

## **District and County Councillors report – May 2014.**

As I write this report, , road works are under way to resurface roads in Stourton Caundle and between Hazelbury Bryan and Sturminster Newton, following the mess made of them inadvertently last year. The Highways Department have done their best to rectify the situation which appears to have due to a combination of poor quality material and inclement weather. I understand the plan is to put two layers of resurfacing down and then seal on top. I just hope their latest efforts prove more successful. In the meantime, we continue to be plagued with potholes on the country lanes and I can only urge you to continue reporting them so that the Highways people know where they are and can deal with them. It is an on-going battle and a thankless task.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April I had the pleasure of attending William Barnes School in Stur. for the presentation of a new school bell, the old one having cracked through enthusiastic use during the years. The new bell was the Town Council's contribution to the celebration of the school's centenary. Numbers attending the school, or intending to attend the school, are increasing and the governors are planning to to make additional use of the library and the IT suite to house additional reception classes for the next two years. The County Council are working on plans to replace the school with a new purpose built one on the other side of the town in the hope that it can be open in two years time, September 2016, just as the William Barnes runs out of space. There will be consultation with parents, governors, townspeople and most importantly the children as part of that planning process. One thing which is clear is that sadly there will not be a swimming pool as part of that new scheme, although space is likely to be allocated for one if ever it can be afforded. The site of the current school will be released for housing, the funds raised contributing to the cost of building the new school.

The Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan Team of local volunteers is working hard to get the views of local people on how they wish to see the town develop over the next twelve or so years. Consultation on education will form part of their work. As well as replacement of the William Barnes School, Yewstock Special School is expanding into a new site on the other side of Honeymead Lane in order to create more space to accommodate young people staying on in education for longer. It is intended that this extension will open in September 2015. One spin off of the new site will be additional off road parking for school staff, thus hopefully making life easier for local residents who find the daytime parking in that part of Honeymead Lane something of a problem, which they have been in discussion with the Head of the school to try and resolve. Once Yewstock and the William Barnes School's needs have been attended to, the County hope to be able to turn their attention to The High School, replacing some of the temporary buildings which have been in use for quite a long time.

As a County Councillor I have been increasingly involved in the work to restructure Children's Services with the aim of improving the service given to families and children in need, whether that need is for simple short term advice or the longer term needs of children in care, and a range of needs in between. Councillors have a responsibility as "corporate parents" to children in the care of the local authority. We want our children to succeed as well, if not better, than children not in care. It is encouraging to know that educational achievement of those children is improving, but still lags behind children being reared by their parents. Children are not taken into care lightly, and all will have had difficult times before coming into care, which itself is a very frightening process. The local authority have established a "virtual school" with its own staff and headmaster whose role is to work with the actual schools our children attend, in order to help the schools meet the children's needs. I spent my working life as a social worker, both in the Probation Service and for the last ten years managing a Youth Offending Team and I find this part of my Councillor's duties especially interesting and challenging.

All local authorities are having to work on reduced budgets, as a result of government controls and cuts in grants, apart from the parish and town councils who have greater control over their own destiny, for the time being at least. Both the County and District Councils are facing 40% reductions in income over the next two years. Hence the need to find more efficient and effective ways of working. The bulk of their activities involve providing a direct service to the public and increasingly councils are pulling back to those services they are required by law to provide. In North Dorset the District Council has worked closely with the market towns to establish community partnerships to help residents achieve their ambitions for their own areas. A small working party, of which I have been a member, have just completed a detailed review of those community partnerships to see how they might continue to work effectively but on a District Council contribution reduced by around 40%. The recommendations of the working party are now out for consultation. What is absolutely clear is that the highly valued Community Resource Workers are the key to the work of the partnerships but keeping them is going to require a joint effort from the towns as well as the District Council.

Public transport is an ongoing issue for our rural area. The deadline is 31<sup>st</sup> May for young people wishing to continue in school to apply for concessionary places on school transport, if these are available. The X8 students and workers early morning and late afternoon bus service between Sturminster Newton and Blandford and back has been saved until the 4<sup>th</sup> July, the end of term. We as councillors are working with officers to see if we can find a way of providing a link after that date. We recognise the vital importance of this service to those needing to work or study in Bournemouth and Poole, the loss of which would have very bad long term implications for our area.

Pauline Batstone,

District Councillor Lydden Vale Ward and County Councillor Blackmore Vale Division.