

Report from County Councillor Dudley Hughes

This year has been for me a great one as Chairman of NCC but sadly due to outside pressures it has been a tragic one for NCC. After over a hundred years of serving the people of the county its demise has been brought about some errors of judgement by previous administrations but more by an acute shortage of funds at a time of increasing demands especially for Adult and Children's Services.

Continuing reductions in funding whilst at the same time having to cope with increasing demands for social care services finally came to a head early in 2018 when it became apparent the Council could not balance its budget for 2017/18 without using all its reserves and/or selling the replacement HQ building Angel Square. This sale has now taken place and the receipt far exceeded the build costs but this is only a sticking plaster so the Government has decided Northamptonshire should move from 8 councils to 2 unitary councils. The aim is for this to happen in May 2020 with new elections taking place that year. Currently it looks as though Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northants will form one unitary authority taking on responsibility for current county services. This means all existing Boroughs, District and County Councils will disappear. Whether this will reduce costs is, I feel, questionable and unfortunately it does not seem there will be a realistic attempt to consult the electors to which I have raised objections.

Despite this councillors fought hard to keep libraries open when most surrounding councils had already turned them into independent or community facilities. Issues around Raunds library have yet to be resolved but thanks to the forethought of the Town Council we are in a good position to take over the Library Building and again thanks to the tremendous support from volunteers we will be able to run an Independent Library.

In all this I do want to record the good things NCC does: we still have good children's homes and maintain services to those in need. Of course NCC would rather provide better services but finances are very limited. Our Children's Services continue to improve and the Social Work Academy set up to help reduce our reliance on agency staff is making a real difference.

Personally I have enjoyed being Chairman of NCC which has provided me with an opportunity to see the great things which go on our County. Volunteers do tremendous jobs in so many ways including a wide range of activities for residents of all ages. The youth groups are numerous, specialist groups for those with particular needs do fantastic work and so do groups for those who are elderly. I have especially enjoyed attending events for the Scouts and Sea Cadets and I was pleased to present awards to our carers: one stands out for me when two 6ft6inch plus Saints players presented awards to two small children who are the carers for their disabled parents. We owe a great deal to all who volunteer in our community.

I regret very much there will be no Empowerment Fund for the next year and I am sure we will see some of our services reduced as NCC responds to the outside pressures put upon us with reducing funds I will however continue to represent the Raunds and Stanwick and Hargrave Division and I thank you for electing me to be probably your last County Councillors.