

Final County Councillor's letter for April 2017.

I think that when the history books are written in forthcoming years that the period from the July 2016 to September 2017 will be studied as one of the most potentially turbulent and potentially dangerous since the second world War. The interminable conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Southern Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan combined with constant Isis terrorist atrocities across the world and the unpredictable and unstable nuclear situation on North Korea will make a rich pasture for the grazing of present and future historians, but that is always assuming that there is one. The Brexit vote in July 2016 followed by the accession of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America in November 2016 have upset all polls and predictions for future outcomes for the UK in particular and the world in general. The sudden totally unexpected announcement of a new General Election for the Government in the UK due on the 8th of June this year combined with the French vote that two virtual political outsiders, with very disparate policies and desired outcomes, are now the contenders for the appointment to the Presidency of France on the 8th of May, along with the Federal German Elections due to take place in the near future which will decide the future of Angela Merkell could well change the entire political and military stability of Europe. For example Russia is now the second highest spender after Saudi Arabia in rearming and military spending in the world, which will inevitably present a challenge to the new President of the USA and defence spending in the nations in the NATO alliance. Therefore the next couple of months are going to offer no respite from the unpredictable upheavals that seem to be becoming the norm.

Sadly following the Chancellor's spring budget on the 8th of March 2017, the norm with respect to the covering of adult care in the community remains the same. The extra one percent allowed on the annual Council tax rate being merely a refocussing of the normal 2% annual allowance over the next three years into 2 years of 3% followed by a 0% rise. In all cases this concession was inadequate to cover the increases in the adult minimum wage rise, cost of living and inflation. The House of Commons Committee for Communities and Local Government considered reports from the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (Adass) in April 2017 into Adult Social Care and produced its final report stating that the financial state of Adult social care in their words is dire and that increasing financial pressures are likely to exacerbate the situation. In the light of an extensive inquiry it was clear that there were many present and emerging problems with the service. Councils are providing services to fewer people, i.e. only those with the highest level of need, and that level of care is only the minimum to enable those people to function. Less than one in twelve of the Directors in Adass considered that their local Authority would be able to meet its statutory duty under the Care Act and thus could become liable for Judicial Review. According to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) the majority of Care providers are still providing good or adequate services but 28% are rated as inadequate or requiring improvement, and the CQC is concerned that even the current levels of performance are unsustainable. One of the main indicators of care performance is the number of emergency admissions of people over 65 to hospital and the delays in their discharges to home after treatment. Evidence of delayed discharges in the inquiry varied from over 300 per 1000 of the population to just 12 per 1000. In the latter case this was attributed to pre-planned integrated processes, shared assessments and quick access to services. As 42% of the Council provided services were curtailed by an average of £900,000 in 2015/16, the numbers of unpaid carers had to increase by 16% with one in five providing care for over 50 hours a week without any support from the local authority and this

poses a growing shortfall in intergenerational carers and a knock on effect on the health and wellbeing of these people. The Committee felt that the Health Minister's suggestion that the role of carers for their parents should be taken up by their children runs counter to the above and that the £1.6 billion funding earmarked for 2019/20 under the Better Care Fund should be made available now for adult social care. It was noted that 96% of private patients paying for their own care with care providers were being required to subsidise those being funded by the Councils through 43% higher charges for the same service. Even so as stated in my last letter, many providers of care are returning their contracts and going out of business. Therefore the Committee recommended that the CQC should oversee the market shaping, commissioning, procurement and monitoring activities of Councils. It also advises that a process should be set up to assess the costs of care taking into account local factors to guide local authorities in the setting of fees. In the last case it was felt that the driving factor in commissioning relationships with providers was being driven by pursuit of low fees and the Councils duty to fulfil and shape their care ability was being compromised. Examples were given of Councils with poor commissioning practice, unfair contracts, depleted commissioning teams and unwillingness to accept the role of profit in the sustainability of private sector providers. In addition not all councils were monitoring the quality of care provided and or checking factors contributing to sound provision such as providers paying the minimum wage and for travel time or sleep-ins. The recruitment and retention of Care works in the Adult care field is difficult and many worrying statistics were given to illustrate the main reasons; i. The median hourly pay for a care worker is £7.40. ii. 160,000 to 220,000 are paid below the national minimum wage. iii. 49% of care workers are on zero hours contracts compared to 2.9% of the national workforce. iv. 27% of care workers receive no dementia training. v 24% of care workers who administer medication do so without training. Finally and very importantly the Committee recommended that in the light of the sole income for local authorities from 2020 being derived from business rates, which they concluded were unlikely to be sufficient to cover the growing demand for adult social care, that they should be allowed to use some of the additional business rate revenue to close any gap in funding before being allocated additional responsibilities. In this case it is probably too late as at least three previously separate grants covering aspects of administration have already been subsumed into the 2020 business rate income by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and which will have to be paid out from it.

We are living in a world which is still evolving, for example African Elephants tusks are slowly diminishing in size as the gene pool of the big male tuskers decreases due to poaching. However there is a moth called Galleria mellonella, The Greater Wax Moth, whose caterpillars are bred for fishing bait which in nature emerge from eggs laid by the moth inside bee hives where they hatch and feed on the wax combs created by the bees for their hatcheries and honey stores. Beekeepers naturally remove them and destroy them as they diminish the crop of honey. An Italian beekeeper did this and put those he had collected into a polyethylene bag while he did something else, but when he returned 40 minutes later holes had started to appear in the standard shopping bag and this triggered an experiment conducted by scientists in Cambridge when a 100 of these caterpillars were put into a polyethylene bag and after 12 hours it was discovered that the weight of the bag had diminished by 92 milligrams (mg). Scientists say that this rate of degradation is extremely fast compared with some bacteria reported last year which degraded some other plastics only by 0.13 mg in 24 hours. Generally polyethylene is highly resistant to breaking down and even when it does the minute particles choke up ecosystems without degrading. Studies showed that the worms were

not just chewing the plastic but enzymes in their bodies were transforming the polyethylene into ethylene glycol which they can use as a nutrient. The actual processes that break the chemical bond are not yet known, perhaps by some enzyme in the salivary glands or symbiotic bacteria in the gut, but efforts are now underway to find how it is achieved because it could be a solution to the general problem of polyethylene waste and eventually enable the complete removal of the billions and billions of shopping bags in rivers, at sea, in landfills and the general environment etc. If the caterpillars are crushed and made into a paste they have the same effect, so it is integral to the worm's digestion system or physical makeup. As I said at the beginning the world of evolution is still ongoing, so this worm could be the host to the precursor of a bacteria, fungus or microbe that eventually evolves to target our plastic based world as a food source, which is slightly concerning.

On the 5th of May I will e mail the new County Councillors e mail address to the usual recipients so that they can then send future Parish information and meeting dates directly to him or her

Finally I would like to thank all those in the Division for their patience and forbearance during my tenure of the honoured position as your County Councillor.

Yours

Derek Yeomans

Retiring County Councillor for Curry Rivel and Langport.

District Councillor for Burrow Hill