



CHARD TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2010

Mayor's Annual Report

2010 has been a good year for Chard as a Town, although it may have not been a good year for some - especially those who have lost their jobs, or even their homes, due to the recession.

We need to keep uppermost in our thoughts those, who are struggling due to the economic down turn and those, for whom day to day living has become very challenging.

In Chard we are very fortunate to have some very good and stable employers, like for example, Numatic, where I was honoured to be invited this year to tour their premises. All those Henrys and Hettys whizzing through production and so many Chard people involved in the "birth" of each one.

I use the word "birth" as I was thrilled when Numatic generously donated a very special May Day Henry for my May Day raffle for my charities. As you read this you may already know how much he has made but considering he is a one in six million Henry it was well deserved.

This was just one example of the generosity of Chard businesses for my Mayoral events this year. Many members of the public and fellow Councillors have also given generously not just financially but also of their time to assist these worthwhile charities. These charities need our support for their research work to bring about a reduction in the incidence of Cancer and further, so that those living with Cancer have their lives improved.

All of this would have been worth nothing without the support of the people of Chard and surrounding areas and my fellow mayors and Chairs of Councils who have enjoyed the many events we have put on this year.

So a big thank you to all those who have volunteered their time and resources to make those events possible and, of course, to those who have dipped into their pockets to raise the money.

Unfortunately I have not been able to make all of my visits this year. Over Christmas I had a dose or two of the Flu and it was not possible, and certainly not advisable, to make the seasonal visits to the Hospital and Care Homes. I was able though to attend several summer fetes which were very enjoyable indeed. To meet residents and talk to them about the Mayoral Regalia was very interesting especially meeting one resident who I am sure must have been related to a past Mayor. Certainly her Great Grandchildren were excited when they found their family name on the back of one of the links!

I have also been able to attend many AGMs of Chard organisations. Whilst you often see the same faces in different places - especially one Councillor who seems to be part of many organisations, it is humbling to see so many volunteers who clearly give so much time and energy to these groups.

The selfless attitude of these volunteers who help raise money for charity, or help people, or bring enjoyment to others is outstanding. I always knew Chard was a place where many put others before themselves but I had not realised just how many there are making such a difference to Chard.

The Town Councillors this year - like no other year in my time on the Council, have really come together. The team of Councillors have put party politics to one side, to work collectively with the staff to improve the finances, tighten budgets and do things differently to ensure our council tax for Chard Town is not increased. Not only this but

also to ensure we are doing everything we can to get the very best value for money from every penny you give us from your hard earned finances.

We have also been determined to work hard to get finances into Chard to support our retail sector. Working together with the District and County Councils we have secured grants to make the Town look better - and more attractive, so that more people come into Chard to do their shopping. When I stood in the Guildhall (this room) at my 'Mayor Making' I tried to encourage everyone to look around Chard and buy locally where they can. I know residents have been trying to do just that but a little more is needed to ensure our shops survive.

If we are to survive this recession all of us need to pull together as a community and our shopkeepers are vital parts of our community.

We can do nothing about the weather and didn't we have our share of it this year? The snow came, and then came again and again! Whilst the children were having fun, and some parents too, it was difficult for many to get around. Some were bound to home and a many could not get to work. Inevitably there were some who complained and were persistent and quite vocal in their opinion that the "Council" should do something but there were many who quietly just got on with their lives, helping their neighbours, doing their shopping and fetching the essentials. Once again the 'many' rally around in difficult times and it makes me proud to be Mayor of such a 'caring town' as Chard.

The Council wants to harness that spirit -and resilience, ready for when the bad weather returns, so if you are one of those people who wants to do your bit for your neighbours we want to hear from you.

Our parks in the town continue to improve. Thanks, in part, to some grants from Government passed down through the County and the District to Chard we have a brand new exciting play facility at Jocelyn Park. Ashcroft is next on the list.

Improvements, such as these, take time and money but little by little we are getting there.

I wish to thank all my fellow Councillors for their support this year, and my family and friends, and newly made friends who have been helping with my charity events. To the staff, especially Kate who has dealt with my diary and John and Sarah for your patience - thank you! Thanks also to my Deputy, Cathie for her attendance when I can't be in two places at once. Finally, to Garry my consort and husband, who has been my rock, my chauffeur and especially my timekeeper, thanks.

This has been a great year but I cannot bring my speech to a close without saying I have purposely kept it short to allow you all to ask questions. If there are none it will give more time to Sgt Andy Lloyd to give his Police Report. I am hoping he will not be too long though, because we have to present the Outstanding Service Awards to just a few of those people I mentioned earlier. The nominations this year have again been very emotional to read and I know of at least one recipient who will be blushing!

Thank you all.

Jill Shortland

Mayor of Chard

The Town Clerk's Report - 2010

This report concludes the third year in the Council's four-year term. In 2011 we shall be looking at elections once again, though not National but Local Council Elections. For Officers this is a time when we reflect upon those Councillors whom we have got to know. It's a mixed feeling as it is Councillors who make the decisions – Officers merely advise.

Your Town Councillors are elected democratically by the people. They are not paid and receive no expenses or allowances. Often when they are the subject of abuse and criticism I wonder what it is that drives them to accept this onerous and demanding role. In Human Resource (HR) terms they are in effect Unpaid Employees of the Council and are entitled to receive the same 'duty of care' that a paid employee is entitled to receive. The laws of slander and libel are of cold comfort to the recipients of accusations and innuendo when the perpetrator chooses to hide behind a *nom-de-plume* or a fictitious address. Council decisions are taken by Councillors collectively, often after Officer advice, but no single Councillor has any more power, in law, than any other Councillor or Elector. It is when they sit in Council that their power is derived. Difficult decisions have to be made, but one thing is absolutely certain; those decisions are democratically taken by a group of people you have chosen to represent you. The decision(s) may not suit you but they have been made in a democratic manner. Last year I enthused over the plans for relocating the Council's administration into the Guildhall and providing face-to-face contact with the public on five and a half days a week. Many, including some within the Council, said it would not happen but the doubters have been proved wrong. The Guildhall is no longer that 'black hole' where Chardians can only look through the glass doors – those same glass doors are now open seven days a week with a Reception facility manned by Council staff for forty-four hours a week spread over six days. On many days of the week we are joined by staff and volunteers from other agencies who, like the Council employees, are available to the public for advice and help.

This relocation, together with the installation of telephonic and computer equipment, was achieved within budget from the Council's reserves without one penny being added to your Council Tax bill. Chard Town Council was one of very few authorities to set a 'zero budget' for this coming year. That small portion of your Council Tax bill that comes to this Council is exactly same as last year and your Councillors should be commended for that. A 'zero budget' is not simply standing still. When a budget is below inflation rate, no matter how low the rate may be, it is in effect going backwards and something has to give. Tightening belts and 'more for less' are common phrases that come to mind but these are always short-term measures that hide the inevitable.

Quite rightly for a town of its size and operation Chard now has a Deputy Town Clerk. This was achieved by merging two posts saving £14,000 in the process – a move criticised, quite vocally by some residents (in the media) as extravagant though they never once complained openly to the Council either at meetings or in the post. The streamlining of processes and operations through this appointment has enabled important savings to be made – and more are planned. I would emphasise this is not a

'fat trimming exercise' – there wasn't any fat to start with! It is merely taking advantage of current market forces and making efficiencies.

If there has been a disappointment in this last year it is that our Amenities Department, ably assisted by the volunteers from the Chard in Bloom Committee, and despite a gargantuan amount of effort did not gain the coveted Gold Award in the South West in Bloom competition. Chard once again had to settle for the Silver Gilt Award – an award that many towns, even some larger than Chard, would give their eye teeth to achieve. At the time of judging – a horribly wet day in July, it was generally agreed by all involved that the standard of judging was poor but of course that just sounds like sour grapes! However, the Council has agreed not to enter the competition for at least this year, and to appraise and consolidate upon our efforts of previous years. That is not to say the town will not look lovely this year – it will, but the bedding plants will be allowed to develop in their own way and in their own time without the pressures of judging day looming in early July. Once again, we hope as many traders as possible will purchase hanging baskets to improve the important visual aspect of the town to encourage more people to shop in Chard.

Partnership Working has been a phrase we have almost pioneered in Chard within the local government sector. This style of working has yielded many advantageous cost-saving facilities for Chard people. Partnering with organisations such as Somerset Waste Partnership and South Somerset District Council has enabled the Council to save a considerable amount of money through efficiency savings. We are all being as creative as possible in looking at ways in which processes can be streamlined to encourage further savings.

For a many years, thanks to the wisdom of previous Councils, Chard has developed the capacity to look after many functions that other towns may only dream about. This proven capacity, coupled with our ability to use the Power of Wellbeing will stand Chard in good stead with the merging of functions between South Somerset District Council and East Devon District Council. Chard Town Council is willing and able to accept delegated functions from these authorities providing 'revenue follows function'. Many of the smaller, more localised activities of the principal authorities can be delivered locally here in Chard and at a lower cost. That has to be good for everyone.

In this coming year the Council has set aside a fund to enable it to award grants to community organisations within the town. Application packs are available and the Council will shortly appoint an evaluation group to assess each application to decide on the level of the award. This is not a 'give-away' task. Applicants need to meet a strict criteria and demonstrate their ability to handle money wisely and in a proper fashion. It will mean that a number of small groups will be able to receive a 'helping hand' to establish themselves and become sustainable faster and more easily.

Chard continues to grow. This is a very lively and active town with plenty going on. Your Council and Officers are totally committed to serving the community and helping it to grow.

John Furze MILCM
Town Clerk

Organisation and Accountability

The Town Council has fifteen elected members returned from five wards, each with three members, Combe, Crimchard, Avishayes, Jocelyn and Holyrood. The Council Committees are Amenities, Guildhall & Tourism, Planning & Highways and Finance & Personnel. Working Parties, Action Groups and Sub-Committees are evolved as required.

All meetings of the Council and its Committees are open to the public and press to attend. There are a few times during the year when by resolution in accordance with the requirements of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press are excluded from a particular agenda item and these are usually, but not restricted to, matters such as 'Staff in Confidence' or for 'Commercial in Confidence'. At each meeting time is set aside, usually fifteen minutes, before the meeting starts for members of the public to address, make statements or ask questions of the Council.

In accordance with statute, at the end of each financial year the accounts of the Council are available for public inspection for a period of twenty-one working days. This period is advertised and facilities are made available for members of the public to peruse and examine the Council's accounts. As the Council is committed to a policy of openness and transparency any reasonable request to view the accounts, or any other aspect of Town Council work, will be accommodated at any time of the year.

Town Councillors

The current Councillors for Chard Town Council are:-

Avishayes Ward

Mrs C A Morrison
Liberal Democrat

Mr G Shortland,
Liberal Democrat

Mrs A Spencer
UK Independence Party

Combe Ward

Mr D R Hill
Conservative

Mr A Kenton
Liberal Democrat

Mr M J Wale
Conservative

Crimchard Ward

Mr J Dorset
Liberal Democrat

Mr D M Mears
Conservative

Vacancy

Holyrood Ward

Mr D J Orchard
Liberal Democrat

Mr S Dowell
Liberal Democrat

Mrs S P Wyatt
Liberal Democrat

Jocelyn Ward

Mr D M Bulmer
Independent

Mrs J Kenton
Liberal Democrat

Mrs J C Shortland*
Liberal Democrat

* Cllr Mrs J C Shortland is Chairman of the Council, which carries with it the title of Mayor.

Details of Councillor's addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses may be obtained on request from the Town Clerk and are also available on the Chard Town Council website – www.chard.gov.uk under the page 'Council Information Point'.

Council Officers

The senior officers of Chard Town Council are:-

Town Clerk	John Furze MILCM	john.furze@chard.gov.uk
Deputy Town Clerk	Sarah Robson	sarah.robson@chard.gov.uk
Amenities Manager	Andrew Hensher	andrew.hensher@chard.gov.uk
Office Manager	Sandra Pittwood	sandra.pittwood@chard.gov.uk

Officers may be contacted through the Town Clerk at the Council Offices situated in The Guildhall, Fore Street, Chard, Somerset. Phone 01460-239-567 or by email at the addresses show opposite their name. All enquiries for the Guildhall should be directed through the Guildhall main number 01460-239-567 or through the email address shown above.

Information about the Council may be viewed on the official website www.chard.gov.uk. This details all Council and Committee meetings together with agendas and minutes.

Finance

The precept for the year 2009/10 was set at £533,600 equating to a precept of £120.54 for Band D properties. For 2010/11 the precept has not been increased to £533,600 equating to a precept of £120.54 for Band D properties. The Town Precept continues to be in line with other towns of similar size within the South-West Region.

The Town Council has complied fully with the Audit Regulations and appoints professional Internal and External Auditors. Accounts for the previous year have been certified by the District Auditor.

Council Tax

Council Tax for the three Local Authorities responsible for Chard have been set for the year 2009/10 at the following levels:-

- £120.54 for Chard Town Council
- £147.78 for South Somerset District Council
- £1027.30 for Somerset County Council
- £161.26 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority
- £69.18 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
- **£1526.06 in total and based on Band D Properties**

Summary of Audited Accounts for 2008/9

Item	Expenditure	Income
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	155106	12700
Street Cleaning	51100	51100
Burial	25349	16100
Allotments	2000	2300
Guildhall (inc loan Acc)	201924	37750
Tourist Information	33844	24400
Support Services	170382	100
Precept		520505
Capital Activities	51850	26600
Total	691555	691555

The forecast Accounts for the year ending March 2010 are as follows but it should be noted that these figures have not been audited and are only 'forecasts' and will probably change when the Audited Accounts will be presented to Council in the Summer of 2010.

Item	Expenditure	Income
Revenue Activities	£'000	£'000
Grounds & Maintenance	162751	12000
Street Cleaning	51912	51843
Burial	24095	20100
Allotments	2250	2450
Guildhall	213659	42500
Tourist Information	32620	25550
Support Services	211956	11200
Precept		533600
Capital Activities		
Total	699243	699243

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Model Scheme) and has adopted the Mandatory Code per Model of the 2007 Code of Conduct for the conduct of Councillors.

In June 2009 Chard Town Council confirmed its eligibility to exercise the Power of Wellbeing as contained in Local Government Act 2000, Sections 1-4A as amended.

John Furze MILCM
Town Clerk