

Report for Nedging with Naughton Annual Meeting 8/5/18

When elected, one of my key goals was to hold the Conservative administration to account. My ability to do this was helped by forming part of a larger group of 12 councillors – Greens, Liberal Democrats and Independents.

School bus cuts

This plan first emerged in August and a decision has not yet been made. By delaying consultation, our group gave time for parents and school heads to voice their concerns. Cabinet are due to make a decision in June and I hope they will have listened to the many representations from parents, teachers and councillors like myself. The consultation results showed overwhelming opposition to the cuts plan.

Highways reshuffle, potholes,

Shortly after I was elected, Highways was completely restructured. The idea was to integrate staff at Kier, the company with the contract to repair our roads, with county staff. Under the new structure, rather than contacting individual officers for an area, parish councils and individuals and councillors must contact a central service centre. Though this is in some ways frustrating it does mean that they have a proper record of reports and jobs and can monitor them better. The reshuffle however, cannot disguise the fact that highways do not have enough money to do all the work that they have done in the past. For example Highways are only repairing holes above a certain size that they know could result in damage to a vehicle and hence a claim. Smaller ones, even if nearby, are being left. This would not seem to be a cost effective use of tax payers money and I have raised this with the cabinet member for highways. It is important to report potholes on the website. If someone's vehicle is damaged from a pothole then a claim can still be made if it has been reported and the pothole has not been repaired. If you do not get a response to online reports, please do take them up with me to escalate.

Addressing a culture of secrecy

Four cabinet committees were set up in September. These committees are "advisory" to cabinet only. At the meeting at which they were set up I pushed hard for them to be held in public rather than in secret as was the plan. Although this was resisted by the administration, the cabinet has promised to

review this after 12 months. Later in the new year, it emerged that there is a Public Sector Leaders group which also meets in private and makes spending decisions over millions of pounds. I'm pleased to say that after public pressure from me, they invited the media to their last meeting this month and the districts and Suffolk are now reviewing the way it is governed.

Budget

Sadly the removal of revenue support grant for the county council has left a hole in its budget for the 2018/19 year, even after it has raised its precept by the 5% maximum it is allowed. This is being met by a host of cuts across various services and a small amount from reserves.

Unitary and leadership

The issue of creating unitaries has again raised its head after Colin Noble, county council leader, announced he has hired consultants to look at it. He has said that he prefers one unitary across Suffolk but has said that they will look at options of several smaller unitaries. Following that, but probably not directly related, a challenge for the leadership of the Conservative group and hence the council, has emerged from Cllr Matthew Hicks.

Nedging

I was pleased to contribute towards the purchase of a speed gun for your Speedwatch team and also half the cost towards the implementation of the 40mph speed extension. It was not ideal (30mph and a longer stretch would have been better) but I am convinced that this is better than nothing.

May I wish the parish council and Nedging and Naughton residents well for the remainder of 2018 and I look forward to continue working with you.