



County Councillor Robin Brown

Annual Report to the Parish Council

I am delighted to be able to provide my second annual report as your County Councillor in the Woodford and Weedon division.

### **Friends Life Women's Cycling Tour**

Last May, we hosted the start and first two stages of the 5 stage "Friends Life" Women's Cycling Tour through Northamptonshire. The cream of the international and Olympic cycling world participated with 300,000 spectators over the five days and a total of over a million television viewers which equalled the viewing figures of the British leg of the Tour de France. The event was an incredible success for Northamptonshire, both economically and for the prestige of the County. I am delighted to report that we have successfully negotiated 3rd stage of the 2015 tour back to Northamptonshire on 19<sup>th</sup> June starting in Oundle and finishing in Kettering.

### **Educational Excellence: Race to the Top**

February 2015 saw the launch our "Race to the Top" strategy to raise educational attainment in our schools. We are aiming to make Northamptonshire one of the highest performing counties for education by 2020 by encouraging schools to strive for excellence.

An innovative Strategic Education and Skills Partnership Board will be created to lead the programme, bringing together education and business leaders. The project has the support of, George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education and Lord Heseltine who has been working closely with the County Council to make this a reality.



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Race to the Top has been prepared with collaboration with the Department for Education and has three main strands:

1. To identify and intervene in schools across the county which are judged to be failing or in need of improvement. These schools will be given time to produce improvement plans, with a promise of local authority intervention if they fail to improve.
2. An invitation to all schools to apply for a share of the £1million improvement fund for projects to improve young people's aspirations. The bids will be assessed by a panel, including representatives from the business sector via Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership and Northampton University, and the Regional Schools Commissioner.
3. Sixteen new schools will be needed in the county over the next 12 years and the council will be looking for a number of top quality sponsors, with clear track records of success, to collaborate with the LEA in providing these schools.

Good educational attainment is a key cornerstone of the prosperity agenda of our County and we plan to engage local businesses and schools to work more closely together to provide better outcomes for our children.

### **Tri County Alliance**

In December 2014, the leaders of Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire County Councils made an alliance, to work together with the three Local Enterprise Partnerships, (LEPS), to focus on their common economies of innovation, science, technology and creative industries.



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Our strategic alliance is asking Government to allow joint new plans to be developed for transport, spatial planning and other key infrastructure. We want to devolve employment and skills funding so employers' needs can be properly met locally, and support a devolved approach to the local trunk road network. We want enhanced powers over bus services and the ability to maximise public transport between key towns and cities and ensure the best economic benefits are unlocked from projects such as East-West rail and the connectivity of technology centres like Silverstone to the national road network.

Our Tri County area has a Gross Value Added of £45 billion, a population of 2 million people and is the equivalent combined Authority for Greater Manchester. We believe that by creating this alliance, we can find smarter ways to achieving savings for all three Councils and also secure genuine devolution of powers and funding, similar to the Greater Manchester model. It is important to point out that this alliance is not about setting up a super county, but is simply about collaborating on the issues that we have a statutory responsibility for. The alliance is still in its early stages and over the next couple of months we will be working out the details to present to the government after the May General Elections.

### **Our Infrastructure Programme**

The County Council is in the middle of the largest infrastructural investment programme in its 125 year history. In the last five years we have spent over half a billion pounds. During the next five years we will be investing a further £600 million upgrading and building new schools, roads and Superfast broadband. Last year saw the opening of the £35million Corby Link Road and workings on upgrading key strategic junction pinch points. We are laying the basis for the next stage of the dualing of the A43 between Northampton and Kettering.



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Other important road projects include the A45 Daventry link Road, the Weekly Warkton bypass and the A6 Chowns Mill Junction. The Kettering East Development will see the opening of the first of two new primary schools in September.

Work will also begin in the next couple of months of the County Council's New HQ. This is an 'Invest to Save' project that will see the closing and selling of twelve old, expensive to run existing buildings. This project will bring 2000 plus public sector workers back into the town which is an important boost to our County town and more importantly, will reduce our running costs and make significant savings. We estimate that in the first year of running, we will be £300,000 better off and in the next thirty years our annual operating costs will be half of what we would be spending on the twelve existing buildings.

### **The Council Budget and Next Generation Working for Public Services**

The pressures on Strategic Local Authority services are immense. We have already taken out nearly £200 million from our base budget and we have another £148 million left to take our over the next five years. Quite simply, we cannot go on as we are. Our current operating model is not fit for purpose.

Over the next five years the costs of providing services due to a continued surge in demand and other pressures will rise by £104m while the money given to us by government will reduce by £79m. This means the cost of running services will be double the amount of money available to us. At our February Council budget meeting we passed our 2015/16 budget and our new Council Plan to meet these demands and protect front line services.



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Our new strategic direction means that by 2020 we will see a far smaller retained organisation, the right-sourcing and commissioning of services from a new set of accountable organisations and social enterprises which may be owned, managed and run by current council staff. We will be using the Community and Voluntary Sector more in delivering vital local services and most importantly giving our service users more choice and control in the services that they use.

For more information on our council plan see our website

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Council/performance/Pages/plans.aspx>

**Empowering Councillors Scheme**

Our Empowering Councillors scheme is as popular as ever. Countywide we have funded well over 2500 community projects to the tune of over £2.5million. In my district I made sure my money has made a positive difference by funding various projects.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R Brown', written over a horizontal line.

**Cllr Robin Brown**