

County Councillor Report for Hartlebury PC October 2016

First of all apologies for not being with you for your meeting on Tuesday. That day is the first chance my wife and I have to visit our daughter Nicola in London after the birth of her second son and our sixth grandson. She didn't quite make UCH for the birth and Henry was delivered on her bedroom floor by two paramedics helped by an astonished husband, our son-in-law, Frank.

The big talking point will no doubt be the attempted landgrab of Hartlebury by Wyre Forest District Council. Last night I proposed the following motion at Wychavon District council

“ Members , you will already be aware from the email from the leader Councillor Robinson, that Wyre Forest District Council is due to consider a report at its council meeting this week on the proposed changes to the Parliamentary Boundaries. However, there is also a proposal within that report to approach the Local Government Boundary Commission to change the district boundary to move Hartlebury ward into Wyre Forest.

There was no prior discussion with this Council about this and importantly no discussion with the local community in Hartlebury. There is no logical reason to conflate a Parliamentary boundary review with the wholly separate process and considerations that are relevant to a local government boundary review.

In the event that WFDC does vote for this change, Council is asked to oppose this unilateral action and write to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in the strongest possible terms.”

You may wish to see the webcast of what then happened but suffice it to say that the Council voted unanimously to approve the motion. So now that we know that WFDC have decided to go ahead with their approach to the Local Boundary Commission Wychavon will be taking action to oppose it “in the strongest possible terms” What I fail to understand, and I think I said it last night, is what Marcus Hart stands to gain from this unilateral action ? He has alienated the MD of Wychavon, the Leader of Wychavon, the district councillor for Hartlebury and from the correspondence I see flowing, your Chairman and others on your parish council, add to that Simon Geraghty the leader of County and Mark Garnier the Wyre Forest MP (who is on record as stating that

Hartlebury should remain within Wychavon). Unless Cllr Hart has some devious strategy up his sleeve which I cannot fathom at this stage, he has alienated all the decision makers he needs on his side at the very outset of his campaign !

Since your last meeting I have attended Hampton Lovett and Westwood PC, Elmbridge PC, Ombersley PC, and Hanbury PC. As a result I have between 10 to 15 items to follow up with Highways. I have now fixed to have a full morning's meeting with David Hunter-Miller to get to grips with the Highway budget, how it is structured and what we can expect from ad hoc submissions of what needs doing within the Ombersley division. I need time to fully understand what can and can't be done and the why's and wherefore's. I ask for your patience. If the answer is we can't afford it, I need that explained to me in the knowledge that I never like to be fobbed off with that excuse unless I understand the sums behind it.

I am still undergoing my induction. At the rate meetings with senior officers are arranged and then cancelled, I will not have had the briefings I need before the next election ! The last one was with Catherine Driscoll who heads up the Children, Families and Communities portfolio. We have 700 children in care within the county, not enough foster carers to cope, so have to engage foster carers through agencies who charge up to 5 times more than the cost of our own foster carers. We cannot get enough social workers, since no-one wants to take on a job where you are criticised for too much intervention or too little.

Catherine's department takes over £77 million of the annual budget. She told me that 5 years ago the County would be intervening in around 50 child care cases per year, now it is over 100 cases per year and rising. It was a very sobering and thought provoking meeting. I intend to get to know more about this department, especially as my wife, now retired, was a community paediatrician who had to deal with many cases of children in need.

In terms of the divisional fund I have been liaising with Sheridan who knows that I am still waiting to hear from some of the parishes before analysing who needs what, and then making decisions. It will take time.

As Marcus Hart is also a county councillor I may hear more about what is really going on in the Wyre Forest from other councillors. I will keep both Nigel and Sheridan informed. Cllr Peter Tomlinson Sept 29th 2016