

# Annual Report for Corvedale Division 2019 – 2020

As a result of deadlock at Westminster over Brexit, little local government legislation was passed. A turbulent year ended with a switch of prime ministers followed by a short period of progress post the December election; the departure of the UK from the EU at the end of January; two storms of biblical proportions in February with serious flooding consequences for much of Shropshire; hotly followed by pestilence in the form of Covid 19 and subsequent lockdown. The old adage that fact is stranger than fiction could hardly be more apt.

The legislative stasis caused by Brexit has continued to affect Shropshire. The Government's continuing failure to tackle ballooning social care costs has left our authority with a growing budget deficit upwards of £10m in the social care budget and we have had to raid other budgets to support the service. Decisions on both the Fair Funding Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review remain unresolved so once again we are pegging along on a rollover annual budget. This makes forward planning very difficult.

April 2019 saw us struggling with the deplorable state of the roads in the division. We were dogged by the arcane working practices of our main contractor, Kier, poor communications and a confused reorganisation of the highways service which failed to deliver a good service to south Shropshire's hundreds of miles of lanes, most of them in poor repair

Budget constraints forced the suspension of the clearance programme for roadside culverts, ditches and gullies. As a result when Storms Ciara and Dennis struck, excessive surface water flooding further damaged already potholed roads. Before the Covid lockdown I took two senior highways officers on a tour of some of the damaged Corvedale roads. That we spent 2 ½ hours bouncing over potholes and still only covered half the division speaks for itself, but they promised speedy remediation of our problems. Since lockdown, and with little traffic, repair work is at last proceeding more quickly.

Despite the difficulties in Westminster, Shropshire Council has had a busy year – and so have I. I decided to tot up the number of Council committees and working groups I sit on and surprisingly found they number 17, excluding my external work promoting rural interests through the Rural Services Network and the Governorship of Shrewsbury School; and division work supporting the Corvedale parishes.

My workload divides roughly into four areas:

Environment: AONB Policy and Partnership Boards, which finally saw the publishing of the Glover report into National Parks and AONBs in September. Glover strongly recommended that AONBs should receive more Defra funding as well as statutory consultee status on planning issues. We live in hope, although all decisions are stymied for the time being whilst

Defra is working full time on the implications of Brexit and food supplies. The AONB is currently concentrating on the challenges presented by climate change.

Scrutiny: I chair the Communities Overview Scrutiny Committee and sit on Performance Management and People Scrutiny as well as a number of working groups arising from these. These have all been busy. I have reported previously on the Communities Overview work, but I also chaired a Youth Strategy working group on behalf of the People Committee which recommended greater concentration on the needs of vulnerable young people to counteract the pernicious influence of serious organised crime. I sit on the Financial Strategy Task/Finish Group which spent time perusing the budgets/expenditure of different Council service areas and discussing issues with senior officers.

Planning and Housing: which includes the South Planning Committee, and the Supervisory Board of the new Shropshire Housing Company, Cornovii, which has two development sites identified in Shrewsbury and the north, on land owned by the Council. I have warned them that when it comes to providing housing in the south of the county they will have to take a different approach not least as the Council owns very little land in the south so will have to acquire development land. Furthermore the pattern of settlement in the south differs hugely from elsewhere in the county and needs to be respected.

I am a member of two groups overseeing the review of the Local Plan and studying the type and affordability of housing in the county; as well as working with our Place Plan Officer and Housing Enablement officers on the development and rollout of housing needs surveys to the Corvedale parishes. Latterly I was asked to join a group looking at the distribution of CIL, which has not worked well to date and has been an ongoing frustration for a number of Corvedale communities.

Culture, Leisure and Communities: I have worked with these services particularly in devising a Cultural Strategy which has been sorely lacking in Shropshire to date; with Portfolio Holder Gwilym Butler in promoting a Community and Rural Strategy, based on RSN's own efforts in that area; and also sitting on the Great Outdoors Partnership.

External work is also important. I chaired the LEADER Local Action Group which distributed funding in excess of £1m amongst local businesses in the south of the county. The European Social Fund is still considering its final applications and will then complete its work. These funding sources will be sorely missed, particularly in the rural areas.

Rural Services Network has had a very busy year promoting its template for a Rural Strategy to Government and through various events, including regional roadshows. We had two successful sessions in South Lakeland and Chichester, with more lined up until Covid stopped us. I chaired the Annual Rural Conference in Cheltenham in September on the theme of Creating Vibrant Rural Communities; the keynote speaker was Lord Foster of Bath who chaired the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy, and is an enthusiastic supporter of our work on the rural strategy. Gratifyingly, we had the largest turnout ever. Unfortunately some promising discussions on rural needs that we started with the Treasury ground to a halt with the change of government; this is on the agenda for revival post-lockdown.

I have attended as many parish councils as possible over the year, and was pleased that we managed two joint meetings of the parish council chairs and clerks during the year, in which we discussed housing needs surveys and the Place Plans with our new Place Plan officer, Vicky Turner , and how the Corvedale should approach any potential parish boundary changes which might come forward over the next couple of years. It is good that so many parishes have opted to carry out housing needs surveys; it gives a useful steer on where the housing need actually lies within the division.

All our lives are now on hold, but the Council is hoping to hold a remote Council meeting in May as well as testing the viability of remote Planning Meetings; we are all getting used to working with Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Also, the Council has set up a series of Community Reassurance Teams around the county (shades of our long-lost Community Enablement Team perhaps?!). We come under the south-west team, which is headed up by Pete Banford (with whom I have worked closely over LEADER) and also has Phil Holden and Vicky Turner in the team. This will I am sure be a useful source of help and advice and of course please continue to let me know of any way I can help to get us all through this extraordinary period.

Finally, please look after yourselves and stay safe. I look forward to meeting up with you all before long.

Cecilia Motley

Councillor, Corvedale Division

April/May 2020