

Annual report to the Parish Council

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The Government cuts to the County Council grant continue to make the operation of the council very difficult. During the last year all the Directorates have gone through a full staff restructure and there is constant pressure to make savings while continuing to provide good services. In the next three years the Councils across Dorset will be expected to make further savings of over £100M. This pressure is driving all the councils to look at different ways of working as the current situation simply is not sustainable. This devolution agenda continues to be a big discussion area at DCC and of course it makes complete sense to look at fewer councils to save money. The discussions will be helped by the Local Government Association advisors who are working with all the councils, for free, to provide a series of possible options that could be more cost effective while still providing local representation. Combining Councils or two new unitary authorities are being considered. Currently Bournemouth and Poole, which are unitary authorities already, do not look as if they want to join as a single authority with the rest of Dorset. It therefore looks likely that there will be a new unitary covering the remainder of shire Dorset. If these changes are to be agreed by the Government then we have to have firm proposals for Dorset by the autumn of 2016 for them to come into effect in 2019.

One of the cuts that has been agreed to balance the budget is the removal of the members' local budgets. This has been a success for many parishes but it is felt that the little money we now are receiving should be concentrated on our statutory obligations. I am no longer able to take requests for funding although those already agreed will go through.

We will be going to a new committee system from May. Currently the three main committees are silos in their way of working, Environment, Adults and Communities and Children's committees. We now look to work across the directorates in a way that gives a greater integration and understanding of the whole of the activities undertaken by DCC. The new committees will also have the scrutiny role and the audit and scrutiny committee will cease. The audit role will move to the governance committee.

The new committees will be Economic Growth, People and Communities and Safeguarding.

You may be aware that we are changing our youth service provision. We are some £3M overspent on the children's budget and this is because we have so many 10 to 14 year olds coming into care. Currently we have about 440 young people in care

against a norm of five years ago of about 350. It is essential that we start to tackle this problem at the cause and begin to work with much younger children and their families. The decision was made to get our youth workers to liaise and work with primary schools to identify families and children that need early help. They need to be out in the community and not necessarily waiting for young people to come in to youth clubs to see them. The County will no longer operate the youth centre buildings that it owns and these are being offered to the local communities. We are very encouraged by the response and it looks as if all but one of the buildings has either schools or the community interested in taking on the building and youth club. It will be of benefit to these communities if it can work as many of the buildings were only open in the evenings and not every day of the week. There could be many more opportunities for them to be used by local people. There will be a restructure of qualified youth workers to align them with the schools in the community which will be completed by the beginning of September.

We are looking to work in a much closer way with the health services in order to not only make savings in management but also to make the experience one of a single service for people needing care and support. This is still a difficult discussion with partners as people are protecting their own part of the service and of course their jobs. However it is essential that this kind of cooperative working is moved forward quickly. Certainly in my role as the Portfolio Holder for Adult Health, Care and Independence I have seen a big change in attitude, and embracing change, even in the last three months.

After financial difficulties at the beginning of the year Dorset Waste Partnership seems to be turning the corner and the new management have been taking better control of the finances. The new collection system has now been rolled out across the county and the council is currently recycling just over 60% of all our domestic waste and this is one of the best rates in the country.

Our Highways section is also rated in the top ten in the country. We now have a full management plan for all the roads we look after. (some like the A35 are managed by the Highways Agency). This plan has enabled us to apply successfully for additional funding for pothole repair. The most recent grant has brought in just over £800k for pothole repairs. It is still not enough but every little helps.

The next few years are going to continue to be very difficult for the Council and I am expecting cuts that will have a big effect in rural areas. Rural bus subsidies are bound to be one of these areas and you will have heard recently that there is also discussion about the future of the mobile library van service. We will need to work together as a community to see how these services can continued to be provided but perhaps in a different way.

Jill Haynes

