

WSSC Janet Duncton Report December 2025

First and to get it over with you will all have noted that the Government have cancelled the Mayor election for 2026. This after all Parties and Independants have made their declarations and started work to get their position across.

That said they have not as yet said if County elections will be cancelled or not and I have no idea why. To set out the position which I know you have had before but is important.

This year the elections were cancelled by the Government. It was not asked for but their choice. This year when we submitted our Unitary propositions we included a request that they consider cancelling the County elections for 2026 and here is the reason why.

If there is an election whoever wins will have one year. After that they are just a shadow authority for one year while in 2028 the Unitary elections will take place. In 2028 we will disappear as County, Borough and District Councils and no longer exist. Well that's the Government Plan as we have it of now. Of course whether on a new Council or not you can put your name forward for the new Unitary authority but that's a choice.

It has been suggested to Government that they could bring the Mayor election to 2027 so that the Mayor is in situ before the Unitary but they haven't made that decision as yet. If they did and with the present situation that would be be County elections 2026, Mayor elections 27, Unitary elections 28 and great! a possible General Election in 2029. We'll be all elected out and the cost of course is many millions of pounds for each election which could be better spent on Services but hey ho, it's not our decision so we wait with bated breath for the next revelation.

I won't bore you with more of that for now but it will come back I'm sure so watch this space.

Now in the real World. (Childrens Services have had OFSTED in and now we wait for their decision on our improvements to this Service. I have to say I am hopeful that we have achieved at least Good, outstanding may be a bit to ambitious but you never know. It is certainly a Service that has improved out of all recognition. We have a brilliant Cabinet member in Jacquie Russell who has worked closely with the Service on their journey. I must add that one of our Social workers in that Service came second in a National award scheme for childrens Services so we must be doing something right. I've said before OFSTED has already judged our Childrens homes as either good or outstanding which is some achievement.

Fire and Rescue has also done a stirring job since it's first Inspection report some 5 years ago and took on board all the recommendation for improvements. As ever the only improvement that is constantly in the red is our Retained Firefighter part of the Service and to be honest I can't see it getting to either amber or green.. I would ask you once again if you know of anyone in your community that may be interested in looking to take up the challenge of a retained Fire and Rescue officer please encourage them to go on line and look into it. Some have even gone on to eventually get into the Fire and Rescue Service as their career. So many opportunities.

A quick word on Highways. You now have winter plans and I hope the weather isn't so bad that it is disruptive but who knows. I have been pleased in 2026 to get so much work done in my division but it is a constant battle and believe me I don't stop.

Have a great Christmas and everything you wish yourselves for 2026.

I take this opportunity to thank you all for your help and guidance as ever over the past year and look forward to working with you in the new year.

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