**Report to Abermule Community Council ( July 16)**

**From: Cllr. Wynne Jones. Elected Member-Dolforwyn Ward**

1. **Effects of ‘Brexit’**

It is still far to early to form an opinion of the effects of Brexit on Welsh Government, Powys County Council or indeed on delivery of local services. However so far the following is relevant

* That the political uncertainty caused by vote to leave, means that we shall have a new Prime Minister and probably a new Chancellor, which could mean changes in the financial approach from government and to the austerity programme.
* The current Chancellor has abandoned his plan to eliminate the budget deficit by 2020 ( which he has blamed on Brexit but in reality he was way off target anyway and was never going to achieve his target). This means that austerity will continue beyond 2020, which is very bad news if this is so,
* Welsh Government have been advised by Whitehall that there will be an emergency budget in autumn and that there could be further cuts to public spending- again if this happens it would be very grave news indeed.
* Welsh Government, amid this chaos and pathetic lack of direction, have torn up their budget timetable and put their plans for a 3 year budget on hold. Likewise at PCC we are having to do the same, and have now moved the Councils budget meeting to the last week in February 2017 ( that’s as late as is possible) and we are completely re-jigging the whole budget process.
* One of the effects of Brexit and the subsequent 10% fall in the value of sterling is going to be inflation which we are being advised will reach 4% by December 2017. If this is so it will have an effect on the Councils MTFPlan to the effect of around £2m per year, and additional savings will have to be found accordingly.
* All Welsh Councils are currently undergoing a revaluation of Pension Funds and with the main relevant stock indices down around 10% as a result of Brexit (ignore the Footsie 100 that is not relevant) this could dramatically increase the ‘hole’ in Pension Schemes which in turn will significantly affect the Councils budget which has to provide the revenue to ‘fix’ the hole. We are currently asking Government to delay the revaluation for one year.
* Obviously with the RDP Programme with over £4m for Powys through to 2020, we are concerned if the programme will be cut short, Meanwhile we have to attempt to draw down on RDP Funds as quick as possible ( for obvious reasons)
* We are concerned about what the decision means for farmers, as the farming industry has a big effect on the economy of Powys. Currently the Common Agricultural Policy applies and subsidies are paid by EU in accordance with that policy. With our exit from EU we will also leave the CAP, and as agriculture is a devolved function, there will be no ‘British Agricultural Policy, but instead an policy for each region, in our case an Agricultural Policy for Wales set by WG. We have huge concern that with many flagship WG projects in Labour areas that will lose EU Funding, Welsh Agriculture will have to compete with those, as well as the NHS, for any funding devolved from Westminster. In addition we will have agriculture for different regions, on different policies, all trying to sell into the same market in the UK.

1. **Decision making on School closures and mergers.**

Recent Welsh Government change of legislation has opened up the possibility of decisions on school closures being taken by either Cabinet’s, Area Committees or Full Council’s. Previously this was a delegated function of Council’s Cabinets which could not be removed or interfered with. As a result of this change a motion was brought to an extraordinary Meeting of Powys County Council on 16th June proposing that Full Council makes the relevant decisions on school closures. The motion attracted a great deal of support from County Councillors, most of whom saw it as an opportunity to stop the schools transformation proposals dead in its tracks and/or stop current proposals that affect their area. Full Councils have a poor record of making such difficult decisions both in Powys and other Councils. I are pleased to report that the motion was lost by 1 ( Yes one!!!) vote. So responsibility now remains with Cabinet, but in the case of proposals regarding High Schools, there will be a Council Seminar where Members can debate the issues, but will not be able to make any decision.

1. **Next election and Local Government Bill.**

As part of the negotiations with LibDem and Plaid, the Labour administration in Cardiff, had to agree to drop their proposals for the reduction of Councils in Wales to 8/9. This means that the previous proposed electoral arrangements for Local Authorities and Town & Community Councils have now changed. Both levels of Local Government will now hold elections in May 2017 for Councillors to serve a 5 year term ( previous proposal was LA’s 3 years and T & CC 6 years).

The new Minister for Local Government, Mark Drakeford, is now looking to work closely with Local Government with a view to taking a new LG Bill through the Senedd in the second year of the Assembly programme, but in doing so wants to first of all reach broad agreement on its content. He seems to want to encourage voluntary Local Authority merger where there is an appetite, wants to see more integration between Councils and their Local health Boards ( eg. Powys) and feels there is a need to reduce the number of Town& CC Councils. The new Minister’s approach is a breath of fresh air compared with the previous approach of Minister Leighton Andrews( who is now consigned to political obscurity after losing at the ballot box).

1. **Update on LDP**

After beginning the LDP process in 2010 as the then Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, it is with some delight that I have now re-joined the LDP Working Group. This has come about due to Cabinet changes which saw the Cabinet Member serving on that group, losing his on the Cabinet.

Work continues at a pace to make the changes to the Deposit version as required by WG and the appointed examiner, with the Council given a 6 month window to achieve that. The number of houses in the plan is unlikely to change, but we are having to provide considerably more evidence to support that, particularly around the specific area requirements. We also have work to do on the amount of land allocated for business development. Where there will be a big change is on the section regarding renewable energy, with current work showing that there is considerable opportunity in Powys for renewables, including substantial opportunity for PV and RHI as well further opportunities for wind and hydro.

1. **Grass Cutting.**

At last we have got the grass cut in Abermule, although I are less than happy about the quality of the work, some of which is caused by the fact that the grass was so long it is then difficult for the machines to deal with it in a tidy manner, and I have organised that they return immediately to finish the work properly and completely.The poor service is nothing to do with cutbacks at PCC. The situation is that the framework contractor P & W went out of business and the Council has tendered the business and the new contractor (Greenfingers) have failed to recruit enough staff in a timely manner to cope with the work involved in the contract. They have had to move 10 gangs in form other areas in order to catch up and that is now happening, but the initial take up of the new contract has been less than satisfactory, and although there will be financial penalties applied, that does not negate the effect of the poor service has had on communities affected.

With regards to the grass cutting on unclassified roads in the ward, that is due to begin next week ( wc. 11th July) so that is about 2 weeks later than last year.

Wynne

Cllr.Wynne Jones.