

COUNTY COUNCIL
14 FEBRUARY 2019
LEADER'S REPORT

The February meeting of County Council is always the most important other than the Annual General Meeting.

It is when we set the Council Tax precept. More on that later. Members are aware that I sit on the Local Government Association (LGA) Task and Finish Group on Fair Funding and Business Rate Review.

At those meetings I seek to push for more transparency and clarity in local government finance as well as a fair deal for shire counties. The present system anything but clear and simple. There was a telling letter in the FT a few weeks ago referring to the recent purchase of a house in London for £40million on which the council tax paid would be less than on a one bedroomed flat in Dorset. The letter finished "just saying". Of course, that is the problem – it is easy to identify the problem, the difficulty is the solution. Scotland is considering a tourist tax. In the USA there are local state taxes. It is easy to find flaws in all alternatives but it is clear the present system cannot continue much more.

The Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Rishi Sunak spoke recently to the County Councils Network (CCN) and I am confident he is alert to the issues faced by County Councils with huge pressures coming from adult social care and children's social care. Although he is a Yorkshire MP, Rishi Sunak's family live in Hampshire and he started his education at Stroud School, Romsey.

I get the impression he is open to our suggestion on it being better to have a small charge for issuing bus passes e.g. £2 a year to help retain a bus service. Pointless having a free pass if there is no bus, or a small charge at a Waste Recycling Centre so that we can retain all centres rather than no charge but only half the Centres. However, that remains work in progress. Criticism is easy; finding solutions is somewhat harder.

As Chairman of South East England Councils (SEEC), I have had meetings with Housing Minister, Kit Malthouse who referred positively to the work we are doing at Manydown, near Basingstoke. That is a tremendous investment by the County Council and should produce not only huge financial dividends but also much needed quality housing. Our Strategic Land Investment projects are anticipated to generate in the order of £250million of net receipts for the County Council in the period up to 2029/30.

I have also met with Anne Milton, the Schools Minister who is very impressed by the work of FE Colleges and 6th Form Colleges in Hampshire. As am I – and I congratulate Peter Symonds in particular, that has had 60 students gain Oxbridge places this year. Other colleges have also done well and I think their successes are a tribute to the Hampshire primary and secondary schools that prepare their students.

The work of the Hampshire Commission 2050 continues. The next session on 22 February will be dedicated to rural Hampshire. A visit to the IBM European Research Laboratory at Hursley has been arranged and we will also be receiving reports from young people about their aspirations. The Commission is due to conclude its work in June this year and a report of its findings will be prepared.

I was delighted to learn from our Senior Architect, Mr Bob Wallbridge that the Lookout at Lepe Country Park has been shortlisted for a prestigious RICS Award. If you have not yet visited the Lookout – do. It is a marvellous facility and all part of our investment strategy to make the country parks financially sustainable.

Lepe, Gosport, Fareham and Hayling Island will of course be very much in our minds in June this year as we commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings launched from Hampshire and very much masterminded from Hampshire.

We will hear more on Brexit later in the meeting, which could be the last meeting before the UK leaves the European Union. In the meantime, I can confirm that a Hampshire Consortium will receive £2.5m of funding from the European Social Fund.

I also give notice of the proposal to make former County Councillor, Robin McIntosh an Honorary Alderman at the Council's Annual General Meeting in May. Robin served for 16 years and was a very distinguished Chairman of the Council's Regulatory Committee.

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