ANNUAL REPORT CLLR Gwilym Butler April 2016

The past year has yet again been another challenging year and post the General Election we have seen the ambitions of central Government come to light with major effects on the rural areas and Shire counties.

The Government in its agenda to devolve powers and cut the deficit has made a major policy decision in concentrating on the Metropolitan areas where services such as health and education can be delivered more cheaply per head of population than in the rural areas.

To enable the "power houses" as the government calls them the funding formula to local authorities has been changed dramatically . Historically the council would collect Business rates on behalf of the Government .The Government would then redistribute the monies back to local authorities as grants usually dictating how the money should be spent ,central control. To date Shropshire has received grants from Government which were boosted by around £40 million as a revenue support grant RSG , more than we collected as we are a low Business rate county .

What the government has now decided to do is to withdraw the top up RSG over the next five years which will result in Shropshire losing a further £40million. The money the government saves will fund the Power Houses and deficit reductions , but also staff at Whitehall can be cut back as all future collection of Business rates will remain in Shropshire .

What effect will this have in Shropshire ?

To date over the past 6 years we have reduced our overall budget by £120 million which has cut staff and services to the bone and has resulted in service issues in Planning and Highways . We have however maintained excellent education and other statuary services such as safeguarding adults and children and social care .

If we now have to find savings of a further £40 million are hands are tied outside statuary services it will mean that hard decisions will have to be made around ,Libraries,Museums, Leisure Centres,Transport, Street scene, waste collection .

The council has now started an open and frank discussions with all residents via the Big Conversation ,where we have already got over 2000 residents responding to hard questions . It has also opened an open conversation with Town and Parish councils and the Voluntary sector to understand if there are new ways of working or precept to maintain services.

The councils precept is again controlled by legislation in that we are not allowed to increase council tax by more than 2% per annum without holding a referendum at a cost of around £500K . The government is also allowing us to raise a further 2% ring fenced for Adult Social Care . We are committed to raise our precept by 2% for the next 4 years to help the shortfall ,but it will still mean shortfall of £25 million by 2020.

We are lobbying government to lift the 2% ceiling on raising the precept in consideration that they insisted that we froze it over the past 5 years , which if we had increased it moderately by 2% our budget would be £15million better off than today.

I believe we are seeing a major culture change by government to shrink local government and transfer responsibilities to individuals and communities . There will no longer be a uniform delivery of non statuary services across Shropshire and it will be up to individuals and communities to decide and shape their lives and communities.

There will be no more "its not my fault it is the council !" because the council will only be delivering statuary services such as Planning , Social Care,Licensing and Protection .

The big question now is how involved does the Parish Council want to be come in delivering services and looking at ways of working with Shropshire Council on maintaining and developing services if it is the wish of the local council .

We do understand that not all councils will want to engage and we will have those who are very pro active .

My biggest message is that this is not about now , but it is about how you shape and maintain your community for your children and grandchildren ,and what type of infrastructure do you want for them? What type of place?

I believe it will get harder and harder to deliver statuary services Education , Health , and Care in the rural areas unless we have a strategy for growth and development alternatively we will wither on the vine and the rural areas will be come an elite area for the wealthy . Unless we have a forward thinking strategy for where the whole of society can live, be educated, have a healthy and developed life we will lose everything that is precious to us now in the way we like everything just the way it is.

An example of this is 16-18 education , and the lack of local facilities and cost of transport , will that deter people who have children from living in this area ?

The immediate threats to our local area are the subsidies Shropshire Council gives to the Library £23500 , Youth services,£3000, Leisure Centre £53620,, Highways Maintenance,£3000 per parish signed up , and Transport yet to be calculated.

It would be unfair for the parish where the facility lies to fund it entirely when it is used by those in neighbouring parishes .

If we lost any of those facilities what effect would it have on your lifestyle or your children's lifestyle and how important would it be to maintain those services? Would people want to live here in the future?

The Council is not saying you should run any of those services unless you wish to , but if you wish to precept for any of those services and pay the council or who ever delivers in the future and share the burden to ensure we have a facility for the future.

What would be the impact to you if you paid an extra £1 or two a month on your precept knowing it was being spent on local things for local people . A parish council is a democratic body you would always have the opportunity to lobby for how any funds should be spent and attend any meetings to do so.

Now the SAMDEV has been adopted it will not be long before we have to look at building land supply up to 2036 from 2026 . Increasing Economic development will be vital if we want to increase council income and create local jobs , with that and a growing population due to longer lives we have to have a share of development if we are going to survive as we are into the future . We have the opportunity to be proactive and shape our future rather than having it imposed .

Finally with rising costs of running a Parish Council the Parishes may want to look at working more closely with neighbouring parishes , maybe federating like the schools or merging .As with everything else the cost of delivery and administration is the core cost of a lot of Parishes and would it make sense to work more efficiently ?

This is a huge period of change but also of opportunity and it will be down to you to decide how we move forward . I will try and provide you with any information you may require and look forward to working with you on whatever you and your parishioners decide , it is down to you !

Gwilym