

COUNCILLOR'S REPORT FOR AUGUST 2013 – Pauline Batstone, County, District and SN Town Councillor.

1. Electronic Communications

Deep joy, I have finally managed to get into my Dorset County Council e.mail Account regularly from home, and also, as a failsafe device, e-mails sent to the DCC account also appear on my NDDC account. This may seem a relatively trivial event but not knowing if I was missing any important communications from residents or officers via the DCC account was very worrying. Now all I have to worry about is getting rid of all the e-mails which I do not need to know about. One difference from being a councillor in the 1980s and '90s and now is that a very considerable amount more time, every day, has to be spent on the computer, both dealing with e-mails and reading information – and masses of paper still comes through the door, but at least now, thanks to the new recycling collection scheme, it is easier to get rid of.

2. And talking of recycling and waste collection

Problems continue to be reported in specific places where things have not gone to plan. In particular, waste not being collected at all or not on the expected days. We do seem to have too much duplication of vehicles chasing each other around the lanes which needs ironing out. The point was made to me by a farmer's wife recently was that any working farm is going to be accessible to the large rubbish collection lorries given that any working farm is going to have milk tankers and other large lorries visiting it, however apparently narrow its farm lane. A few people are still, when I last heard, waiting for their particular bins, because of problems with the initial delivery. Slowly things are coming right, I think, and I do thank the Dorset Waste Partnership Staff for their efforts to deal with problems as quickly as possible, working through the weekends as necessary.

3. Equality and Diversity Champion's role

I was given the role at County Council of championing Equality and Diversity – that includes challenging all the "isms" i.e. racism, sexism, ageism, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or physical, mental or learning disabilities. The aim is to work with officers and fellow councillors to ensure that the County Council, through its decisions and actions does not discriminate, inadvertently or deliberately against residents and visitors on the grounds set out in the Equality Act 2010. All county council reports are assessed for their impact on equality issues. I am Joint-Chairman of the Dorset Forum on Equality and Diversity which brings together all those organisations working in this field in the County – that meets quarterly. I am on the Board of the Dorset Race Equality Council which meets monthly in Boscombe (a trip down memory lane for me as I spent three enjoyable years managing a Probation Hostel in Boscombe). The largest ethnic minority group in Dorset are the gypsies, who have lived here for the past four hundred years or more. I am a member of the Salisbury Diocese Gypsy and Traveller Chaplain's support group, the Chaplain being Rev. Adrian Brook of Durweston, and his job is to provide spiritual guidance to the gypsy and traveller community and guidance to those other clerics working with them. Dorset has a relatively large elderly population, who fortunately live longer and healthier here than anywhere else in the country, but they may have mobility problems which we need to respond to.

4. Children's Services

As a member of the Children's Services Overview Committee I am learning how hChildren's Services, which includes education and child care, operate in Dorset nowadays. I worked with families and children all my life in one guise or other but systems and regulations have changed since I retired four years ago. Two local families have approached me for help in

sorting out problems they are having with children's services, which is part of the work of a Councillor. I hope to re-establish my links with the Dorset Youth Offending Team and with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme which I have had a long standing interest in (and memories of cold wet nights in tents on Dartmoor and in the New Forest on expeditions). As the local Member I am also on the Management Committee of the Sturminster Newton Youth Centre.

5. Personnel work

I am on the Personnel Committee for North Dorset District Council and the Personnel and Appeals Committee for Dorset County, the my first meeting of which I attended in July. A large part of my work as a manager before I retired was dealing with personnel issues and this is an area I enjoy. The Committees do not get involved in individual cases, other than appeals, but their main role is to set policy.

6. Roads

During the spring we had considerable problems with potholes which seemed to appear overnight, and there are still existing road problems from that time. I will be taking a trip around the Division with the Highways Team on 7th August to identify with them what the issues are locally and what may be done. There are a number of road closures during August and September to allow resurfacing work to be done, in Stalbridge, Stourton Caundle, Okeford Common and Glue Hill in particular, and the details can be found on the Dorset Travel website, plus I endeavour to post them on my website and Facebook page when I receive notices.

In the longer term there is the need for improvements to the north-south routes in the county, in particular the A350 and ideally the C13 between Blandford and Shaftesbury. I was nominated to represent North Dorset on the Dorset Local Transport Body which has the responsibility of allocating funds for major road works in Dorset and which met in July. Unfortunately the Body only has funds for the A338 Spur Road and other developments in the conurbation in the east of the County for the foreseeable future. However, we at North Dorset are determined to campaign for funds for improvements to the roads in the north.

Not only do we have problems with our roads when we are trying to travel on them, we also have problems when we stop. Disabled drivers wanting to park in Station Road, Sturminster Newton, have been told that they can only pull up to set people down, which is not a lot of use to someone who cannot walk and needs to park near to the shops to pop in for something. Sturminster Newton Town Council will be meeting with Highways officers in August to discuss this and to make a plea that the disabled should be allowed to continue to park in the lay-bys in Station Road. If anyone causes an actual obstruction by parking elsewhere, then that is a different issue. Stalbridge Town Council is similarly meeting with Highways officers to try and resolve the issues of parking in Duck Lane. Lydlinch also has parking and footpath problems of its own.

7. Team North Dorset

Team North Dorset is a quarterly meeting of District and County Councillors and Officers, with local town, housing and partnership representatives, rotating round the market towns for their meetings. The purpose is to consider and address local development issues by bringing as many interested parties together as possible. The most recent meeting of the Team was in July at Sturminster when, amongst other things, consideration was given to how Sturminster may move forward with its agreed Development Plan for the Town Centre by accessing infrastructure funds made available through the European Union and the UK

Government. It is hoped this will finally lead to some development on that grotty bit of land behind the Co-op at the traffic lights in Stur. Currently the developers have imposed so many restrictions on what could be done there temporarily, that it is impossible for anything to be done to improve its appearance.

8. DAPTC Northern Area Meeting

I attended the July meeting of the Northern Area of the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils. We received a presentation from Dugald Lockhart who is leading on the Superfast Broadband for Dorset County Council. Greater availability of superfast broadband across Dorset will provide a platform and catalyst to drive economic growth, to transform public services, to deliver digital inclusion, and to bring new opportunities to individuals and communities across Dorset. The ambition for Dorset is that 95% of premises will have access to Superfast Broadband through BT's fibre optic network of at least 24Mbps and all other premises to achieve access speeds of at least 2Mbps. Through working with other providers of broadband the County hope to enable at least 97% of premises to access Superfast speeds. The scheme is to be delivered by mid 2016.

9. Planning issues

I attended the North Dorset Development Management (planning) Committee meeting on the 30th July. There were three planning applications within my Division – Rudge Hill Farm solar farm (amendment to S106 agreement), a unit of holiday accommodation at Sycamore Farm, Stur. Newton and planning permission for up to 20 weddings a year at The Victorian Barn Woolland. As a Sturminster Newton Town Councillor I presented the comments of Sturminster Newton Town Council. On the Rudge Hill Farm the Town Council were concerned that if the solar farm was developed, the loss of workable agricultural land would make the farm too small to justify the two houses currently belonging to it. The application was adjourned for a month because of irregularities in the paperwork submitted. The Town Council had no objection to the holiday let at Sycamore Farm. The parishioners of Woolland were divided on the Victorian Barn application which was refused by the Committee.

10. Strategic Delivery Committee

The Strategic Delivery Committee is a new innovation, having its first formal meeting in July at which I was elected as Vice-Chairman. The purpose of the Committee is to bring together senior officers, party leaders and councillors to develop the strategies to deliver the policies of the council. Prior to the first meeting taking place a training session was held. Training was also held this month for councillors on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The role of that is to scrutinise decisions going before the Cabinet of the Council and also the Council's performance against agreed measures.

11. Peer challenge

"Peer Challenge" is a process set up by the Local Government Association following the withdrawal of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment targets by central government. In the past few months Dorset County Council has been going through such a process of inspection by a team of Councillors and Officers from other authorities. The Council is just getting feedback from them which seems to indicate, on the part of staff and councillors, a desire for change and to find new ways of working with local communities to deliver services within an increasingly difficult financial position.

12. Health Service changes

Through my places on the County Public Health Committee, NDDC's Scrutiny Committee and also my involvement with the Dorset Race Equality Council I have become particularly aware

of the way changes in the health service are being implemented. I have attended presentations on the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group whose role it is to commission clinical health services in Dorset, in accordance with their strategic principles of designing services around patients, preventing ill health and reducing inequalities, providing sustainable healthcare services and doing so closer to patients homes. Dorset Race Equality Council has been commissioned to promote HealthWatch. Healthwatch is the new independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of the public. Healthwatch plays a role at both national and local level and will make sure that the views of the public and people who use services are taken into account.

13. Friends of Stur. Library

I am Chairman of the Friends of Stur. Library and on 9th July the Friends and guests spent a pleasant "Evening with Roger Gutteridge", well-known local author. This is our second "Evening" thanks to the staff of the library, Sandy and Rosanna, and we look forward to welcoming Hilary Townsend from Stalbridge for an "Evening" on 10th September. I am about to meet the newly appointed Area Manager for the Library Service, Manny Manohoran, to discuss the recruitment and training of volunteers to work in support of the library staff, to enable them hopefully to increase opening hours and put on events which they do not have the time to do themselves. The aim is to increase the use of the library and thus help to ensure its long term future as a core library. As County Councillor for Stalbridge I have also been invited to the about to be established Community Libraries Forum which I will attend to support the Friends of Stalbridge Library.

14. Friends of Guys Marsh

I became involved with the Friends of Guys Marsh when I first retired and have been fascinated to be reintroduced to the ways of the adult prison system, having spent three years working as a Probation Officer at The Verne Prison twenty-five years ago. This means a monthly meeting to support the Friends in their work to raise funds for projects to benefit the families of prisoners and aid prisoner rehabilitation. I also help by serving teas and coffees to prisoners' families in the Visitors Centre every couple of months or so.

15. Lord Digby's School OGA

During July I chaired a meeting of my old school's Old Girls Association when we agreed on an award to be presented to a girl at Gryphon School who is judged to have made the greatest contribution to school life in the preceding year. The two Sherborne Grammar Schools closed in the early 1990s on the formation of the Gryphon School. It has long been the wish of us, the "old girls" to make a contribution to our successors and we are pleased to have found a plaque with the LDS school badge on it, a fleur de lis, which will be presented annually.

16. Four Fetes, one village party and a trailer ride

I recognise that it is the duty of a councillor to use their allowance whenever possible to buy entrance tickets, raffle tickets and generally support social activities in their patch. I had the pleasure of attending four village fetes in my Division during July. I visited the open garden at The Old Rectory at Pulham and attended a lunch for The Children's Society at The Old Rectory at Fifehead Neville. I was also delighted to be invited to the village party organised in Mappowder on a lovely sunny Saturday afternoon. Finally there was the fun of a trailer ride on a beautiful summer evening around Glanvilles Wootton. Events like these make you realise just how lucky we are to live in such a beautiful, sociable county.

17. Councillor's Surgeries

I continue to hold monthly "drop in" surgeries but I will not be available on 7th September as I will be away that day. I will be cutting each surgery short by a quarter of an hour from September onwards so that I can also be in Sturminster Newton, The Bibbern Gallery at The Exchange on the first Saturday of each month, and Stalbridge hopefully at The Hub on the third Saturday. My surgeries from September onwards will therefore be held as follows:-

1st Saturday of the month (except 7th Sept.) 9.30 a.m. – 10.15 a.m. Glanvilles Wootton Village Hall, 10.30 a.m. – 11.15 a.m. Pulham Village Hall and 11.45 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. The Exchange, Sturminster Newton.

1st Thursday, 10.00 a.m. – 10.45 a.m. in each month – with the police at Thyme after Time Cafe, Woodrow, Hazelbury Bryan.

3rd Saturday of the month 9.30 a.m. – 10.15 a.m. Mappowder Village Hall, 10.30 a.m. – 11.15 a.m. Hazelbury Bryan Village Hall and 11.45 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at The Stalbridge Hub.

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