

It is now approaching 3 years since I was elected as your District Councillor. One of my many reasons for putting myself forward for election was that I was very concerned as a Council tax payer that spending in Richmondshire District Council was in the position of being almost out of control. Given the Government's policy of putting great onus on Councils to manage their spending in a more efficient manner we set out as the new administration to find and deliver efficiency savings wherever possible.

This has resulted in a total savings of almost £1 million over the last three years and whilst some of our decisions have been very difficult we have achieved this without making compulsory redundancies among staff. This has meant that in the current budget which I presented to the full Council last month we had to only make a very modest Council Tax increase of £5.00 per annum on a D band property. After this increase was taken into account we were left with an overall budget deficit of £18,300 which was met from reserves. I think it is worth pointing out that had we not taken the measures we had, we would have had a deficit in the current year of £400,000, and a deficit in the next financial year of 2019 of £800,000. Given that the reserves of RDC are about £3.5 million we would have been in the position of being bankrupt within four years had this been allowed to continue.

We have maintained services as much as possible and one of the efficiency measures which we introduced was to require our staff on refuse collection and recycling collections to work 4 10 hour shifts per week rather than 5 8 hour shifts per week. This has meant that we were able to reduce the number of vehicles which we have on the road and resulted in a saving of £90,000 per annum. I fully appreciate that Skeeby was affected in terms of recycling collections when we had the first snow this year. However, we have placed details of all collections and any alterations to those collections on our new website from January this year and I would urge everyone to have a look if at all possible at the details if there are any circumstances such as Easter or adverse weather conditions which will affect the collections.

So it has been a great pleasure meeting and working with the residents of Skeeby and I aim to ensure the standards delivered by both the County and the District Council are maintained and wherever possible improved upon. I congratulate you on how tidy the village is and your community spirit is very present. I have historically when giving this report mentioned how beautiful the village daffodils are but I feel this year we are living in the hope of spring eventually arriving.

In terms of the County Council to which I was elected in May last year as a representative for Richmondshire North which of course encompasses Skeeby, my main thrust has been the issue of speeding through the villages. I was delighted when Skeeby set up their community speed watch initiative and enjoyed taking part in the training evening. I make no secret of the fact however, that I feel that the Parish Councils should be allowed to purchase their own matrix boards if they so wish and in this respect I have a battle on my hands with the Executive of the County Council. It is true to say that I have been quite overwhelmed by the support I have received with the County Council membership of 72 Councillors and of course from people like your good selves discussing Skeeby around a table at your Parish Council meetings. I will continue with the battle until victory is achieved and then if you wish to purchase and use a matrix board, the cost of which is considerably less than the current rate of £3,500 for four years to hire for eighteen weeks of the year, you may do

so. I do not envisage that villages will necessarily purchase their own boards themselves but I do not think it will be very practical for villages to join together and share a board.

Whilst I have not been directly involved in the budget within the County Council I know it has been an enormous task to balance the books. The overall budget of the County Council is almost £ 1 billion and the largest section is now adult and social care where spending exceeds that of education. The council tax has to be increased by 4.99%, it is more than we would have liked but we started the year with a deficit of £10 million and that was only reduced following an additional grant from the Government. I personally have always been very wary of balancing the books in any substantial manner by using reserves because of course once the reserves have gone then they will never be replaced.

Initiatives are being brought forward by the County Council to generate income which will of course help balance the books and keep council tax increases to a minimum in the future. You may have read recently in the press that a Law firm has been set up by the County Council to hire out services and hence generate income. The Allerton Park recycling electricity generating operation is just about to be opened and I am going on a tour of it next month so I will be able to give you more details and hopefully inform of what the benefits will be in real terms at your next meeting.

I look forward to working with you over the next year and please if anyone has any problems please do not hesitate to contact me.

Cllr Angus Thompson
Member of Middleton Tyas Ward
Richmondshire District Council