

County and District Councillors Report – December 2013.

Although I was away in West Australia for a month from mid October to mid-November, I did keep in touch via my iPad and dealt with some issues from there. The main issues I have been involved with in October to November are as follows:

Roads and obstructive parking has been the major source of complaint from residents across the Blackmore Vale Division. People appear to totally ignore the Highway Code in several places in our area and cause problems for their neighbours who cannot get in or out of their roads or in the worst cases heavy vehicles have to take detours because they cannot get through because of parked cars. Residents are concerned that emergency vehicles will also not be able to get through. The police, through the Police and Crime Commissioner and also local police officers, have made it clear that they will take no action unless the road is totally obstructed. Breach of the Highway Code by parking on pavements, too close to junctions or on yellow lines will apparently not be acted on by the police. The County Highways Department will not put down yellow lines unless they are sure they will improve the situation and most importantly can be enforced, which means having sufficient Parking Officers available to monitor them. In reality the Parking Officers are not going to be around rural areas sufficiently to effectively enforce yellow lines there. Also the legal processes needed to approve yellow lines are extremely expensive and the Highways Department, like all local government departments, has a limited budget. The only answer is for residents to show consideration to their neighbours. I also find it hard to understand why the police will not enforce the Highway Code which all good drivers expect to obey, for their own safety as well as others. In particular, parking on pavements is a hazard to anyone with sight or mobility problems. I have brought this to the attention of the Police and Crime Commissioner who holds to the view that the police have a responsibility for crime and do not have the capacity to deal with breaches of the Highway Code.

As the County's "Equal Opportunities Champion" I have responsibility for ensuring the issue of equality is addressed by officers and councillors in the setting and administration of policy. I represent the County on the Dorset Race Equality Council and also sit on the Diocesan Social Justice Group and Support Group for the Diocese Gypsy and Traveller Chaplain, all of whose meetings I have attended in the past month. The County recently adopted its Equality and Diversity Policy which addresses issues of discrimination on the basis of not only ethnicity but also age, gender, disability and rurality.

As County Councillor I was approached by the Housing and Communities Agency representative, Mark Glendenning, to ensure local residents in Newton were aware of a proposed exhibition of plans for a courtyard development of business starter units on the North Dorset Business Park. Unfortunately that exhibition has had to be postponed for a week or so because Mr. Glendenning could not make it due to a family bereavement. It would seem this will be the first development on the site.

Both the District and County Councils are going through the budget setting process and at the time of writing this report we await the details of the Revenue Support Grant.

As part of the budget preparation and necessary savings the County have been reviewing the cost of subsidised public transport. At DCC Cabinet on 3rd Dec. decisions were taken to make savings of £850K although the officers have prepared proposals which make savings of over £100K above that. Consequently the cuts to be made are not as radical as first proposed, in particular leaving Saturday services in many areas. A working party is currently looking at the issue of school transport for over 16s to try to prevent the same administrative problems next year as have arisen this year. The County policy of no free transport for those school pupils over 16 remains the same.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee of NDDC is currently examining the funding and operation of the four Community Partnerships and Rural Enterprise Partnership to see if there are more effective ways of operating.

The District Council is holding a special meeting next week to consider its response to the Boundary Commissions proposals. The Lydden Vale Ward\Blackmore Vale Division will lose Woolland in recognition of its close links with Ibberton in the Bulbarrow Ward. A proposal that the area of Plumber and Haydon should transfer from Blackmore to Lydden Vale was dismissed. The Boundary Commission is also proposing that Hinton St. Mary should be part of the Marnhull District Ward\Stour Vale Division.

I continue to chair The Friends of Sturminster Newton Library who are working with the library service to increase the viability of our library.

I have been attending meetings of the Sturminster Newton Neighbourhood Plan Group .

Pauline Batstone,
District and County Councillor.
3rd December, 2013.