

LINDRIDGE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

15.05.19

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

1. County Council Affairs - personnel

At this time last year, we were about to welcome our new team of senior officers, comprising the Chief Executive, Paul Robinson, the Chief Finance Officer, Michael Hudson, the Chief Commissioning Officer, Andrew Spice, and the Interim Director of Adult Social Care Services, Avril Wilson. In addition we have since confirmed Richard Taylor as Head of Human Resources.

They joined John Hobbs, director of Economy and Infrastructure, Francis Howie in charge of Public Health, and Catherine Driscoll, the director of Children's Services.

I can report that the new senior management have settled in well, working with the Cabinet to produce a viable range of services appropriate to the County's needs, and consistent with our income of around £330 million a year.

That is not to say that we have not faced substantial difficulties in balancing the budget, and Lindridge residents will be aware of some of the stress points that have been encountered during the year. Despite the controversy, I think we can be assured that the necessary range and depth of services will continue to be delivered as required.

2. County Council Affairs – council tax

Once again we find it necessary to increase Council Tax, this time by 3.99% overall. Within that sum, there is a 1% rise dedicated to Adult Social Care, as the government recognises the increasing burden of an ageing population, some of whom require council support. This overall increase is equivalent to £0.93p per week for a Band D property.

3. Council County Affairs – expenditure

Many people will be aware that our Children's Services have been judged as requiring improvement and as a result we have found it necessary to place the department into a wholly owned company, named Worcestershire Children First. This will formally come into operation in October, although it now exists in shadow form.

This new venture has to be seen in the context of two years of continuous improvement in Children's Services, as a result of concerted effort of all staff, under the leadership of Catherine Driscoll and her colleague Tina Russell. We are hopeful that the new company will assist in this continuous improvement, so that the whole department may be returned to the County Council in a short while.

The Government has promised a Green Paper on adult social care for some time, but its publication is still imminent. This is an area of increasing need, but there is the crucial matter of the boundary between County Council funded care and the National Health Service. Clearly both organisations should be working towards the same goal, but there are occasional conflicts about responsibilities and allocation of expenditure between the two organisations.

As I observed last year, all other services are paid from the residue of income after these two departments are financed. This has resulted in difficult decisions on funding for libraries, archives and

the possible need to charge for parking. It should be emphasised that there are no plans to close any libraries, and the archive service is adequately funded to carry out its essential and valuable work.

That said, we are very keen to run an efficient and effective council, and this is resulting in a detailed examination of our ways of working, aimed at maintaining or improving the service with fewer personnel and resources.

We naturally hope that this endeavour will be supported by all residents, and I would encourage everyone to let me and the officers know of any deficiencies in our performance over the year.

4. Infrastructure

One of my Cabinet responsibilities concerns infrastructure, and, unlike my colleagues who are concerned with children and vulnerable adults, it means that I get to work on some exciting big physical projects.

In the last year we have doubled the width of the railway bridge on the Southern Link Road between Whittington and Norton. This manoeuvre has been recognised as a difficult project well executed by the receipt of two awards for excellence already.

We have also had confirmation of the Government's financial support for the 4th phase of the link road, so that is now steaming ahead, aiming for opening in 2021. This will involve dualling the road between the Ketch and the Powick roundabouts, including a second Carrington Bridge and the flood overflow viaduct, as well as the widened causeway for some 1.2 miles.

By the end of this calendar year, Worcestershire Parkway Rail Station should be opened and fully operational. This will mean many trains to and from London stopping there, and some initial services on the Cross Country line also stopping. We are hopeful that more of the latter will join them, giving residents of the County the chance of joining trains to and from the south west and north east without leaving Worcestershire.

In addition, we are in process of a complete renewal of Kidderminster Station, as well as starting on the improvement of the A38 through Bromsgrove.

Meanwhile, there are exciting developments at our Game Changer sites at W6, Redditch Gateway and the Malvern Hills Science Park, all related to improving the economy of the County and increasing our business rate income and the number of good jobs available for our residents.

5. Local issues

I am pleased to see some progress on the footway works along the south side of the A443. I hope these will make a big difference to those using mobility scooters and buggies. We are not yet able to replace the illuminated warning signs at Lindridge Primary School, for no very good reason. I hope that will be resolved soon.

Speeding through the village is a perennial problem, and I hope the minor signage measures that have been agreed will make some difference. There is more work to be done around Frith Common, but a resolution to that problem is in sight.

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