

Mr Chairman, councillors, residents of Hardingham, thank you for inviting me to speak.

The financial climate in which local government operates continues to be challenging, with significant and on going reductions to core funding being experienced at the same time as substantial service cost pressures. However there are positive improvements that I can report from county hall.

This year the council launched the new Early Childhood and Family Service. This will have greater reach to those more isolated children and families in need of help and advice, through increased local support, easier to access information and crucial outreach work while continuing to deliver services previously offered.

The council will be moving, not removing, some services into libraries, nurseries and community centres, alongside 15 new service bases. Crucially, this more efficient use of infrastructure means money can be invested on delivering the services that we know are needed to a greater number of children and young people, across Norfolk.

The council will also be investing £120m in special educational needs and disabilities provision in the County.

People affected by loneliness and social isolation in Norfolk can now turn to a comprehensive range of new services for help and support.

The new services include a county wide network of “Life Connectors” who work directly with people to provide coaching, practical advice and support to help people make and maintain relationships and strong links within their community.

The new services also include outreach, promoting volunteering opportunities and benefits, and addressing rural issues such as transport and use of technology in order to support people to become and stay well connected in their local area.

This year the council announced a £29m capital investment scheme to deliver 3,000 extra homes for older people in Norfolk over the next ten years.

The focus in highways has been on pothole repairs and resurfacing. Money will also go towards bridge maintenance, and repairs of signs and drains. The council knows that potholes are a big issue for road users and I hope you have seen an improvement in tackling this problem. I was able to donate some of my members allowance towards a clean up of signage and white lines in the parish and I will continue to liaise with highways over any problems via the parish council.

I am very glad to report that the no 17 bus route will continue as it is, on Tuesdays and Fridays. From Bradenham to Dereham via Hardingham and returns after a couple of hours. The officers at County hall took the time to meet me and to listen to the case in favour of retaining the service. However it is a case of use it or lose it.

For those who wish to find out more about the services provided by the county council, there is a wealth of information to be had from the councils website and I recommend it as a first port of call for any information you might require.

Finally I would like to take the opportunity to thank John Sharples who has done so much for the village in his time as parish council chairman and to also thank the parish council and parish clerk for all their hard work throughout the year and to all those residents who volunteer their time and enthusiasm towards making this such a great place to live.