I was taken ill that required treatment at the JR for a few days, I’m more than happy to talk about our fantastic NHS and DTOC however there are big areas for rationalisation and efficiency savings. I have been diagnosed with diverticulitis which is manageable if not particularly pleasant. I would like to thank everybody for the kind messages they are appreciated.

**Devolution**

An alternative form of Local Government has been put forward by the City and Districts Councils. It’s frustrating that given the County council provide 80% of services that we were not consulted upon the proposal before it was announced. It’s ironic that the motion passed at the County budget meeting had a reference to working with the City and District councils. In fact a week before the announcement I had emailed all the other Leaders saying that we should all sit down and work out the best Governance for the residents of Oxfordshire. My suggestion was to look at all options to allow an open and transparent debate rather than putting forward a proposal that has been devised behind closed doors.

There is a lack of detail regarding the City & District proposal. I am concerned that by creating 4 authorities the costs of County functions will be increased by additional bureaucracy or alternatively if the functions are lifted and shifted into a new Combined authority quango then directly elected democratic accountability will be lost.

The main function of the City and Districts councils is planning future housing development. For the last 3 years they have been unable to agree housing numbers in each area despite all signing up to the process in the first place. This has meant that some of their local plans are effectively on hold that could allow speculative development across the county. How can they suggest another partnership when they do not have agreement on their base function?

The new Cotswold/WODC council will obviously have one headquarters and there is no detail of where that will be located. Will that mean residents of West Oxfordshire traveling to Cirencester to deal with their local council?

Yes I welcome the fact that the City and Districts have acknowledged there needs to be a reorganisation of Local Government in Oxfordshire however it needs to be done in an open and transparent manor taking into account all options, for the benefit of the residents of Oxfordshire.

**County Budget**

I’m sure you are aware that the County Budget was always going to be challenging. Despite the loss of a member of the Conservative Independent Alliance there was sufficient support for the budget that Cabinet put forward to be passed. However the difference between the amendments by the opposition amounted to around £4 million on a budget of £570 million. With that in mind negotiations took place between me and the Leaders of the opposition parties to see if we could achieve a united County Budget.

The amendments to agree the cabinet budget were:

*1*

*In relation to SC21AB&C – £1.5million with full review of the all-day service for older people.*

*2*

*SC12 – Put in £2m in order to ensure in terms of service and geography the needs of the Children of Oxfordshire are met.*

*3*

*Transition – To create a cross party board of members to consider maximum benefit from use of temporary funds across services and across geography of Oxfordshire. This fund will be for 16/17 a total of £4million with £1million allocated for creating a one off pump priming fund for one year to take to districts and parishes, inviting them to commit money to support Children’s Centres which they would help save, a £1million added for income generation pump priming. Homelessness budget also to be considered*

*4*

*Workplace parking levy– commit to a full review of implications with a view to implementation as early as is feasible.*

*5 SC1A*

*A review of cabinet members*

*Separate free vote for all Councillors*

*We propose that a full and timetabled consultation for unitary government to be put in place to discuss this issue on a cross-party basis with district, town and parish councils with the clear aim of bringing it to fruition.*

Full details of the budget can be found at:

<http://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MId=4402&Ver=4>

With the amendments the budget was passed with all Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Independents voting for it. Within the budget there were savings that none of us wanted to make however members were pragmatic to ensure a balanced budget was passed.

**Major Incident at Didcot Power Station**

Oxfordshire County Council’s Fire and rescue service led the multi-agency rescue operation that still continues following the partial building collapse of Didcot A Power Station on Tuesday 23rd February. The loss of life is tragic and my thoughts and prayers are with the relatives. Updates are posted regularly on the OCC website.

**Village Resilience Fund**

Oxfordshire communities are being urged to tap into a special 'resilience' fund to help them to cope better with emergencies. The SSE (Scottish and Southern Energy) Resilient Communities Fund offers up to £20,000 to help communities to:

• Protect the welfare of vulnerable people during a major power cut or emergency due to severe weather.

• Enhance community facilities and services that may be needed during a major power cut or emergency due to severe weather.

• Improve communication during an emergency situation, to keep communities informed or to aid contact between local groups and response services

Further information at https://www.ssepd.co.uk/Resiliencefund/ or call 0141 224 7191

Ian Hudspeth