

County Councillor's Report to Nettleham Parish Council 11/12/2017

1. First, may I express my appreciation to all those who took part in the first Nettleham Festive Market. It was a thoroughly enjoyable event and I do hope there will be more of these in the future. I found lots to buy and the atmosphere was lovely.
2. In order to monitor motorists' behaviour, the County Council has recently been trialling CCTV cameras outside eight schools in the County. The trial began in January and it appears that the CCTV vehicle helps to improve safety and traffic flow. Responses from schools have been mixed, but there have been positive responses from parents, especially those who walk their children to school - and who perceive badly-parked parents as 'lazy'! The trial is to be extended for a further twelve months in order to see what further options may be available to the council to improve parking near schools. A detailed report on this issue can be found on pages 15 – 32 of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee pack of today's date.
3. Scrutiny of the County Council's IT provision is ongoing with the relevant scrutiny panel getting ready to receive and discuss IT provision in a selection of councils around the country. Reports have been gathered and are to be discussed on Wednesday. My own ongoing issues still include all e-mails disappearing after four weeks with no available setting to retrieve or continue access to older emails. This makes casework very difficult and must be sorted as soon as possible.
4. The second scrutiny panel has recently sent out a questionnaire to ask residents their opinions about the street light switch-off. Do please send in your comments if you have not already done so. Just as a matter of interest, the police have issued a report which states that crime has not increased because of the switch-off.
5. This week I saw Kevin Kendall and asked him for progress on Linelands. He is now keen to receive suggestions from this Parish Council.
6. Last week I attended a budget briefing, which LCC provided for members and where directors provided information about their service areas. Officers are bidding for as many grants and income boosts as possible and the outcome of some of those bids will be known in the next few weeks. Councillors have recently entered into a campaign to try to push the government to provide fairer funding for Lincolnshire. Two years ago, LCC accepted a four-year funding deal (along with 97% of councils in the country), which gives a certain degree of certainty and which allows the council to set a budget for the remaining two years of that deal. After that, it is likely that the 100% localisation of business rates will be in place and, because Lincolnshire could suffer under such a deal, the government is setting up a 'no detriment' clause. LCC's general reserve stands at £15.3 million, but this is for emergencies and cannot be committed to other things. In fact, this reserve is small for an organisation the size of LCC and could be swallowed up in a single emergency event. The Earmarked Reserve is much larger, but is very tightly controlled and is not 'spare' money, a point which is sometimes difficult to get across to some county councillors!

7. I have again attended a Secure Review in Exeter and am pleased to report that the care there is of a very high standard. This means that any Lincolnshire teenager placed in 'Secure' by the courts would be well-looked after if placed there. Such long-distance placements are only used if nothing closer to home is available.
8. Despite repeated requests I am still being sent Highways work reports for Sturton instead of for Nettleham and Saxilby. I know my requests are being seen because I received one correct report a couple of weeks ago, before being sent the wrong ones once again. I'm aware that Highways staff are desperately pushed for time, but I do feel that this is unacceptable. I've now take the issue further.
9. My work on SACRE (The Statutory Advisory Committee for Religious Education) continues. I have some concerns, because this body contributes enormously to the RE curriculum taught in the County and a decision has been made to ensure that Christianity is one of three compulsory religions to be taught, while Judaism is not. I just wonder how Christianity can be properly understood without its Jewish background. The other two compulsory religions are Islam and Hinduism, while Judaism can be taught as a non-compulsory element.
10. I attended a meeting of LALC in Sleaford last week and will be supporting their attempts to raise more money for the provision of courses for councillors and clerks. This budget is very small indeed, but they are keen to keep the cost of their courses as low as possible, so that small parishes can take part.
11. My work with deaf people in Lincolnshire is now at a stage where we are teaching the third cohort of students, many of whom can already hold quite a decent conversation in BSL. The money raised for this training means that Level 2 courses can be offered at a cost of £250, to include at least a year's teaching and all assessment fees, while other level 2 courses in the county are charging £650 for the same thing. This fee differential is important, because it allows low-paid carers to take part and is encouraging some employers to pick up the bill. One employer is paying for three students at a total cost of £750, while the same provision in other parts of Lincolnshire would be prohibitive at £1,950. We keep the fees low by raising money wherever we can and 100% of everything raised goes towards the cost of the classes.

Jackie Brockway

10/12/2017