

Corvedale Division

comprising the parishes of Abdon & Heath, Acton Scott, Clee St. Margaret, Culmington, Diddlebury, Eaton under Heywood & Hope Bowdler, Munslow, Rushbury, Stanton Lacy, Stoke St. Milborough

Annual/ Election Report

April 2020 – May 2021

Cllr Cecilia Motley

I would like to thank all those who voted to return me to Shropshire Council on May 6. as member for the Corvedale Division. I am delighted to continue to represent this unique and beautiful part of south Shropshire and would like to assure all residents - not just those who voted for me - that I am here to help with any problems they may have with Shropshire Council.

As we start a new four year stint after local government elections it's timely to reflect on the last four years of unprecedented events: a general election in 2017, the demise of Mrs May's government and rise of Boris Johnson in 2019, the Beast from the East, serious flooding, the signing of the Brexit deal and the scourge of the Covid pandemic which descended on us in Feb/March 2020 and from which we are now slowly emerging in May 2021.

The last four years have not been kind to local government. Pressing issues such the comprehensive spending review of public services , local government funding review, business rates reform, progressing the Green Paper on Social Care , Environment and Agriculture bills were stymied by Brexit negotiations, change of government and the imperative need to deal with the Covid crisis and support the NHS.

As the threat of Covid recedes these national problems are still on the back burner and it is particularly disappointing to see the

government still unable to give a timetable for sorting out social care. This service is still desperately underfunded and is one of the greatest responsibilities faced by principal authorities like Shropshire, which bear the brunt of escalating need and have to take money from other deserving budget areas to meet demand.

On the brighter side Shropshire seems to have come through the Covid crisis relatively well, though the strain on both acute and primary care health services has been severe. When lockdown struck Shropshire council staff were mobilised into different teams to organise support with benefits, government grants and the furlough scheme as well as distributing grants to help community buildings which had been forced to shut down. The vast majority of staff were ordered to work from home, and councillors likewise. Our public health directorate was on call 24/7 and did a fantastic job dealing with and closing down Covid outbreaks quickly.

After a hiatus of some eight weeks, council committees started to get back into action through remote zoom and Teams meetings and parish councils followed suit. Soon it was almost business as usual. In our case remote working served us well, despite enduring full Council meetings that sometimes took 6 hours to wade through, depriving us of the will to live.

As lockdown lifts it is unfortunate that Government cannot extend the legislation to allow parish/town councils the flexibility of meeting remotely, particularly in the cold winter months. Hopefully this decision will be reversed later in the year.

I kept busy throughout lockdown with my usual range of responsibilities: the Communities Overview Committee, which I chaired, covered a lot of ground ranging from reviewing options for rural public transport to revising the rules for Homepoint housing applications. The Planning Committee kept going with full agendas

as did AONB Partnership and Strategy Boards and the numerous committees and sub committees I sit on, some 17 in all.

Rural Services Network, which is the national champion for rural services and which I have chaired for the last six years, has had a productive lockdown: the 2020 Annual Rural Conference was held remotely over five days and attracted over 400 participants; we have delivered a full range of seminars on issues such as rural health, housing, and rural economies and are still bombarding government with facts and figures through our Revitalising Rural campaign to level up the rural areas.

Touching briefly on the election campaign, it was good to have the opportunity to get out and about round the Corvedale and Apedale and meet people who are obviously feeling more confident about the future. Many residents praised the success and efficiency of the vaccination roll-out in Shropshire. The biggest issue on the doorstep was the dire state of our rural roads. This will be an absolute priority for the incoming administration to sort out.

Finally, the election count on 7th May was a surreal experience, held at the Shrewsbury Sports Village. Due to Covid restrictions there was none of the usual scrum of people looking over each others' shoulders at ballot papers and making emotional speeches whether they won or lost. Instead the atmosphere was sterile (not just due to face masks and quantities of sanitiser); we were called into an empty, cavernous hall individually, the votes were counted, the results announced and our prize for winning was a box of Covid lateral flow tests! Then we were ushered out by the back door and that was that.

In my longish political career I now reckon I've seen it all!

Cecilia Motley

