

I sincerely apologise for not being able to make this evening's meeting due to work commitments in London.

I am particularly sorry as this report is my sign-off report from the role of County Councillor. I want to express my thanks to the Parish Council for their support over the past four years. I congratulate Yasmin on her success in the election of May 1 and I know the residents of Willingham will be well represented by her.

At past Parish Meetings, I have taken the opportunity to give an oversight of the County Council. It is a huge organisation – the annual budget is £1.1 billion.

But approximately 80% of that goes on the core services of adult social care, education, special needs and childrens' services. These are statutory services and both the demand and cost of providing these services has increased significantly. Council Tax rises are capped at 5%. But a large proportion of the cost of provision of these services is employment and the increase in the national living wage – which increased by over 6.5% in April – drives up costs. Put that together with the increase in demand for services and you can see that the maths doesn't work.

But no more than 1% of the enquiries I receive from residents relate to those key services. That is good news because when those services go wrong, they go badly wrong and it is to the credit of the Council (and the relief of Councillors) that we have not faced any of these traumatic issues.

But the general financial pressure means that one of the greatest challenges is simply to balance the books, which the County continues to do. Many other Councils have failed to do and gone into effective administration. To the credit of the Council, the financial integrity of the Council has been maintained.

However, it does mean that the flexibility the Council has to do extra things is very limited, despite the fact that there are things residents and we would like to do. Like Highways!

The state of the Highways is poor. This reflects the culmination of years of neglect of preventative maintenance. To get the roads back to a good state will require an investment of £930 million – of which over £500 million is to repair the peat-soil affected roads such as the B1050. These sums are well beyond the scale of what is possible for the County to fund itself and we will be reliant on the Central Government to assist in this.

Nevertheless, we are doing our best with an additional £40 million allocated over the next 2 years for addressing these Highways issues. I am pleased to say that about a million of that will be spent in Cottenham and Willingham, including a carriageway resurfacing of the B1050 through the village to address deterioration. However, it is immediately obvious that while this is good news, the magnitude of the problem cannot and will not be addressed through our internal funding (which essentially means the council taxpayer).

Locally, we have seen some specific developments to mitigate the speed of traffic, improve safety and accessibility for pedestrians. The 20 mph zone and the LHI bid for the footpath along Over Road being two of note.

In summary, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to represent the residents of Willingham at the County Council and thank you for your attention.