

Dear All

I intend to be with you Tuesday evening but it is a chaotic week so just in case please accept the following report and let me know of any questions with which I may be able to offer assistance.

Marie

News from County Councillor Dr Marie Strong Wells Division (Glaven, Priory and Walsingham Wards) marie.strong@norfolk.gov.uk or 07920 286 597

Norfolk County Council Budget: At the annual budget council meeting in February county councillors voted on how money allocated to the county will be spent. Present were members of the public who attended in order to demonstrate their concerns regarding cuts to the children's centres and to aspects of financial support for young people with special needs. Whilst a deputation regarding climate change received most of the media coverage you will be able to listen on the NCC website to the recording of the budget cuts debate. Whilst the two opposition groups opposed the cuts the budget as presented by the majority group was approved in its entirety.

Cabinet System and Live Coverage: After May NCC's committee system will be replaced by a cabinet system. At the same time the main meetings, such as cabinet and full council, will be 'live streamed'. It is unfortunate, in my view, that we are moving back to a cabinet system particularly since the cabinet makes all major decisions and will consist of councillors from only one political party. Therefore you will miss the healthy debate and exchange of views which the committee system engendered. Fairly or not the cabinet system has been said to engender a democratic deficiency. Fortunately full Council meetings will continue to include the council's 84 members representing all county council political parties and importantly representing each and every county resident.

Changes to District Ward Boundaries: Consideration of how Norfolk's town and parish councils should be grouped into wards is now complete and will take effect from the May 2019 district council elections. Presently the county division of Wells represents the town and parish councils shown at the end of this report. These councils are presently divided into three district wards – Priory, Glaven and Walsingham. Under the new ward system the same councils will be divided amongst the following wards: Coastal, Holt, Priory, Stody, Walsingham, Wells with Holkham.

Changes to County Divisions: Now the district wards have been agreed the county divisions are to be re-assessed with the amended divisions in place by the 2021 county council elections. Although not confirmed it is assumed that as with the re-shaping of the district wards there are likely to be fewer councillors.

County Divisions:

To-date there has been a set number of residents which each councilor should have in their division. Fewer councillors - and fewer residents (see below) - mean some county divisions are potentially set to become larger.

Wells Division is one if not arguably the most beautiful division in the county but at the same time many areas exemplify rural deprivation. As a result of the latter it is one of the parts of the county where many residents find it necessary to move away for work and are these days less likely to be replaced by residents. (County archives show a time when Wells Division consisted of Wells town and two parishes – presumably with a very high proportion of residents.)

Non-residents do not count in the calculation of a division - although if they have bought property they, understandably, anticipate receiving assistance from the town/parish, district and county councillors.

I must add that I am very conscious of the income that can accrue in parishes via non-residents employing tradespeople and of the income from holiday makers. I am also aware that new residents moving in and those who eventually become resident often become much welcomed members of our communities, volunteering for the many schemes which keep our parishes alive.

However there are obviously a range of socio-economic factors which come into play and which deserve further debate than this report.

For now I am focusing on the forthcoming assessment of county divisions and am wondering if the time is not right to carry out an examination of the system of governance at all levels across the county with particular regard to a re-organisation of power.

Such an approach would have many benefits and be preferable, in my view, to simply making county divisions larger thereby allowing less time for county councillors to do justice to those divisions.

All for now

Marie

County Cllr Dr Marie Strong

Wells Division

Barshams & Houghton St Giles, Binham with Cockthorpe, Blakeney, Brinton with Sharrington, Field Dalling & Saxlingham, Glandford with Letheringsett, Great Snoring, Great & Little Walsingham, Hindringham, Holkham, Langham, Morston, Sculthorpe, Stiffkey, Stody with Hunworth, Thornage & Little Thornage, Warham, Wells-next-the-Sea, Wighton, Wiveton