

## **M H Charlesworth – Annual Report**

The year has seen more and more draconian cuts by an indifferent Tory cabinet which appears not to listen to the concerns of fellow councillors or the people who pay their allowances – the residents.

Scrutinizing the decisions of this Tory Cabinet has been challenging, but the main opposition – Liberal Democrats – has held the Cabinets feet to the fire. Under the leadership of the Chair of the Scrutiny Commission (Simon Galton) and the diligence and perceptive questioning of his Liberal Democrat colleagues, all the Tory Cabinet cuts and decisions have been properly questioned and debated.

I wish the same could be said of the sorry Labour group, they appear to have come to some sort of rapprochement with the Tory group. This can be witnessed at the webcasts provided by the County Council on YouTube, there you will see a supplicant Labour group who do not robustly question the Tory Cabinets cuts and decisions. The dynamics between Tory Leader Nick Rushton and City Mayor Pete Soulsby may have influenced Labour's stance at County Hall.

My year (as always) has been spent communicating with residents over a variety of issues and concerns, these range from the poor state of footpaths to the unitary proposal. The remuneration panel could do themselves a favour and ask democratic services for a complete log of member enquiries throughout the year, this would give a clear indication as to the workload of members. Communication with residents is done in a myriad of ways: by delivering leaflets 4/6 times a year, social media, and by letters and phone calls. The officers at County Hall have been most helpful in resolving many of the issues raised and my thanks go to them. As to whether I have been an effective councillor will be decided at May's local elections, whilst I appreciate that they are district elections residents do not readily differentiate between county and district at voting time.

It can easily be recognised from the above that I participate in the decision-making at County Hall and represent the local community in that process. It also demonstrates that I contribute to the strategic direction of the Council, I have taken a keen interest in the Combined Authority bid and will continue to monitor the Strategic Growth Plan and the proposed Unitary bid.

At times it can be difficult to remember that as a County Member I represent the whole of Leicestershire and not just my little corner of Wigston, which is why I deliberately look at issues like the SGP. I believe the Remuneration Panel could ask the Council to put a piece in 'Leicestershire Matters' asking residents if they know who their county councillor is? This would help the panel to see who are visible and known to the electorate.

I have had 2 complaints made against me about comments I made at the County Council meeting in September 2017. These complaints were upheld by a Member Conduct Panel this year and amongst the sanctions that were imposed I was asked to apologise to the 3 independent members of the remuneration panel. This I have

declined to do, as I stand by my comments as being accurate. It is my firm belief that anyone making a recommendation to spend public money should be held accountable and open to scrutiny, the panel have chosen to carry out this role and have put themselves into the public arena.

I am the Liberal Democrat Whip at the County Council and my duties include: arranging group meetings, making sure group members attend meetings and arranging substitutes when they cannot. My principle duty as whip is to create a cohesive group, meaning that while we will have different views on issues, we can reach a common approach when it comes to voting at the Council.

The unitary proposal by the Leader is going to dominate local politics for many months to come; it appears that the primary reason driving this proposal is the dire state of this Tory- led Council; the pretence that it will save money and deliver better services is unproven and disingenuous. This Tory council has failed miserably in its primary duty to protect the vulnerable and needy across Leicestershire.

At the County Council meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018, a report was received from the Independent Remuneration Panel, it recommended that all county councillors submit an annual report (this is it!) and it also recommended what role the group whips should be playing. The justification for the last recommendation is that group whips are now paid £60 for each group member; to enable whips to carry out their duties. It is not up to the panel to define the roles of councillors on how they perform their roles. The panel's role is to set the allowances of members only, I have not seen the panels recommendations for the roles of cabinet members or bag carriers who are in receipt of special responsibility allowances.

If the panel is going to recommend what the whips should be doing, then they should do the same for all in receipt of an SRA, particularly when you consider how much extra allowance members of the Cabinet get.

Going forward the Council needs to monitor the work done by members; this should include a record of attendance on each member webpage; this is done at Oadby & Wigston Borough Council and gives residents a quick view of what each member is doing at the Council. Outside activities as a member also need to be monitored, especially meetings by senior members that relate to issues at the Council.