

**Leader's Report
Annual County Council Meeting
25 May 2017**

First and foremost I wish to thank the majority of councillors for placing their confidence in me as Leader of the Council and re-electing me as Leader. It is certainly no sinecure and not a responsibility I take on lightly but one I will continue to seek to discharge to the best of my ability.

Indeed my young American grandson has declared himself "conflicted" by the result. He has all the American instincts of wanting to win but he would also like me to have more time to visit him and buy ice creams. I hope he will learn that life is about more than winning or ice creams and includes responsibility, commitment and serving others.

I do want to place on record my own appreciation of the commitment shown by Keith Chapman, our outgoing Chairman for his outstanding year. We all know Keith's commitment to the Music Service and I am pleased to announce that Hampshire's Music Service have resolved to make him their Patron. A well deserved tribute.

Keith came from one of the northern most parts of Hampshire up in the Wessex Downs and I now add my welcome to Councillor Graham Burgess, our new Chairman who represents a Division on the shores of the Solent. Those two divisions typify what a great English county Hampshire is.

Elections are not only physically exhausting events but they are intellectually challenging as really complex issues to which, if we are honest, there are no easy answers and are reduced to simplistic slogans. For the next four years we shall all have to grapple with the complexities and not the slogans. We shall have to do this sadly in a dangerous world where terrorists can strike anywhere at anytime. Yesterday I had briefings with the Police and Crime Commissioner and with our own Head of Emergency planning, who assured me the well rehearsed plans moving from a severe alert to critical had moved seamlessly into place. I pay tribute to all those committed to keeping our society safe.

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy and I am grateful to the 36% of the electorate or 370,000 people who actually voted across Hampshire. Hampshire did rather better than the national turnout and in my own Division of Romsey Rural crossed the 40% barrier. I thank them particularly.

I heard one lady in a radio interview say "I always vote because if you don't vote you cannot moan". Sadly that may be a rational position but it is not the case. Many non voters still complain. I suspect the turnout in the General Election will be closer to 70% but perversely it is local government that delivers services more directly to residents than national government. Child care, especially of the vulnerable; education of our children; care of the elderly, with far more needing social care than medical care in the NHS; highways; refuse disposal; trading standards - the list goes on. Those are the services and related issues we must now address.

The people of Hampshire have spoken and have given a convincing result. The Conservative Group garnered 52% to Liberal Democrats 27% and Labour 11% and UKIP, a bare 1%. We will discharge that responsibility given us by the electorate with great care and respect for all however they voted or did not vote. I say farewell to UKIP and leave it at that wondering what they achieved in Hampshire, if anything. But I would like to place on record a tribute to Criss Connor, former Labour Leader who stood down because of serious ill health. I am sure we all wish him well.

Our mission is surely to keep Hampshire prosperous, to maintain the quality of our environment and to keep our good level of services with council tax demands under control. At a recent conference organised by the Southern Policy Centre at Southampton Solent University there was an address by Lord O'Neill, the former Treasury Minister and one of the architects of devolution. He challenged the university academics there and others who claimed the unique selling point or "edge" this region has over others was the quality of IT specialisms. He said "Really?" "Better than London?" "Better than Cambridge?" His answer was that it is your location and environment that is your "edge". Close to the sea but also close to London with good road, rail and air links as well as ports - two National Parks – fabulous countryside and good quality of life. That is why people enjoy living here and what attracts investors. Our task is to sustain the prosperity and the environment and the good services.

Whoever wins the General Election I have little doubt that we will continue to face pressures on our budget. The Health Service needs money, the defence of the realm needs money, with terrorism an ever present threat as we saw this week in Manchester; the police need money. I fear those claims and others will all come before local government's claims for money, so our task is to face up to the budgetary pressures of reductions in government support, demographic pressures - more children and more in need of care - and inflation which is once again stirring. I suggest those who think governments can solve the problem by spending more, borrowing more and taxing more, take a look at Venezuela.

In any event, councils by law have to set a balanced budget so we cannot borrow to cover revenue. We are limited by how much we can raise council taxes. We would need to take some monumental gambles on the property market to do what some districts are attempting by buying hotels in Tewksbury or Mercedes Dealerships as speculative investments. I see that as a very fast boat to the South Seas and a South Seas Bubble rather than a slow boat to China. We face a £140million pressure on our budgets and it is our task to face up to that in as fair and equitable way as we can.

I finish on one other note re Syrian Refugees where we have quietly and calmly offered refuge to a small number of people fleeing that war torn country just over 60 persons in 16 families. I quote one father:

"We had a lovely home. I worked hard for my family. We had a lovely life then the war came. We lost our home, our car, everything. It was dangerous. I feared for my children as there was much kidnapping. A plane dropped a bomb very close and I was injured. We fled to Lebanon and learned we were eligible for the UK Syrian

Vulnerable Refugee Scheme. We said yes right away. We are happy to be here and feel very welcome. I would like to thank the Queen, the Red Cross and Hampshire County Council!"

I think that story puts the other side of the tragedy we saw this week in Manchester.

ENDS

[Check against delivery]