

DOMINIC BOECK *WARD MEMBER FOR ALDERMASTON*

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2018

Introduction

During the year I remained a member of the Executive Council of West Berkshire Council under the leadership of Graham Jones, Ward Member for Lambourn. Graham had previously been Council Leader for 7 years until he stood down in 2012. Following the terrible accident that Roger Croft suffered in February 2017, Graham was appointed interim leader and, after Roger's accident sadly proved fatal, he was confirmed as Council Leader in May.

Graham's long experience and calm leadership has helped WBC maintain focus on the important challenges of providing the services that residents need while managing finances effectively.

My responsibilities continued to be Culture and Environment and in this report I will expand on some of the challenges and initiatives that I have been part of in the past year.

Waste

In September charges for disposal of non-household waste at our recycling centres were introduced, which included soil, rubble, ceramics, plasterboard and tyres, in line with many of our neighbouring authorities.

Later, WBC consulted on the introduction of a charge for the collection of garden waste from homes. This is expected to deliver savings of £900,000 a year and the £50 annual charge will begin in July. WBC will write to all households next month to explain how residents will be able to subscribe to the service, if they choose.

Changes to street cleaning and litter bin emptying have been made. Except for the town centre areas of Newbury and Thatcham, in future bins will be emptied before they are full rather than by a schedule, as was previously the case and streets will be cleaned when they are dirty and not according to a schedule. If residents are concerned about particular bins or streets and think they need attention then they are invited to report them to WBC's Streetcare service, online or by telephone.

The latest figures from our waste contractor, Veolia, tell us that fly-tipping on council land and the public highway is at an all-time low.

Libraries

I reported last year on the library transformation project which was expected to make savings of £690,000 a year. This has gone very well and our 8 libraries across the district have gone from strength to strength, largely due to the great support from 210 volunteers and the financial contribution from parish and town councils.

Corn Exchange

As part of a long-term plan to preserve this much loved asset, WBC handed over the building to the Corn Exchange Trust. This resulted from discussions triggered by WBC's decision not to fund the Trust when the current contract expires in March 2019. The new arrangement will allow the Trust to continue to provide arts and culture to future generations.

Property

I last year's budget setting round, West Berkshire Council set up a property investment scheme that allowed investment of up to £50M from government loans in commercial property. We are now close to being fully invested which will give WBC an annual income of around £1M.

As well as supporting the investment scheme, officers in the property department have had to respond to calls from central government, following the Grenfell disaster, to provide reports on the risks attendant to high-rise buildings, especially residential. WBC holds almost no housing stock, other than special care facilities, and neither we nor any of our partner organisations are responsible for high-rise buildings. There are no privately owned high-rise residential buildings in West Berkshire and I am pleased that we were able to report to government that the risk of a Grenfell type accident here is very low.

Broadband

This excellent project is in delay but by the end of the year superfast broadband will be almost ubiquitous across the district and much of Aldermaston ward will have access to ultrafast broadband, putting West Berkshire to the forefront of highly connected rural areas.

Boundary Reviews

My last point is on the parliamentary and local government boundary reviews. It would appear that the proposed changes to parliamentary boundaries due before the next general election are very unlikely to be introduced, due in large part to the dependence of the government's majority on DUP members, who do not support the proposals.

By contrast, the local government boundary changes will almost certainly be introduced in time for the local elections next year. The Local Government Boundaries Commission for England listened at least in part to the feedback given to them last year and they have abandoned their plans for a giant ward including Aldermaston and Bucklebury and they have reshaped Aldermaston ward to include Aldermaston, Beenham, Brimpton, Padworth and Wasing. It would appear, to my regret, that I will no longer be representing Midgham and Woolhampton next year, whether I am selected and elected or not.