

Northamptonshire County Council Annual Report
Moulton Division
Cllr Judy Shephard

As I have reported before these are extraordinary times that the County Council are experiencing. It has been quite a roller-coaster ride!

Our new refreshed Cabinet under the Leadership of Cllr Matt Golby have striven to meet the huge financial challenges which have faced our Authority. We were faced with a £64 m deficit which resulted in an Inspector (Max Caller) and two Commissioners (Tony McArdle & Brian Roberts) being brought in to oversee our performance.

The stark recommendation on the back of this was to embark down the route on becoming two Unitary councils (North and West) within Northamptonshire by the year 2020. Although I understand that this now may not take place until 2021 due to Government slippage. A task force is now in place focussing on local government reform and Leaders and Chief Executives meet regularly on both N & W Steering Groups to progress this.

Our focus has been on continuing and strengthening our financial recovery within the organisation and dealing with the challenges of delivering our key Services that we have statutorily to provide including Adult and Children's services.

In reflection, over the past year it has been quite a turbulent journey! The Caller Report from the Inspector highlighted that it was about "doing the boring well" which indeed was a salutary lesson which we all took to heart.

We are now set to achieve a balanced budget position this year as we are now in the black! This is in part due to being able to raise Council Tax to 4.99% and the special Government dispensation of being able to use Capital Receipts, and the sheer determined effort by the Chief Executive (Theresa Grant), Officers, staff and our Section 151 Officer (Susan Zeiss). We still have the second lowest Council Tax in the Country!

We must maintain this focus in the forthcoming years as it is key to be able to proceed down the unitary route in a balanced outrun position. I believe we have set a good and achievable budget for 2019/20 in part due to our

Transformation programme which has been determined not to disrupt the statutory services we provide but this will also not be without challenge.

Due to the dedication and exceptional work by Officers and their teams (I cannot emphasise this enough!) we have now been informed that the S114 Notice which restricted council spending, imposed last year has just now been lifted. This is a clear indication that progress had been made in the right direction and is a significant milestone. Careful and strict financial controls will of course remain in place.

The County Council now operates only one Overview and Scrutiny Committee as directed by the Local Government Association and I still remain Chairman of the Development Control Committee at present – a position I have loved. I have indicated that I will not be standing at the next council elections as by then I will have completed 25 years as your County Councillor.

JS

May 2019