

2010-11 has been an interesting year of change. The County Council put a lot of activity on hold not only in the time running up to the general election, but for several months afterwards until it was sure of the direction of change. It took the opportunity of that time to attempt to see where it could remove £90M from its budget over 3 years.

The Government did slash public spending in some areas, while spending more in others. Local Government appeared to have taken a very big hit, particularly this year, with what is described as 'front loaded' cuts, meaning more has had to come out of the budget this year than in the next two.

In the event, Bucks County Council had a far better settlement than expected. It is partly cushioned by the fact that 80% of its budget is already funded by Council tax, so was not affected, and only 20% is funded by the Revenue Support Grant. The revenue support grant was cut by less than 1% overall, and by not increasing council tax the County was paid around £5m extra by the government. The County also received about £36m capital grant which was totally unexpected, very welcome, and much needed.

The reason the County has had still to make about £20M cuts is that inflation has to be taken into account, so rising costs have not been met, and specific funding grants for specific services and projects have been taken away, and merged in to the overall grant.

There will be an effect on front line services, disproportionately in social care, learning disability and mental health. But the most obvious one locally is the change to the rural library service, where 14 local libraries, including Ivinghoe, where 50% of the funding is being withdrawn, and they are being asked to become Community Libraries, so that the service can be delivered in a different way.

I must mention that it has been a very difficult time for people working at County Hall, as there have been many redundancies, and no one is secure in their job, and this always has an effect on service delivery.

The other very big issue has been the High Speed Rail proposals, HS2. The intense opposition from the communities along the preferred route, through Great Missenden and Wendover led to the County Council advocating a West Coast main line alternative. This option had been ruled out by the government, and those of us living with the line know how impractical and disruptive this would be, and highly unlikely to be implemented. However I have made it more than clear that while opposing the preferred route on the grounds of the business case and the effect on the Chilterns AONB, the County's position of supporting the west coast main line undermines their arguments, as if there is no business case there is no business case for the line anywhere - and the west coast main line also runs through the Chilterns AONB - or didn't they know? I have not voted for any of the proposals to put money in to a fighting fund against HS2 because of the position on the West Coast main line.

Cheddington parish has attended the Local Area Forum meetings and as co-chair with my fellow county councillors I think that the Forum has been very successful in bringing people together and putting funding in to local priorities, including the Cheddington footway. A new initiative is a Freight Quality Partnership to tackle the inappropriate use of country lanes by HGVs. The inaugural meeting was well attended by parishes from the three county divisions involved, Great Brickhill,

Wing and Ivinghoe, as all have these problems. The freight industry also attended, as did the police, county and district councils. A working party has been set up and progress has begun collecting traffic information, contacting freight operators and setting up a website.

Finally I am pleased to have been able to help three Cheddington organisations this year with the Community leaders Fund, Cheddington school, youth4youth, and the Cheddington History Society.

thank you,

Avril Davies
County Councillor
Ivinghoe Division