

## Annual Report for Parish Councils

The theme for this last year at County has been 'Not enough resources'. The long and short of it is that we live in one of the lowest funded yet fastest growing counties in the country.

This lack of funding, or support from Government, has led to several cuts in services. This has been immensely frustrating for members of all political persuasions. The most frustrating of them all is the problems with the Highways budget, in particular their discretionary budget. The first bit of news was that they had spent this discretionary budget before the end of the year, meaning none of the little jobs we used to be able to get done, got done. Every village I serve was affected by this budget constraint, mostly because it meant the interactive signs were left out of order! However, we could all look forward to April when the new fiscal year started and we could get a few of those little things done, like Yellow Lines in Rampton, fixing the interactive signs in Oakington and Cottenham, getting signs for Church Street in Histon and so on. But alas, we got the news that this discretionary budget is to be removed and replaced with a far less flexible one, meaning a much longer process for us to get anything done. I can assure you this is incredibly irritating to us members as we want to get these issues sorted out as quickly as possible.

To continue with the lack of funding theme we have had another reshuffle with the senior management team at county, which in turn should streamline the decision-making processes. However the biggest change at senior level was reported in my last report to council, the double retirement of our leader and chief executive. The impact of this will not be apparent until their successors are chosen and have been in post for a while.

I have to just say a little bit for the officers at County. They have to work in this under sourced area and I feel they do a great job with little praise. I know we sometimes have to wait for answers or ask a couple or 3 times but they really are under sourced and are stretched very thinly, particularly in Highways, where most of the problems and requests lie. The lack of resources has hit every area of County Council, we have had cuts to some frontline services as well as back office staff. This puts more and more pressure on the staff who are asked to do more and more by Government.

Another common theme for this year has been the concerns amongst all of the Parishes I represent. The concerns about over developing of our area. Northstowe as always has been extremely prevalent, and then we hear about the possible development of the NIAB land. The only good that can come from developments of this size is the Section 106 monies that come with it, however the concern that the money will not go that far should be at the forefront of our thoughts.

We continue to be well served by our schools on this patch with Cottenham and Impington Village colleges receiving very good OFSTED reports. Cottenham Primary School received an excellent OFSTED, so may congratulations to all the staff at those schools.

Having just gone on about lack of money and resources I had my first bit of good news. After several weeks of nagging emails and talking to Cllr Johnstone about Ladybird School in Cottenham the county agreed to make up the shortfall needed to complete necessary expansion. All of a sudden my faith in local government came back and I felt really good about the whole thing. Obviously that didn't last very long but it was a nice victory none the less.

You will of course now know that Shona Johnstone is our new leader. A new cabinet will be chosen and a new Chief executive will be chosen too. Leaving a whole new senior team. I would like to pay tribute to the current leader Keith Walters, who I feel has been a fantastic ambassador for Cambridgeshire and has led the council well. With David Jenkins as the new leader of the opposition I think it will be all change this next year.

Finally from a personal perspective I have found my second year as a County Councillor far more enjoyable than my first. The challenges are great but I understand things a lot more than I did. There is obviously a long way to go but I feel much more comfortable at Shire Hall than I did. I have enjoyed being a Governor of a successful school like Cottenham Village College, and recently was very pleased to be co-opted on Cottenham Parish Council.

As always the clerk and the chairmen have done a fantastic job with the council and I feel the village is very lucky to have such committed hardworking people. It amazes me how much effort is put in by all of the councillors, and whilst I recognise their frustration with local government, I feel all our villages are much better off for having them.

The next few years will be very tight at County. The financial position will worsen unless we can manage to get the Government to equalise the grant scheme, so that the Shires are better served. However, with new leadership I feel it could be a very exciting, if not busy time.

Matt Bradney  
County Councillor  
Histon and Impington

4 Lyles Road  
Cottenham  
Cambs  
CB4 8QR  
t: 01954 204347  
m: 07739393137