**BOURTON VALE WARD**

**WARD COUNCILLOR**

**2022-3 ANNUAL REPORT**

This year has highlighted many issues and this is a summary of some of them:

**Planning issues**

The Planning Protocol introduced in November 2020 continues to frustrate. As your District Councillor, I cannot now automatically request that an application should be heard at Planning Committee, even if I am asked for delegated authority. As time goes on, fewer and fewer applications actually make it through the Planning Review Panel. It is now quite usual for only one application to be heard, at Planning Committee. In 2019/2020 the average was seven per meeting.

In an area the size of the Cotswolds with the added layer of consultation with the Cotswold National Landscape, this is of concern. Communications to applicants and developers about delayed or deferred applications is very poor. Many applicants have been waiting for over a year for a decision, many with no satisfactory explanation. This creates frustration and can cost the local economy as contracts cannot be honoured. In some cases, applicants have been forced to proceed without approval and then apply for retrospective approval which can lead to further problems, including poor execution and decision making.

Additionally, the enforcement team have suffered through staff losses and staff absences.

**Peer Review**

A second Peer Review has been conducted during the term of the current administration. Peer Reviews act in the role of an external ‘critical friend’ and dispassionately review the Council’s culture policies and performance. In particular, this review recommended that the relationship between CDC and Publica needed to be more clearly defined and also felt that it was important that a good relationship should exist between CDC and Gloucestershire County Council.

It highlighted the importance of the Overview and Scrutiny committee to provide an ongoing review of the Council and Administrations policies, decisions, and performance.

Council recognised that there were issues with poor staff morale and recommended that the Employee Recognition Scheme was relaunched to enable Officers’ exceptional work to be recognised.

**Budget**

Central Government have changed the methodology in how local authorities are funded. Funds now come in from Levelling Up bids, rural services grants, new homes bonus schemes, lower tier services grants, this all goes to make up what is known as the Core Spending Power.

CDC direct funding is down 49% since 2013, however owing to the new funding streams, since 2013, CDC’s Core Spending Power is actually up by 12%. I was not able to support the 2022 budget as it proposed borrowing £75 million from the PWLB for a ‘borrow to invest scheme’. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP took our concerns for Parliamentary scrutiny, and I was delighted when the administration dropped this imprudent strategy. Cotswold residents were saved from onerous debt and the Council avoided serious financial damage. The figures did not allow for onerous interest rate rises. £350,000 was set aside for consultants for advising on this plan. It states quite clearly in the budget report that reserves should not be utilised to fund normal, on-going service provision. It was decided that the Balances and Reserves Strategy adopts a different approach to previous financial years and will now be used to maintain the general fund balance and the Financial Resilience Fund.

In 2019 the Council had reserves of £13.2 million in 2019. Owing to this revised strategy, these reserves can now be used to maintain the general balance, it is predicted they will be depleted to £2.1 million by 2027.

The 2022/23 revenue budget funded by core Government funding increased by £54,533. Over the life of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), the forecast of Government funding has improved by £913,000.

The impact of the pandemic on the Council’s finances resulted in a net cost to CDC of £190,000.

CDC has a 2022/2023 net budget requirement of £13,625,000.

INCREASED COSTS TO RESIDENTS include.

• Council Tax for Cotswold District Council purposes of £148.93 for a Band D property in 2023/24 (an increase of £5). The maximum allowed for 2022/23.

• Garden Waste licence fee increase of £10 (£47 to £57)

• 2022 - 5% increase in car park fees and charges, including scrapping Free after 3.

CDC SPENDING

• During 2022/23, the Council borrowed £0.5m for electric vehicle charging points and energy reduction measures.

• Over £900,000 has already been spent on consultations and another £629,000 is planned for this financial year.

• Officers will be working with the Council’s Treasury advisors to ascertain whether there will be a requirement to undertake borrowing during 2023/24 to support the capital programme.

• £22.5m has been identified to fund the four year capital programme from 2023/24 to 2026/27, with £7.3m of this being through prudential borrowing.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 to-2026/27

**CDC Leisure Centres** have been closed for refurbishment and continues to be a huge drain on Council resources. A procurement process to identify providers to run the district council’s leisure and culture services has recently been completed. These contracts include three leisure centres and the Corinium Museum & Resource Centre.

**A417 MISSING LINK**

The A417 Missing Link is going ahead. Funding was confirmed earlier this year and ground investigations by Kier have begun. The first ‘spade in the ground’ should be in October this year and it is hoped that this new road scheme will be up and running by the end of 2026.