

Norfolk County Councillor's Report – January/February 2018

I'll start by repeating the apology in my December report that work is currently keeping me down in London a fair bit during the week. The good news is that will shortly come to an end as I will shortly be starting a new job based in Norwich. I might not make it to many Parish Council meetings in February but after that I won't have any excuse!

COUNTY COUNCIL BUDGET AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Thanks to everyone who responded to the various County Council budget consultations. The early part of the County Council's year is dominated by discussions about the budget. It looks as though the administration has changed its mind over cuts to bus subsidies and to the road gritting programme which is good news.

My committee responsibility at County Hall is Children's Services and we went through a solid five hours of debate about various issues earlier this month. It included a discussion on planned cuts to the Children's Centre budget and moving Special Educational Needs funding away from schools clusters. I voted against both of those proposals for the same reason – that they were making the changes before coming up with an alternative plan that would make the service as good or better. Sadly they both went through.

I should mention here that I am pleased Norfolk's Children's Services are judged to be improving by OFSTED. A lot of work has gone into tackling the problems identified by OFSTED back in 2013. Everyone accepts that more work needs to be done and I am working closely with councillors of all parties and council staff to make sure we get the right solutions for all children and young people in the County. If anyone has questions about specific parts of my work in this area I'd be happy to answer them.

COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES

You will no doubt have seen the row over the increase in County Councillors' allowances. We voted twice on the issue – because the Lib Dem and Labour groups called an extra meeting of the Council early in January and I voted against the increase both times. The big increases went through despite the level of protest that was heard from the public. One of the oddest parts of change is that the increase is being back-dated to May 2017. I am going to give my back-dated pay to charity and if you know of any local good cause that would benefit from a donation, please let me know.

HIGHWAYS

Highways issues are always make up the biggest part of my postbag. I am currently supporting a number of small projects through the £6,000 allocated to Mundesley division from the Highways budget. The allocation for this year is getting close to being spent up but I assume we will get the same again next year. If you have any highways issues that could be tackled with a contribution from this fund, let me know.

I've even started a 'pothole of the year' competition on my website after I spotted a pothole round the corner from County Hall was fixed within a couple of hours! So if you think you know of a pothole that might have been waiting to be fixed for a lot longer than that, just email me with the details!

BROADBAND

There's an on-going effort to improve broadband speeds across Norfolk. Everyone seems to have their favourite statistic to show that they are making progress but I was struck by this one: a Parliamentary report shows that out of 650 Parliamentary Constituencies, North Norfolk sits 603rd in the league table for average broadband speeds. I know my colleagues on the recently formed Digital

Innovation Committee at County Hall are working on improving that so hopefully there will be positive news in due course.

YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Finally, do you know anyone who would like to stand for the Youth Parliament? It is a great way to get to know how politics works. To stand for election, candidates need to fill in an application form at www.norfolk.gov.uk/youthparliament by 5pm on February 7. All candidates are invited to a welcome event on Saturday, February 10 to meet the current MYPs and to learn how to run a campaign.

Ed Maxfield, January 2018

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