

Quarterly report to the Parish Councils June 2021 – West Northamptonshire Councillor Malcolm Longley.

Good morning all - this is my first quarter report as a WNC councillor in the new Unitary council WNC. This new council has combined Daventry District Council, South Northamptonshire District Council, and Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council. Although NCC will no longer exist the district of Braunston and Crick remains the same as previously and on May 6th. (election day) you had the choice of up to three councillors to represent you in this district. I am very pleased to be able to say thank you for choosing me as one of your representatives and I will do my best to represent you during my time in office.

As you may recall there was a financial crisis at NCC during the 2017/2018 financial year and the arrangements at County Hall were changed with the appointment of a new Chief Executive officer, two commissioners and a plan to create the unitary arrangements we now have in place. Shortly after those events were put in place, I was asked to take over the financial portfolio for the county which at that time I saw as a daunting proposition. The budget had been overspent, the reserves were standing at zero and the borrowings were too high and rising.

Fortunately, we were able to form a strong and dedicated operational team and now three years later we handed over a very different organisation that has balanced the budgets consistently for three years, reduced borrowings every year and has created a reserve fund of just under one hundred million pounds. In addition, the loan maturity profile is now such that the repayment schedule is very low for the county as a whole for the next thirty to forty years which has been designed to give the two new unitary councils the best start in life possible.

During my time as a county councillor for the Braunston and Crick district, there have been two key highlights that I am proud to have been associated and which I hope will continue to be appreciated for many years to come. The first, now completed but not formally opened by the Parish council is the footbridge over the canal at Crick. We all hope that the bridge can be formally opened when the current Covid restrictions are finally lifted.

The second which has now commenced construction at a cost of circa one million pounds is a cycle way from Braunston to Daventry utilising the canal towpath and other available features. This project will be completed this summer and will allow a safe passage either by cycle or on foot from Braunston into the town without risking travel on the very busy alternative highway.

Turning to the new council, I have been asked to take the finance portfolio again and have agreed to do and I am pleased to report that we have started the financial year with a substantial reserve fund of over £100m. However, although the loan repayment profile is benign and consisting of mostly fixed interest rates it remains too high in my opinion and so my three key objectives will be to: 1.) maintain a balanced budget year on year. 2.) maintain the reserve figure at £100m. minimum. 3.) reduce borrowings on a year-by-year basis

As before, I will send out reports on a regular basis consisting of the monthly budget – I will send these out quarterly as they are quite weighty and not everyone will find them of interest, however it will keep you abreast of the day-to-day financial position of the unitary authority. In addition, I will distribute the capital report which will enable you to follow the capital expenditure demands and any project that interests you. Also, I will distribute the quarterly treasury report to enable you to track the latest borrowing position.

Finally, your three councillors will be keen to pick up and deal with whatever issues require our attention and we will be looking to the parishes for our lead in this area as they are best suited to keep us informed of any local need. So, I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Best regards

Malcolm