

Report from Derbyshire County Council – Review of the Year.

Following the historic County Council election in May 2025, I was very honoured to be the first Reform UK County Councillor to be elected to represent the Breaston Division, which encompasses Breaston, Draycott & Wilne and Borrowash. I, along with 41 other new Reform UK County Councillors formed the majority group in Derbyshire (42 of 64), and we consequently took control of the Council. This was obviously a very steep learning curve for all of us, none of whom had been County Councillors before. As well as being the local Councillor for our area, I was chosen to be part of the new Cabinet that makes many of the key decisions at the Council, with the portfolio responsible for Finance and Resources, which we renamed 'Council Efficiency (DOGE)'.

After his retirement following 55 years of service, I also had the impossible task of stepping into Cllr Parkinson's shoes! I was however, delighted that the Council were able to recognise Cllr Parkinson's unstinting, durable commitment to our area and Derbyshire generally, by conferring him with the title of Honorary Alderman.

As you can imagine, this first year has been an incredibly busy one for the new administration! As well as 'learning the ropes' of how the Council functions, we're expecting to deliver a financial outturn that balances revenue expenditure with income – something we're legally required to do, but which many councils have failed to do in recent years – including Derbyshire. During three of four preceding years, the previous administration of Derbyshire CC had to plunder a cumulative £132m from the reserves to balance the books. This was clearly unsustainable, and so we needed to ensure that in our first year, the priority was to 'steady the ship', which we have done, while maintaining and in some respects, improving services.

The budget we inherited at the beginning of the financial year ended March 2026, included planned savings of £37.5m, which we have largely delivered. In addition to these though, we have also realised approx. £20m pounds of additional savings which have off-set the exceptionally high increase in demand for services, particularly Childrens Social Care.

Another priority of the new Reform UK administration was to start to recover the lost years of under-investment in road maintenance. We've all been plagued by the potholes that are a clear indication of this, and we repaired the backlog of 17,000 potholes within our first six months. Another wet winter though brought many new potholes, although we began the Spring in the best position the Council has been in for many years. Although this is a problem that will take years and many hundreds of millions to permanently resolve, we doubled the spend in our first year to £60m, on permanent repairs, and increased the workforce who carry out temporary repairs. The next two years will see even greater investment in permanent resurfacing repairs.

The new financial year is likely to see even greater demands for Childrens Social Care services, along with the ever-increasing demands on Adult Social Care services, due to our ageing population. These continue to place severe pressures on the Council's finances. This is in addition to the continuing inflationary pressures largely brought about by central Government policies, particularly around Employer's National Insurance increases and above inflation Minimum Wage increases.

A significant, although diminishing, proportion of County Council funding comes as a 'Revenue Support Grant' (RSG) from central Government. The settlement for Derbyshire was recently determined for the coming 3 years, and unfortunately, due to the Governments policy of directing more funding to urban councils, the Derbyshire RSG funding level will increase at a level below expected inflation, meaning a 'real-terms' reduction. This meant that despite more significant saving planned for the next two years amounting to close to £100m, we were still faced with a funding gap that required a Council tax increase of 4.9% in April 2026.

Although this was much higher than we would've liked, it was, marginally, the lowest over the last 4 years, and although it's little consolation, Derbyshire residents still enjoy lower than average council tax bills when compared to similar councils.

We ended our first year, we believe, with a more financially sustainable Council and although there remain significant challenges, we believe it's already starting to improve its performance.

We are also making significant changes to the way the Council operates, including the staff 'culture' and hopefully over the coming months and years you will see the benefits of these changes in further improvements to the services.

I realise that I'm now starting to sound like a politician, promising 'jam tomorrow', so I'll close here.

Finally, I'd like to thank you for your support in my introduction to public life.

Cllr John Lawson