

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

2009/2010

Following my election in June 2009, I was excited at the prospect of serving the Goring Division for the next four years. I knew I faced a sharp learning curve as I had no parish or district council experience to call upon. This was to prove right and it has taken some time for me to learn about the vagaries of county council business and I am still not entirely up to speed in many areas. However, it has been a busy year and I continue to learn and, hopefully, to make a contribution as best I can.

Committees:

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee: I requested to be placed on this committee as I believe it is an area in which I may be able to make a positive contribution following my 40 years in education. The purpose of this committee is to challenge cabinet decisions in relation to children and young people which includes all matters concerning youth services, education and schools and safeguarding of the young. The committee examines how well the cabinet and the Local Authority are performing so that it can influence cabinet decisions that affect local people and policy making.

One important achievement of the scrutiny committee was to limit the cuts in youth services so that important benefits such as the 'Chill Out Fund' were not heavily impacted. Furthermore, money which had been designated to improve some youth centres was also protected. There can be no guarantees, though, for the future as it is clear that the council faces a difficult financial time.

The committee has also looked at other matters such as what the impact of the dissolution of the Learning and Skills council will be, monitoring youth carers, the Oxfordshire Anti-Bullying Strategy and Action Plan and the measures being taken to reduce teenage pregnancies.

In the coming year, I shall be vice-chairman of the committee.

Scrutiny Committee Working Group:

I have served, and continue to serve on a working group which is looking at attainment in Oxfordshire schools. Whilst our schools perform slightly above average in national tables, we do not do as well as our statistical neighbours. The working group has sent councillors into a number of schools, some performing well, others performing satisfactorily but could be doing better and some which are simply not performing as well as they should. The objective has been to try to ascertain why some do well whilst others do not and, most importantly, what the authority could do better to improve the situation. The first report back meeting is scheduled to be held towards the end of April and it is hoped that something concrete will come out of the exercise.

Other Roles:

Appointment Sub-Committee:

I was a member of the sub-committee which selected the new Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire County Council.

Corporate Plan Working Group:

Throughout the year, I have also been a member of the working group which has been re-appraising the council's Corporate Plan. This document describes the council's medium term focus for responding to the challenges we face as a county.

Clearly, one of the biggest challenges will be the changing demography of the county especially in respect of the age of our residents. The number of people over 80 is expected to double over the next 12 – 15 years and this will lead to many issues relating to the health and care of the elderly.

Champion for Older People:

It has been my duty to champion older people in debates and discussions and to look into matters affecting them.

Council Tax:

The council remains committed to keeping council tax as low as possible. It has been set at 2.75% for the current year as against 3.7% in 2008/09. This has been achieved through careful planning and by a serious and considerate review in respect of efficiency savings.

Local Activities:

There are five parish councils in the Goring Division. Unquestionably, the major issue confronting all five parishes centred around the extreme winter weather and its consequences. Oxfordshire is largely a rural county and the Goring Division is in the far south with no designated Priority One roads other than the A4074. We suffered badly as a result but I was not inundated with complaints as people made the best of a bad situation. I shall, however, be pushing for the B471, which runs through Woodcote and Crays Pond and then down to Whitchurch, to be upgraded to a Priority One road as it carries more traffic than many roads which already have that classification.

Potholes have been, and continue to be, a major problem. The situation has not been helped by the fact that the council changed contractor with effect from April 1st, but it is hoped that the new contractors will provide a better and quicker service.

I have been involved in helping to improve the bus service between Wallingford and Goring although the real credit for this must go to the two gentlemen, one from Goring and the other from South Stoke, who worked tirelessly to see this matter through.

Allowances:

I currently receive an allowance of £8849.76 per annum. You will be delighted to know that I did not claim any expenses in the 2009/10 year.

Conclusion:

Although this has been a demanding year and there has been much for me to take in, I have enjoyed the year. I have particularly enjoyed being involved locally despite the frustrations I have sometimes felt when I have not been able to attain a quick solution to a local problem. I have learnt that there are 74 divisions and hence 74 councillors all wanting action 'now' and so patience is definitely a virtue. I will, however, continue to do my best for the Goring Division and its five parishes.

Dave Sexon
County Councillor
5th April 2010