

County Councillor's Report for Lavenham Parish Council meeting on 1st July 2021

New look County Council

I was re-elected last month along with eight other Green councillors across the county, making us the main opposition group to the ruling Conservatives and the only county in the UK that has Greens as opposition. Thanks to all those who supported me. The turnout in Cosford was the highest of the 75 divisions in the county at 49.5%. We have decided to again join forces with the 4 LibDems and 2 independent councillors to make a 15-strong group. I am deputy leader of the group for the first year. While Greens increased from 3 to 9 the Conservatives increased from 50 to 55, so they are still overwhelmingly in control. Our larger group size means our political group will have a seat on every major committee. The first council meeting at the end of May took place at Wherstead Park outside Ipswich as apparently the only venue large enough. The next meeting in July has been cancelled and an extra meeting will instead be held in September in the hope that restrictions will have lifted and a venue can be found by then.

New cabinet

The cabinet has been reshuffled and new roles created. **Matthew Hicks** is still the leader, his deputy is now **Richard Rout** who is also member for finance and environment, combining the two roles to hopefully ensure one does not hinder the other. Highways and young people's roles have both been split into two.

Rachel Hood is cabinet member for education, SEND and skills (schools and colleges).

Beccy Hopfenspurger is member for adult care;

James Reeder is member for children and young people's services – services provided to kids outside schools

Andrew Reid has been put in charge of public health and public protection, including the fire service and CABs

Richard Smith is economic development, transport strategy – including road safety and speeding, and waste.

Paul West is in charge of operational highways (including footpaths and pavements), flooding and Ipswich

20mph limit

The speed survey on Church Street, Lower Road, Prentice Street and High Street showed that mean speeds are below 24mph on Prentice Street and High Street, at 24mph on Lower Road and at 26mph and 25mph on Church Street. Our original request was for a 20mph limit on all roads within the existing 30mph signs. Since speeds are v near the criteria even on Church Street it makes sense to me to push ahead with our original request to include that street in the area of 20mph and all of the area within the existing 30mph limit.

Water Street

We had a constructive meeting with the Highways engineers and your chairman over a design. I believe they are now awaiting a decision from Lavenham PC at this meeting to go ahead with the design process and a trial of removing the "give way to oncoming traffic" signage together with video camera recording.

School travel and split villages and split siblings

Having been approached by residents of two villages (Cockfield, Thorpe Morieux,) over the issue of their sibling children having to go to different schools in order to get a free bus, I have written to Rachel Hood as the relevant new cabinet member about the issue of split villages, asking if the policy could be reviewed. She has said she will talk to the senior officer

regarding this and get back to me. The other route is via the new education and health scrutiny committee, at which our group will be pushing to have a review of this policy on the agenda. It is something that the administration was warned repeatedly about by members of our political group when they were considering introducing the new policy back in 2017. The cabinet member who introduced the policy, Gordon Jones, stood down from office in May.

Special educational needs (SEND) Review

Rachel Hood's first act as education and SEND cabinet member is to order an independent review into the way parents and carers are communicated with by Suffolk County Council. The review will not look at the actual provision of SEND services itself. A SEND team from Lincolnshire County Council has been appointed to do the job.

They started week beginning June 21 and will take six weeks. The report, with any recommendations, will be published on Suffolk County Council's website, shared with those who contributed to it and also scrutinised by the council's Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

Some parents and carers of children with SEND - known as the Campaign for Change (SEND Suffolk) – have called for a lawyer-led audit of the council's compliance with the legal requirements set out for the service. Suffolk County Council has refused since it says it is the role of Ofsted to inspect such aspects, as they have been doing. The SEND service has been criticised for failing or delaying to provide needs assessments for children that may have special needs, and then when they are drawn up, failure to provide the actual services that they need.

Bus Back Better

Government has given Suffolk county council a series of tight deadlines over the next few months if it wants to benefit from a pot for bus funding. It must agree "enhanced partnerships" with commercial bus operators by the autumn which detail how they will invest to improve services. However, this does not appear to affect large parts of rural areas like ours where bus services are already non-existent or minimal and largely dependent on dial a ride services.

ROBERT LINDSAY
JULY 2021