

## County Councillor Report February 15<sup>th</sup> 2017

I am now back into the swing of things after our break in January. As you are aware there will be elections for the county on May 4<sup>th</sup> this year. So that means that having been your county councillor for just over 7 months I am having to go through the whole business of electioneering once again !

As you know I was rather thrown in the deep end when Maurice died so suddenly. He did not have time to take me round the parishes and introduce me to you all and explain how it worked, as indeed he had intended to. Thus it has been a very steep learning curve for me over a comparatively short period of time. Not only have I had to get used to venturing out on a number of evenings each month to be with you and discover the problems you may have with those areas county is responsible for, but I have also had to learn what it is that county is responsible for in its entirety. To be honest I am still learning and it will continue to take time.

What makes it more difficult is that departmental managers have no office in county. The building is full of open plan offices with a myriad of employees beavering away in front of their computers. If you want to speak to the head of Highways for instance, you have to phone ahead plan a time and he then might be able to find an empty meeting room or venture out of his huge open-plan office and make his way to the members room where again you have to find somewhere to have a private conversation. At Wychavon however, each manager has an office and you can knock on the door poke your head round and ask if he or she can spare you 5 minutes or so. Much easier and quicker and far more efficient.

Taking all that into account I have decided to stand again for two reasons. Firstly and most importantly you have all made me feel so welcome. I was initially afraid that I would come in for a fair amount of county bashing, but not a bit of it, indeed whenever you have voiced discontent with county it has always been done in a most courteous and respectful way. And I hope I have been able to make some progress with those issues you have given me to sort.

Secondly I want to come to grips with the challenges facing the county and they are many. You will have read about the Ofsted report into Childcare and Social Services. It described them as inadequate but went on to say that with

new leadership at the helm they could see improvements beginning to happen. I want to know what went wrong and why. I am not on any of the Committees responsible for the spend of over £1 million a day yet. I am still deciding where my experience, such as it is, may best be used.

I do know that the council agreed a 2.9% rise in council tax which equates to an increase of £33 on a Band D house. 0.9% of that increase is going to adult healthcare the cost of which is growing exponentially as we all live longer. The council have also agreed to spend £5 million on removing congestion on our roads. That apparently involves updating traffic lights which are on fixed timings and replacing the systems to react to traffic flow and density. Highways will be working on pinch points which are congestion points ( I have yet to find out exactly what they intend to do !). They will also be exploring opportunities to increase our access to real-time information to enable us to plan our journeys better. A further £6 million is being spent on roads and pavements, although I know there are a lot of potholes still needing attention.

County have yet to finish the Southern Link Road by building a new bridge over the Severn complete with a dual carriageway. I have begun to mention the Northern Relief Road but I happen to know that there is huge opposition from the residents of Claines to this, although the other reason is that with a Northern Relief Road we have to promise over 5000 new homes to accompany it. Perhaps this needs discussion in all our parishes ?

One of the strongest arguments the county has currently, is the performance of the economy. In figures up to 2014 (the latest available) Worcestershire has had the strongest growth in higher level workforce skills, has recorded the second highest growth in productivity and the third highest growth in prosperity. And with business rates being handed over to local authorities in the future this can only help the county keep council taxes down and improve their services.

I will finish on that note and look forward to being with you when I can and talking further about your Issues and challenges.

Cllr Peter Tomlinson February 15<sup>th</sup> 2017