

Annual report 2018/19

Michael Charlesworth

Sadly, it's been another year of service decline and cuts at Leicestershire County Council. We all know the financial pressures that are on all local authorities, and Adult Social Care in particular. The news that the government has postponed the long-awaited review of ASC for the 5th time is at best frustrating and at worst irresponsible. Add to this the fact that Scotland spends significantly more per person on ASC means that the system is broken.

The further cuts (the Tory administration uses the misnomer 'transformation') to prevention and intervention services are merely storing up problems for the future and will cost the authority more in the long run.

As a member of the main opposition Liberal Democrat group I try to hold the Conservative administration to account, this gets increasingly difficult year by year, mainly because we no longer have a political assistant.

The work our political assistant did was invaluable to our group in terms of fact finding, report analysis and research work. Several of our group work full-time and this makes it difficult (not impossible) to do the role of county councillor and to do it well. The ruling group has all the advantages; extra allowances, officers on tap and early access to information which ensures the opposition groups are kept on the back foot.

I sat on the Scrutiny Commission and was a member of the Fire Authority, but because of my new working hours I have had to give both up and will now sit on the DCRB committee (planning).

The other significant area of council work for me was sitting on the working group looking at the proposed unitary authority. This work is now largely completed and if the council leader can get the support of his group, it will come before the council over the summer.

I am keeping an eye on the Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) for Leicestershire, this will have a huge impact on southern Leicestershire and its District Councils, who are understandably very concerned about the SGP.

The Council has set aside a considerable sum for the proposed HS2 project in the north of the county – money wasted in my opinion as the project may not even go ahead.

Various patch issues continue to concern me in East Wigston, poor grass cutting, shrinking of school budgets and the sale of council land and properties – in particular the decision to close the Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Records Office on Long Street. The old school's future is very uncertain, who wants an old school building?

My attendance at County Hall has not been to my usually high standard this year because of work commitments – and I apologise to the residents of East Wigston.

And finally, the spectre of Brexit hangs over all levels of government, local or otherwise. Its paralysing effect is doing real damage to the council and Leicestershire's residents.