

Annual report from Peter Hardy (County Councillor)

The main issue at the County Council this year has been the need to invest another £10m p.a. in the Safeguarding Children service. In the last several years there has been a near doubling of the number of children referred to social services, and the council has struggled to cope with the increase in demand. We have had to increase the number of front line staff to cope with this demand, and most of the increase has been filled by expensive agency staff. Like other councils, we struggle to recruit full-time, permanent social workers in the context of a national shortage.

In the summer of 2014 Ofsted inspected the Safeguarding Children service and found it "inadequate". The Council has taken the Ofsted recommendations very seriously, and is undertaking a number of changes in the management of the service to address the issues raised. Protecting vulnerable children in Buckinghamshire is the most important responsibility that the Council has.

Finding sufficient resources to ensure suitable care for vulnerable adults is also a significant challenge given cuts in funding to local authorities. Vulnerable adults includes the frail elderly, the learning disabled, and so on. The Council's costs in this area are continuing to increase putting pressure on other budgets. Currently 60% of your council tax goes on social services (children and adults) and this is forecast to rise to 75% in the next few years. The Council is therefore investing in preventative services which help to postpone the need for expensive home or residential care, giving a better outcome at a lower overall cost to the taxpayer.

Work on building the waste incinerator in the north of the county is proceeding, and it will start operating in 2017. Locally, it is anticipated that the landfill site at Wapseys Wood will also close in 2017. A developer is threatening to build a large gravel works on our southern boundary in Hedgerley. This output from this facility is in my view not required in the foreseeable future, and the developer's application will be vigorously opposed by myself and by the local community.

The Council is continuing to invest significant amounts of money in road resurfacing -£25m in this financial year. The backlog of work across the county is however running at £200m. In Gerrards Cross Fulmer Drive and Daleside are on the programme for this financial year and I am pressing for Marsham Way to be included as well. I am only too aware that many other roads in the village are in poor condition. Without additional sources of finance these will regrettably have to wait their turn.

Finally, on a personal note, I am stepping down as District Councillor for Gerrards Cross South after 13 years including 4 as Leader of the Council. I would like to wish all the candidates in this year's district council election the best of luck, and I look forward as your county councillor to work with whoever is elected on May 7th.

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