

County Councillor Annual Report 2011-12

Michael Charlesworth CC Wigston Bushloe

This is the year when the cuts in Local Government expenditure really began to bite.

As a member of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee, I saw the reduction in services and the increasing costs for users first hand. I of course, understood the need to increase the efficiency and re-structuring of Adult Social Care, but disagreed with some aspects of it.

My particular remit on the ASC Committee is Arts/Museums/Heritage and Libraries. I believe the cuts already made to these services are excessive and disproportionate to other departments in the council, basically they were – and are – seen as a soft target.

No one can take any joy in making these cuts to services and staff, but I am pleased I was at the sharp end of this process, so I could try to influence the outcomes. Scrutiny's role is to challenge, and although the experts (officers) have a far better understanding of the council's various services, members can bring an outside perspective that can sometimes make all the difference.

I also sit on the Standards Board, and it has been a very active year. Several high-profile cases have been dealt with, and there are some on-going investigations. It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is for politicians to put their foot in it! Perhaps the reason for this could be that we are just ordinary people – but with the public watching every move.

As County Councillor for Wigston Bushloe, I am automatically appointed to the Highways Forum for Oadby & Wigston. Here we get a view of current and future projects for roads/bridges and footpaths etc. It is also an opportunity for residents to present petitions about issues that affect them.

I have also been appointed to the Leicestershire Fire Authority, and this has been an eye-opening experience. The main activity of LFRS (Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service) nowadays is road traffic collisions, but they require a vast and varied skill-set to deal with any emergency that may arise. One of the most rewarding things about the fire service is the degree of informality between senior officers, councillors and staff.

In my patch in Wigston, which is basically the Meadows/Harcourt/Littlehill estates and part of central Wigston, there are several areas of concern. The footpaths on the estates are in a very poor state of repair, as are some of the roads and the repair/replacement programme will never catch up at its present rate. Many of the schools in this area have or will be converting to academy status, this could have many benefits for the schools, but for the county council it means a vastly reduced role in local education.

We have an excellent Library and Records office, and one of my priorities is to protect these valuable local services from further cuts.

With more cuts to budgets looming, I remain alert to any potential problems in the County Councils services.

Michael Charlesworth