

St Sampson's Parish Council – Cornwall Councillor's Annual Report, April 2016

The past year has been a difficult one for Cornwall Council as it has striven to maintain the services which the public expect from a local authority whilst receiving ever-decreasing funding from Westminster and government restrictions on the amount which can be recouped by increases in council tax. In the past six years, the council's revenue has been reduced, in cash terms, by some 30% whilst facing increased costs due to inflation and to added commitments arising from government "initiatives" and legislation. This has inevitably resulted in significant redundancies and we should be very grateful for the commitment and professionalism of officers which has enabled the council, so far, to minimise the impact on front-line services.

Whilst there are still those who regret the transition to a Unitary Authority, it should be recognised that, happening when it did, Cornwall Council has been able to adjust more effectively to the more straightened circumstances than most authorities in the country. The fact that we now work on a four-year budget has enabled us to plan ahead, reducing the impact and uncertainty of cuts.

We are fortunate in Cornwall that, although the majority of councillors are members of political parties, our council is not highly politicised and the majority of us see our first allegiance as being to the people of Cornwall. This has been of great importance in allowing us to reach consensus solutions to the problems facing the county.

Cornwall is proud that it was accepted as one of the first authorities in the country to be afforded some degree of devolution of power, the first non-metropolitan one; and furthermore without having to agree to having an elected mayor. This should help deliver better integrated health and care services, have control over the allocation of development funds to ensure that they are used for local benefit and to allow us to develop a coordinated and useful public transport system. We are still pushing for the government to give us greater control over our Planning system in order that it better meets the needs and aspirations of the people of Cornwall, which the national, urban-centred system patently does not.

The Local Government Boundary Commissioners have required us to review our Council electoral boundaries as many of our current divisions exceed the accepted variances from an average numbers of electors per division. We have decided to combine this with a "governance" review, which will consider the role of councillors and the optimum number. Any changes will come into effect at the 2021 election. Work has already started and there will be a number of public consultations during the process, which I would encourage everyone to contribute to.

It has not been easy acting as an intermediary between the Parish Council and the people of our parish and Cornwall Council in these difficult times, particularly in the "devolution" of services which Cornwall Council is no longer able to support such as toilets, libraries and allotments and I must give special thanks to the Clerk and Parish Council, who have worked hard to accommodate these changes. I will continue to try to get essential work done on road repairs, planning and other Cornwall Council services but would ask for patience as the resources, both financial and human, are stretched to the limit.

The progress with the Neighbourhood Plan is encouraging and I would urge everyone to give active support to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion in the coming year. This is not just another "paper exercise". When completed and if supported in a referendum, this will become a document with significant "planning" weight and will allow the people of Golant to have a significant say in shaping the town into the future.

I am very conscious that, when representing three very different parishes, it is very difficult to be physically present as often as I would wish at community functions but I hope that everyone realises that they can always contact me by phone and e-mail and I will try to help. I offer many thanks to everyone who has given me support and encouragement over the past year. It really does make a difference when one is seeking to represent one's constituents in the administration to know that they notice and care.

David Hughes CC

Fowey & Tywardreath Division