

# Cllr. Claire Wright – July 2018 County Report (DCC)

## **Health scrutiny review into the Care at Home service**

The review I am chairing into the care at home service, which was stepped up as a result of the widespread community hospital bed closures, has now heard from a series of witnesses, including the Local Medical Committee (GP representatives) a Sidmouth GP, Hospiscare, patient representatives, NHS managers and Devon County Council Social Care teams.

I proposed the review following Sidmouth GP, Dr Mike Slot's concerns that there aren't enough paid carers to provide an adequate service, expressed at January's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee meeting.

I have to say what I have heard so far has caused me much concern. The finished report, along with our recommendations, will be published in time for the November committee meeting.

## **Carers**

At June's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee meeting I asked for a review into the service for carers, after reading a hard-hitting report of a focus group that Devon County Council commissioned last year.

I was not permitted to put the focus group report into circulation as the council didn't have permission of those who took part, however, the themes were that in almost every area carers recorded that the service supporting them had declined and many felt they didn't have enough money, rest, nor was there enough respite care available. Many also reported health problems of their own.

I didn't have enough support from other councillors for the review unfortunately, so Sara Randall Johnson, chair, instead proposed a group of councillors spent a few hours in July, learning more about the service at Westbank League of Friends, which is where Devon Carers are based who run the carers support contract on behalf of the council. One of the things I established is that the Care Act, made legislation in 2016, has introduced a means test both for financial support and for respite care – something I was previously unaware of. Worrying new rules.

I have been supporting carers in my ward (my impression is that there is just not enough support for carers and there is widespread hardship as a result). I hope to move this issue forward at the September Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee meeting.

## **NHS cuts**

I have asked yet again, for yet more detail on the local NHS's plan to return to financial balance by 2020. I have been asking since the beginning of the year and before that and we keep being given such vague broadbrush information that is impossible to see where the cuts and savings are being made and what funding is attached to what area. This is unacceptable. I hope that we will know more at September's meeting, in line with my request.

## **Community hospital motion**

The Estates Strategy, which determines what will be done with NHS owned property, is set to be published soon.

At June's Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee meeting I proposed that the committee (the only legal check on health services) take a position on community hospital buildings, which are at risk of being declared surplus to requirements and sold off, especially because NHS Property Services now owns 12 of them in Eastern Devon, including Ottery Hospital, which sadly lost its beds in 2015.

My proposal was that the committee strongly supported the retention of the buildings for health and social care and strongly opposed any potential plans to sell them off.

It prompted a testy debate, and unfortunately the Conservative councillors block voted my proposal down. It was extremely disappointing. The full account is on my blog.

However, not to be deterred, I have instead lodged a motion for full council to consider. It will be discussed at the September cabinet and return to October's full council meeting for a debate and decision.

### **Environment motion**

While the government of ancient woodland destruction, fracking and a relaxed attitude to climate change appears to have reinvented itself as environmentalist, environmental charities are concerned at the proposed new watchdog that would be in place after Brexit. As things stand it is virtually powerless to bring polluters and breachers of the rules and regulations to book. My motion to full council supports the RSPB position. My motion will be debated and determined at the October full council meeting. You can read more on my blog.

Unfortunately, my previous motions of a similar nature, which have been supported by Devon County Council, have largely been overlooked by central government, including my motion supporting the Veterinary Association on animal sentience (not committed to) nor on the protections for our precious Devon landscapes after Brexit. Many, such as Woodbury Common, Aylesbeare Common and the Exe Estuary and Dartmoor are currently highly protected under the EU Habitats Regulations laws. This is all set to disappear after Brexit and the government has refused to commit to similar laws.

The State of Nature Report 2016 found that we are one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and the trend is further decline. It is reprehensible that the government is not acting on this.

Instead it has just given consent for a fracking operation in Lancashire, which consumes precious fossil fuels and vast amounts of water, which is poisoned by the process.

### **Support group for people having difficulties with the Department of Work and Pensions**

It has come to my attention that many people (especially single parents) are suffering in silence at the hands of the government. They are trying in vain to support small incomes with working tax credits but being let down by the callous benefits system and the assumption by ministers that people who claim benefits are scroungers. They're not. They're mostly hard working people on very low incomes or they are disabled and unable to work, or desperately trying to get work. And in the meantime are being forced to use foodbanks, can't pay the bills, rent or mortgage due to an utterly useless inefficient and callous system. People who have called on me to help are at their wits end and stressed beyond belief.

I am setting up an Otter Valley support group to try and help, as the government relies on the humiliation factor and hopes that people won't talk about their experiences as a result. This needs to change. I am determined to help. Please keep an eye on my blog – [www.claire-wright.org](http://www.claire-wright.org) for dates.

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