

Suffolk County Councillor Annual Report 2011

Bridge Open at Last

After a mere wait of around 40 years, 2010 saw the Bridge enabling Stowmarket to stand a chance of being gridlock free was open. This vital link is the largest single piece of infrastructure the county council has been involved in this year. As reported in earlier reports the bridge has artwork etched into the parapets depicting scenes of the industrial past of Mid Suffolks largest settlement.

Scrutiny Committees

The Scrutiny committees that sit at the County Council were reviewed this year, after serving on one for over a year, I was sceptical as to how much real scrutiny was achieved. I was delighted when the present Scrutiny regime was scrapped.

Light's Out

SCC adopted a new program of dimming control to their streetlight's. It means that lights will be able to be controlled to the minute, rather than the dawn to dusk regulation at present. It will provide a lamp by lamp control capability. The borrowing needed to achieve this (2.5 million) will be paid for from Energy savings from the network

Pow wow with the chief !

This year I finally got to meet the chief executive of the council. On the 15th of June a full year and 2 weeks after first becoming a councillor, I sent Andrea Hill an "Unhappy Anniversary" card to make known my disquiet that for a whole year the chief executive had not met a leader of a political group within a council that is supposed to be inclusive. I now have regular Quarterly one to one meetings.

New Strategic Direction

This year has been completely dominated by the County councils big idea for saving the huge sums that we no longer receive from central government. The full Council agreed to pursue a programme of "divesting" services to the Voluntary and third sector organisations, in line with central governments "big society" ideal. To national media interest Suffolk it was suggested that we were looking to outsource our entire services. This prompted a new word in the English language, the word to "Suffolkate" meaning to outsource every thing.

At the debate to move forward with this new strategic direction our group put an amendment to insist that the council had a dialogue with communities to see if there was indeed capacity within the community to absorb any level of services.

In the initial stages of this discussion it was quickly realised that this whole approach relies on an honest conversation with our parishes for this to work, so work groups were set up to look into various aspects of this new direction. The groups are looking into Community capacity, Democracy, and another is looking into keeping the council "strategic".

Budget

This year's budget was a brutal affair with cuts announced to Bus services, axing a park and ride facility, closing 7 house hold recycling centres, and ending funding for Lollipop people. One small glimmer of light was the administration finding a 1.7 million pound pot to fund "transformation" this fund was a direct result of meetings our group had with senior management, arguing that communities would not be able to take on many services from a standing start that moving some services from County control would need some funding for this transition.

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