reduced dramatically representing a large proportion of our net budget of a little over £550m. We have been obliged as a result to find savings of over £100m over the period. Further savings are likely to be necessary in years to come. As we promised in 2013 the County Council's share of council tax has not gone up. We have however increased the County Council share of the council tax bill by 2% last year and 3% in 2017/18 to reflect the levy permitted by Central Government to support our Social Care activities.

Suffolk has a population that includes more people over 60 than other parts of the country, and this puts particular pressure on our Social Care budget. Thanks to investment in new care homes made prior to 2013, and a programme that changed the way that we deliver services to users, we have with one or two exceptions managed to continue to deliver adequate services to those in need who qualify. This has not been easy and there is need for further increases in resources in the years to come combined with improved co-operation with the National Health Service.

I think that it is fair to say that over the past two years the attention of the leaders of councils across Suffolk has been quite pointlessly distracted by the issue of Devolution. It was obvious as soon as the arrival of the new administration under Theresa May that this matter had fallen down the Government's agenda, and that only the most enthusiastic regions, which did not include Norfolk and Suffolk, would be pressing ahead with what was in any event a flawed initiative.

I would expect future changes in local government to be connected with the creation of unitary councils, which would to my mind be a good thing.

The Highways Department has been held back by problems relating to the contract that was signed four years ago now with Keir. It is clear that insufficient thought went into the design of these arrangements, and this is only now being sorted out. I will not dwell on highways apart from saying that demand for road repair and improvement, particularly in a

dispersed county such as Suffolk, is infinite and it is almost impossible to satisfy the demands of everyone.

Not all of the news has been negative. Our Children's Services, both in the area of education and in looked after children have both shown an improving trend. Firstly, Suffolk's Children in Care services received a Good rating from Ofsted last year. Secondly, four years ago standards in Suffolk's Schools were very poor. Indeed one of my stated aims in my election material at the election in 2013 was to try to help to support improvements in educational attainment in the County. I have enjoyed being a member of the Schools Improvement Board which has had oversight of this process. Suffolk has gradually risen from the bottom of the league tables, and now stands at or slightly above average in most areas which is a good achievement. One area where we still need to make improvements is in the area of special needs children and the focus is now shifting towards this aim.

Lavenham

It has been a great pleasure to represent the beautiful community of Lavenham over the past four years. I have been able to contribute locality funding towards a number of different organisations and projects in the village and was particularly pleased to be able to support the launch of the Good Neighbour Scheme.

I have spent some time on highways and traffic issues in the village, including attempting through a larger group of councillors with similar issues, to do something about preventing HGV's from using unsuitable routes. I am pleased to say that as a result of this, and also as a result of work undertaken by your District Councillor, Will Shropshire, it is planned that an experimental one way weight limit will be in place in Water Street within the next few months.

It only remains to thank the Chairman of Parish Council, the Parish Clerk, Mrs Bellward and the other Parish Council Members for the warm welcome that I have always enjoyed at their meetings. I would also like to wish all the residents of Lavenham the very best for the future.

Jenny Antill