

**Cllr Robin Brown**

**Woodord & Weedon Division – Northamptonshire County Council**

**ANNUAL REPORT April 2018 to March 2019**

My report to you and your community is somewhat different to the previous years. I no longer act as a member of the executive of the elected administration, I am now a Back Bench councillor attending Full Council meetings (normally 6 per year) plus Overview & Scrutiny meetings, although not allowed to sit on the committees (by diktat of the Commissioners) I still see it as a key role to attend as an observer as often as practical.

The year has seen the appointment of Commissioners (following the Inspectors Report March 2018) initially to oversee Governance and Finance; but in November also the appointment of a commissioner for Children's Services. Also in March there was the appointment of a new Leader and Cabinet, (Leader Cllr Matt Golby previously a Cabinet member for Children's Services) Further there were appointments of a new Chief Executive and other senior directors, most of whom have been in place since September.2018

The Auditors stopped the use of Capital Assets & Section 106 monies earmarked to balance the previous year's budget and in consequence a deficit of £35+ million was carried forward to this year. The administration then made changes to the budget under the new Chief Executive and one of the outcomes of this was that the contentious library closures were put on hold. It is interesting to note that the Lead Commissioner is on record as saying the County Council had enough funds to deliver its statutory services and did not need a "bailout from Government". However in November, Central Government allowed the administration to use up to £70 million from Capital assets to balance last year's budget and create a £20 million general reserve thus ensuring such areas as Winter Gritting were reinstated where deemed necessary.

One final comment on the Budget for 2019/20 is the Council Tax increase of 4.99%, with the Secretary of State having allowed for an extra 2%. This was passed by the Council on the 21<sup>st</sup> February. The administration stating that the final budget would therefore balance and leave the NCC in a better financial situation.

The most significant change however is the move to Unitary Government as signalled in the Inspectors report and since has been followed through by the County's District and Borough Councils (Exception Corby BC) with the Secretary of State allowing the elections for the D&B's to be delayed until 2020.

The legal process published by the County Council and passed at an emergency meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019, does however question (and as yet unanswered) steep rise in costs of the changeover from £15 million to £44 million: In my view, this is unlikely to stop the move to reorganising local government in the County. Elections for the two new unitary councils are planned to take place in May 2020. I have no input to the discussions and only know what is in the public domain.

During the last seven months I have spent more time with the Parishes of Everdon and Woodford Halse as both have a NCC service that has been under threat of closure. In Everdon the Outdoor Learning Centre (a non-statutory service) is under offer to be sold as a going concern to the Parish Council (Local consultation and agreed Parish Council Finance still to be completed). I look forward to this being successful and the community becoming very involved in this nationally recognised outdoor learning centre.

Woodford Halse has a small library which is now being taken over by the Parish Council. The community benefit is immense and I congratulate all involved in being determined to save that facility.

I have expressed my concern to the Cabinet Member for Highways (Cllr Ian Morris a colleague from the previous cabinet) regarding the HS2 disruption likely on the A361 and it is pleasing to note that Byfield Parish Council are now represented on the committee responsible to deal with the HS2 issues locally.

I will continue to represent you through until the next elections and hope to keep you up to date with any further developments.

**Cllr Robin Brown**

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