

Cllr Roger Huxstep's Annual Report to Hambleton Parish Council - Annual Parish Meeting, 28th April 2015 in the Meon Valley Division, of Hampshire County Council.

Devolution? Since the referendum in Scotland, Cllr Roy Perry, Leader of HCC has written to Hampshire's MPs, encouraging their support in the strong case for greater devolved powers to Hampshire. He did not believe there was any reason why Hampshire and the southern counties should be deemed any less competent to run more of their own affairs than other parts of England or the United Kingdom. This view was echoed across the County Council with the full backing of a Notice of Motion calling for a transfer of powers on matters such as transport infrastructure and college funding. Also transfers of powers from unelected and unaccountable quangos to councils that are answerable to their local communities.

The Prime Minister has spoken of the 'core cities' but why not the 'great shires', of which Hampshire is one of the greatest. For example its economy is greater than Northern Ireland's. Devolution would be possible without the need to create new and unwanted administrative structures, new tiers of government, or the division of the country into statistically uniform blocks that lack all history and depth or permanence or sense of identity.

Roy Perry has been in discussions on devolution in England with ministers and senior civil servants, and as more detailed devolution proposals emerge, there will be closer working with partner organisations who will all be promoting the case for shires like Hampshire, not to be relegated to second-class status.

The County Council has given a cautious welcome to the Government's announcement of funding to address flooding issues across the country, as part of the Infrastructure Investment Plan, announced last December. While welcoming the news that funding will be made available for a number of flood alleviation and mitigation schemes in Hampshire, there is disappointment over the limited number of projects being supported in the county, and especially about the delays until funding is available. Hampshire will continue to press Government for earlier funding. Where possible, we will seek to use HCC's own resources to accelerate the delivery of these important improvements on the ground, as in the case, here in Hambleton, where work is already underway and phase 2 of the Pipe Scheme is imminent.

Winter Preparations. Winter 2013/14 yielded the heaviest rainfall in 200 years and resulted in over 1,000 trees having to be cleared from Hampshire's roads and 92,000 sandbags deployed on the highways. Such extensive damage saw the Council awarded extra funds from Government to help with flood repairs - £11.5 million from flood recovery funds, and [£6 million from the pothole fund](#). This was in addition to the £35 million Hampshire spends annually on highways maintenance.

The preparations for this winter included cleaning and jetting an extra 2,500 gullies, soakaways and drainage chambers which have been identified as potential flood risks, as well as 1,800 drainage-related maintenance or local jobs at over 100 sites. The Council has also submitted 33 bids to the Environment Agency for funding towards flood defence and alleviation measures.

Education. Hampshire students had reason to celebrate last summer with strong performances in SATs, GCSEs and 'A' Levels. Of those completing their primary education in 2014, 88% achieved the nationally expected level 4 or above in mathematics, 91% in reading and 87% in writing – all above national results. 81% achieved level 4 in all three subject areas, an increase of 3%, and compared to 78% nationally. 25% reached the higher standard of level 5 in all three subjects.

The percentage of Hampshire's 13,000 GCSE students achieving five A*-C passes, including in English and mathematics, remained at 60% this year, despite a number of changes to how subjects were examined and counted which has seen national results fall from 61% to 58%.

At 'A' Level, 89% of the 10,000 post-16 students studying at Hampshire's colleges and sixth forms achieved the Level 3 standard of two or more A*-E grades at A Level, or the vocational equivalent, compared with 88% nationally.

Services for Vulnerable Children. These services delivered by Hampshire County Council, are 'good' overall and, in some aspects 'outstanding', according to Ofsted. The Council was one of the first authorities to face a new, tougher framework that places greater emphasis on positive outcomes for children and young people – focusing heavily on child protection and children in care. During the four week inspection period last spring, a team of ten inspectors thoroughly examined practice, including a detailed review of over 200 individual cases. Inspectors concluded that overall services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers are 'good', while the adoption service is rated as outstanding, as is leadership and governance across all children's services.

Troubled Families Programme. Hampshire is amongst the second wave of early starters for the widened Troubled Families programme, with Phase 2 beginning now. This will mean working with a minimum of 1,112 families in the first year. The widened programme now includes families where violence in the home is prevalent, where health problems (mental and physical) persist, and more generally, families where children are in need of help and support. Hampshire will continue to work hard with partners to ensure the right families requiring help are identified early, and are worked with successfully, so that outcomes for the communities they live in are improved.

To date, 1,150 positive family outcomes have been secured from the first phase of the programme and the Hampshire programme remains on track to achieve the targeted number of 1,590. Significant progress also continues in encouraging agencies to work together and share information. This was recognised earlier in the year by Ofsted who commended the programme as 'well-structured and increasingly effective at meeting the needs of local families'. Along with the county's targeted approach to providing 'early help', the programme is delivering long-term, sustainable change while making the best use of taxpayers' money.

Council proceedings. The last full ordinary council was on Thursday 19th February. Councillors debated the budget for 2015/16 (more of that later) and also received a briefing from Sir Tony Redmond, the Lead Commissioner of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in anticipation of re-drawing divisional boundaries for the 2017 County Election. As a sequel to that, there was an extra-ordinary meeting on 13th April to agree the number of councillors to make up the county council and there was cross-party agreement to stay at 78 even though Hampshire's electorate is set to rise by of the order of 5%. Our division, the Meon Valley may well be the subject of an enlarged area to bring in extra electorate. The division has a registered electorate as at December 2014 of 11,805 compared with the average of 13,080 for the divisions in the Winchester City Council District - a shortfall of 9.75%. The projected electorate for 2021 is actually down by 252 while the average across the district is set to rise to 13,846 so our shortfall will increase to 16.56%. This breaks the boundary commission's rules in these matters so the Meon Valley Division will have to expand to take in some of the electorate from neighbouring divisions that are oversubscribed. That is likely to be from the Bishops Waltham Division and/or the

Winchester Southern Parish Division equivalent to another 2,293 voters which in turn is very close to the number of electors that an individual district councillor is set to represent by 2016.

Care at Home. This will be the new service for providing care and support in people's own homes to older people and physically disabled service users. It replaces the current Preferred Provider Panel that is due to finish in July 2015. The Care at Home service will also provide the 'Take a Break' service for carers.

The current service has contracts with over 100 agencies. Adult Services will be reducing this number to 11 providers, who have 17 contracts between them. By using fewer agencies, stronger working relationships can be built with them, which in turn will help to improve the quality of their service to the 6,000 plus Hampshire residents who need care at home and to better understand the challenges they sometimes face.

The new service will also introduce a standard hourly rate for care and support services that will be the same across the county for all the new agencies. This is to ensure quality is the reason for choosing a provider, rather than price. The new standard rate has been set at a level that will allow agencies to properly reward and train care staff. All of the new providers have committed to paying rates that exceed the living wage when performance related payments are taken into account.

All service users who will be affected by a change to a new agency will receive a letter to tell them who their new agency is and when the change is happening. They will then be contacted by the agency who will arrange to meet them and introduce their new carer.

This service is being rolled out now on a staged basis and is due to complete in August this year, and those who will experience a change will be written to in advance of this. Service users or family members who have any concerns in the meantime should contact 0300 555 1386.

Recruitment is a major issue in the care sector at the moment. Negative publicity and a lack of awareness of the opportunities in care are significant factors in this. The County Council is therefore working with its providers to launch a Care Marketing Campaign to promote the positives and encourage more people to consider a career in care. Look out for our Change Lives campaign in local papers, bus shelters and local radio or visit www.hants.gov.uk/changelives Adult Services are also working with colleagues in Trading Standards to extend the 'Buy with Confidence Scheme' to include care and support services. This will provide Hampshire residents with more of a quality indicator should they wish to purchase these services directly.

Changes to waste recycling centres' opening hours. Opening hours at Hampshire's 24 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) changed on 1st April 2015. The change follows consultation with residents on a number of options to shape the service for the future. These looked at affordable ways to ensure the County Council continues to deliver a modern, value for money service for Hampshire's residents. Councillor Seán Woodward, Executive Member for Economy, Transport and Environment at HCC, said: "We've looked at what changes we need to make to maintain this service at a time when we need to save more than £100million from the Council's overall budget and our grant from Government is nearly half what it was a few years ago. I am pleased to say that the changes we will be making mean that none of the recycling centres will be closed down to meet the required overall budget savings for 2015."

The response from residents to the consultation last year showed there is strong support for the HWRC service and so the changes made to deliver the necessary savings reflect how people want to use this service. We analysed the peak times the centres are used, listened to what people said about opening times, and talked to the operators about how and when the sites are serviced and cleaned.

"Taking all this into consideration, we will be able to save over £150,000 from the cost of running the service, while making sure the sites are open when people most want to use them, which is a much more effective use of money. This will see the sites opening an hour later in the morning and closing at 4pm in the winter, at 5pm during March and at 6pm during the summer months." The results of the consultation indicated that a later start in the morning was the most preferred option in terms of reduced opening hours. Our HWRC operator, however, has indicated that the first part of the morning is crucial for initial servicing and the effective running of the sites to ensure there is sufficient capacity for the day ahead, ensuring that the sites are clean, tidy and ready for the public to use, especially during the busier summer months. Analysis shows that the average peak times for people using all sites are mid-morning and early afternoon. Taking all this into account, from 1 April 2015 the opening hours of HWRCs are:

1 Oct - 28 Feb - 9am - 4pm

1 Mar - 31 Mar - 9am - 5pm

1 Apr - 30 Sep - 9am - 6pm

The Council's Budget. The revenue budget that covers the cost of providing services including wages, goods and materials - which must be reduced by 12% in 2015/16 to meet cuts in Government grant and to balance demand pressures linked to an ageing population and children in care. A relentless drive for efficiencies and savings since the period of austerity began, in 2008, will result in a total of £240million savings achieved by the end of March 2016. The changes to meet these savings were agreed as part of the budget setting for 2014.

We now prepare for the next phase of our savings and efficiency programme which aims to address a further £100 million of savings required by April 2017.

Despite receiving one of the lowest grants per head from Government resulting in the Council losing around 51% of its general grant from Government, on top of cuts to specific grants. Managing the next round of cuts to find the £100 million by 2017/18, equivalent to 14.5% of the revenue budget, will be much tougher, as savings become harder and harder to find. The austerity process has to be on-going, as we recognise the Government's need to bring public expenditure back under control. Fortunately Hampshire continues to perform extremely well - having established a solid reputation as being home to some of the best public services in the country. The Council is consulting this spring on a range of options to deliver the right support to residents at the right time and in the best way, which is likely to mean scaling back some areas and doing some things differently. Having said that the good news is that for the sixth year in succession HCC is planning no change in Council Tax; continuing Hampshire's tradition of levying one of the lowest Council Taxes, actually the second lowest in England.

BROADBAND. For the latest news see www.hampshiresuperfastbroadband.com. It is not totally comprehensive but it's the best there is at the moment facilitating checks by post code and or telephone number.

Roger Huxstep
County Councillor
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