

## **Report for Brettenham annual Meeting 9/5/19**

### **District councillor report**

I am delighted to have won the Babergh council elections in the ward of North West Cosford, of which Brettenham is part. I look forward to working with both Brettenham council and the village community for the next four years.

The results of the Babergh Council election are interesting. The Conservatives now have 15 councillors and other political groups have 17, which means the Conservatives no longer have a majority.

The second largest group is the Independents with 8 councillors, the Greens including myself with four councillors, LibDems with 3 and Labour with 2. I was yesterday elected group leader of the Green group on Babergh.

Babergh council used to be run by a “committee system” which involved councillors from all parties by proportion to the size of their groups in decision making. When the Conservatives won their first majority in 2015, they moved to a cabinet system with the leader choosing his or her own cabinet. By law this cannot be changed for five years.

So however the administration is eventually made up – and negotiations are ongoing – we will have to have a cabinet system for at least the next three years.

The leader and his or her cabinet will be voted on by the whole council at its first annual meeting on May 22.

### **County councillor annual report**

#### **School bus cuts**

I and my group did all we could to oppose this, including referring it twice to scrutiny committee. I fully expect it will lead to more cars on the road, confusion for parents and little savings. I am glad though, that, through our consistent opposition to the policy, we were able to reduce the severity of the final policy change. In particular, we were able to ensure that children who are currently attending a school will continue to receive free school transport until the end of their time at that school – thus reducing the upheaval and ensuring no child is forced to move schools in the middle of their education.

#### **Highways**

I said last year that much of my time has been spent urging highways to do jobs that appear to have slipped for whatever reason. This is still the case. However a new, more pro-active cabinet member for highways does seem to have helped speed up response times and has implemented a new pothole policy – filling in all holes in an area rather than just the largest – which the administration tells me is working to save money, though I have noticed a few failures lately which I have reported. A new head of highways, Mark Ash, who does not have a highways background, has just taken over and it is hoped he will further shake things up.

## **Pension fund risk**

I sit on the pension committee and have been steadily pushing for the committee to reduce the risk of “stranded assets” from holding a high proportion of fossil fuel shares. At the last meeting, the committee agreed to look at transferring some of its assets to a low carbon fund.

## **Leadership change**

In the past year, the leader of the Conservative administration was voted out by his fellow Conservatives and a new leader, Matthew Hicks, voted in. He has been less confrontational than his predecessor and has set up a series of ad hoc, cross party “policy development panels” which so far seem to be working well to bring in new ideas. After pressure from me, the “Suffolk Public Sector Leaders” group is now meeting in public with agendas and minutes published.

## **Special Educational Needs**

The best example of this is the recent panel on SEN which recommended cabinet invest up to £45m over the next five years in creating new places within the county. This has been approved by cabinet and now signed off by the finance officer and should be implemented in the new year. It was cross party input and support that helped the Conservatives agree to invest. However on the downside, the county has just failed its SEND inspection, two years after failing its first one. The inspectors said leadership and governance changes had been made but it had not fed through into better outcomes for parents and children, as health care professionals and educationalists appeared not to be coordinating together.

## **2019-20 Budget and Cuts, Citizens Advice, staff**

Suffolk County Council’s 2019-20 budget was agreed on Thursday 14 February. This will see an increase in council tax of 3.99%, and savings across the council’s directorates totalling £10.1m.

One of the most concerning decisions by the Suffolk administration is to cut the entire grant for this service. I and my group have spoken out against this at every opportunity because I believe it is a false economy. The grant is being withdrawn over two years in two halves and the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups have agreed to fund the other half alongside the county for the 2019/20 year only.

The budget also proposes staffing reductions across all directorates, totalling almost £3m. We do not currently have details of how these cuts will be distributed and which staff will be affected, but I am very concerned that this will result in less efficient services and an increase in stress amongst the remaining staff.

## **Children’s centres**

My group (made up of Liberal Democrat, Green and Independent Councillors) made the decision to withdraw our representative from a Policy Development Panel that was looking into the future of family services in Suffolk. This is because it became clear to us that the sole focus of the panel was on reducing the number of children’s

centres in the county rather than a genuine attempt to find solutions. As a group, we value the work of children's centres and will not be complicit in any attempts to reduce their numbers.

### **Successful motions**

I'm pleased to say that three motions that I either proposed or seconded were passed.

They are

- Developing a strategic, costed five-year cycling plan to improve investment in cycling infrastructure in the county.
- Committing to reducing single-use plastic waste in Suffolk;
- Declaring a climate emergency and pledging to make Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.