



Chard Town Council
Annual Report
2011/2012

Mayor's Annual Report

During my year as Mayor I have visited lots of places in and around Chard and Somerset. In Chard I have met a lot of people belonging to groups and organisations that I knew a little about, but this opportunity has enabled me to learn a lot more about them.

There is a considerable amount of volunteering that takes place in Chard, which you will see from the number of Outstanding Service Awards presented at the Annual Parish Meeting. These people are tireless in the amount of time and energy they give to the community. Without the volunteers these groups would not be able to continue providing services within Chard that are so desperately needed, be it for the old or the young. May I say a big thank you to the volunteers on behalf of the users of these groups.

My chosen charities during my term of office have been mainly those which assist young people, and also the First Responders. Working with the Guiding and Scouting Associations has brought me a lot of pleasure this year. I have watched as they rehearsed the Gang Show, their confidence growing, and seeing them tackle unfamiliar events with all that they could muster. And the result was a show they staged for two nights at the end of March. The last show ended with me being pulled onto the front of the stage to do the Penguin Song, which involved actions such as moving my arms and legs in some kind of order, and trying to sing at the same time!! Well, I wasn't able to do this very successfully as I was laughing so much.

During this down turn in the economic climate it has been encouraging to see people being able to give their time generously. There have been a couple of new businesses opened in the town and I would like to wish them good luck for the future.

It was with regret that I had to chair a special meeting of the Council recently to review recommendations that the External Auditor had made in relation to the accounts for the year ending March 2011. The members recognised that mistakes had been made during the term of the last Council but that lessons had been learned. I am pleased to say that no funds were misappropriated and that the recommendations made were of an administrative and precautionary nature. May I take this opportunity to say that Chard Town Council apologises unreservedly to the taxpayers and voters of Chard for the errors in practice and administration identified by the Council's auditors in their examination of the 2010/2011 accounts.

The 'Portas' bid brought the traders, public and council together, it was a lot of work in a very short period of time, but I am hoping that with the discussions we had at the meetings that even if we are not successful in getting the money, then we can still work together for the good of the town.

I would like to say a big thank you to the Christmas Lights Committee for the wonderful display last year. The front of the Guildhall looked amazing with all of the lights around it. Hopefully they will be able to do something even bigger this year, no pressure to the group.

Having the desk in the foyer of the Guildhall allows a number of outside organisations to use this facility during the week. I hope you agree this is proof that the Council is forward thinking and trying to encourage more people to come in and see what is available in Chard and also the variety of events that are taking place in the Guildhall. The building is in constant use, and even if you cannot see if the Auditorium is being used there may be a meeting in the Town Hall or in the Mayor's Parlour. We are looking at ways in which we can improve the experience of using the Guildhall.

I would like to say a big thank you to the Guildhall staff for keeping the building in good order and being around when people have enquiries. I can honestly say that nothing is too much trouble for them.

Also there have been changes within the Council's Amenities team and I would like to express my appreciation and thank the team for their dedication to the town.

The Tourist Information Centre is being well used. A big thank you to the committed volunteers and staff who man the office and keep this facility open. We find that it is not only visitors wanting information for the surrounding area, but also residents wanting to find bus times etc... so this is a vital local service.

I would like to give the office staff and especially Vicky a very big 'Thank You' for their support in my year as Mayor. Vicky has been looking after my events calendar, and advises me of any invitations, letters or questions, and if I did not respond quickly would send me a reminder.

Thanks also to Mr. Dave Travis, who has been my Mace Bearer this year, and his family for supporting me at events. Also to Mr. Robert McGuian for being my second Consort, who I only used a few times but was very thankful for.

My Chaplain, Reverend Warwick Lydiate, this has been a learning curve for both of us. I am very sorry that Warwick is leaving the ministry but happy to say he is staying in Chard and look forward to seeing him in the town.

And to Councillor Mrs. Jenny Kenton, my Deputy, for stepping in when I was not able to attend a function, and for being there to listen when things were getting busy.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to my husband Jim, who remembered the key each time for the chain box because I kept forgetting it, for being my chauffeur, time keeper, dresser and ideas man. And for my family that have missed me not being able to visit as much as I wanted, but maybe they say thank you for the peace and quiet.

I have enjoyed this privilege and honour to serve the people of Chard in this way.

Councillor Mrs. Cath Morrison
Mayor of Chard

The Town Clerk's Report

This last year brought many changes to the Town Council. In April 2011 Councillor Dave Hill, former mayor and long standing member sadly died, his experience, commitment and wisdom is sadly missed.

May 2011 saw local council elections taking place, there were three former Members who either chose to stand down or lost their seats and with two vacancies this resulted in the Town Council having six new Members. Also Councillor Mrs. Jill Shortland, former mayor, decided to step aside and retire from the Town Council after serving for 20 years. These changes and the introduction of new Members brought an opportunity to listen to fresh views and ideas and be challenged about how and why we do things!

Another departure was John Furze the former Town Clerk, who took early retirement at the beginning of 2011. This provided the Council with a chance to look at options for changing the management structure of the Council. The last few years had already brought some significant changes, and cost benefits, and again this occasion enabled the Council to review the structure to ensure there was sufficient and adequate capacity to take the Council forward. The net result was making the post of Deputy Town Clerk redundant and the introduction of a new post of Operations Manager. I was delighted to be approached and offered the post of Town Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer which I accepted and formally took up the position in October.

May was a busy month and after an enormous amount of hard work and effort by a dedicated group of Members, officers and local residents, it was very rewarding to see Ashcroft Park re-open. The play area was refurbished and a number of pieces of new 'all ability' play equipment were installed making this a park for all children, including those with disabilities, both accessible and fun. It has proved very popular with children from a wide area coming to visit and enjoy the new facilities.

Lower Henson Park was the focus for the second Community Fun Day held in July, which was organised in partnership with Streetspace – a local community group whose aim it is to work with young people towards their personal, social and spiritual development. The day was a great success and saw a huge turnout of both young people and adults coming together to enjoy a range of activities from stalls, skate and bike competitions, team games and of course, not forgetting the Mayor cooking and serving food at the BBQ.

Last year during October the Council held an awards evening in the Town Hall for all the community groups and voluntary organisations that had successfully applied for funding from the Community Development Fund. The event saw Members presenting cheques to the groups who had an opportunity to network and promote the work they're involved in. This scheme is open once again between April and the end of July, to local groups working in and around Chard, wishing to apply for financial assistance to help with capital projects. This year the Council has increased the funding and will be allocating up to £12,000.00 in total.

I am delighted that during the last year the Council has been able to continue to share the reception desk facilities with a number of organisations. This partnership arrangement means that groups that might not be able to afford other office accommodation are now accessible to people in Chard. We regularly have representatives from Somerset Skills & Learning, Citizens Advice Bureau, Camelot Credit Union, Yarlinton Homes, Chard Intentional Peer Support Group and NHS Fresh Steps at the Guildhall reception offering assistance and advice.

This year has also seen the Guildhall Cafe area coming back under the management of the Town Council, rather than on a franchised out basis as it had been previously. The Members feel this offers a greater flexibility to hirers wishing to use the Auditorium for events, and allows more choice. This arrangement does not extend to the Antiques Fayre that is held each Thursday, which is still on a franchise basis and always seems a popular destination to travel to for a home cooked lunch!

During March there has been a flurry of activity as Members became involved in putting together a bid for Chard to become a 'Portas Pilot'. This government initiative announced earlier in the year offers a chance for 12 towns to bid for a share of £1m. A tremendous amount of hard work and effort was put into bringing together traders, landlords and local businesses to unite in finding common goals and agreeing priorities. It looks as if the scheme has been very popular with a number of other towns in the region also putting bids together. The outcome won't be known until May, but regardless of this, it was very encouraging to see such enthusiasm and a desire to work together to make Chard a better place to live, work and play.

Chard continues to develop and grow despite the difficult economic climate, and there is a sense of activity and vibrancy. This is evident in the number of events and activities that take place in town from the Carnival to the enormous variety of musical, theatrical and dance events that happen on a regular basis. There is a strong sense of community and this is seen in the large numbers of charitable and voluntary organisations that are working so hard. Chard Town Council, its Members and Officers, is committed to serving our community and has a strong desire to see it continue to develop and flourish.

Sarah Robson
Town Clerk

Organisation and Accountability

Chard Town Council comprises fifteen elected members each representing one of five areas of the Town. These areas are known as wards. Each ward has three members, Combe, Crimchard, Avishayes, Jocelyn and Holyrood. This arrangement makes sure that we have a truly local government in Chard. The Council Committees are Amenities, Finance & Guildhall and Planning & Highways. There is also an Allotments Sub Committee which works in partnership with the Allotment Holders Association. This year has also seen number of working parties that have been set up on a task and finish basis as and when necessary.

All meetings of the Council and its Committees are open to the public and press to attend. There are occasions during the year when members of the public and press are excluded. This is by means of a resolution in accordance with the requirements of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. These matters are usually, but not restricted to issues such as 'Staff in Confidence' or 'Commercial in Confidence'. At most meetings 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 come 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 try and be accommodated at any time of the year.

Chard Town Council – How to get in touch

Town Councillors

Your Town Councillors are elected democratically by the people of Chard. They are not paid and do not receive any allowances. It is the Councillors that make the decisions and steer the direction in which the Council goes.

Avishayes Ward

Mrs. Cath Morrison
Liberal Democrat

Graham Forsyth
Independent

Mrs Tricia O' Brien
Liberal Democrat

Combe Ward

Mrs. Sara Dowell
Liberal Democrat

Andy Kenton
Liberal Democrat

Martin Wale
Conservative

Crimchard Ward

Julian Dorse
Liberal Democrat

Mrs. Jenny Kenton
Liberal Democrat

Tony Prior
Independent

Holyrood Ward

Mrs. Brennie Halse
Conservative

Garry Shortland
Liberal Democrat

Mrs Sue Wyatt
Liberal Democrat

Jocelyn Ward

Dave Bulmer
Independent

Martin Dowell
Independent

Ms Sandra Pittwood
Independent

Details of Councillors' 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 Town Council's team of staff is led by Sarah Robson, the Town Clerk. Terry Powell is the Council's Operations Manager and is directly responsible for the Guildhall and Amenities teams.

How to contact us:

Visit us at: Chard Town Council
The Guildhall
Fore Street
Chard
TA20 1PP

Tel: 01460 239567
Fax: 01460 261661
email: sarah.robson@chard.gov.uk
email: terry.powell@chard.gov.uk

Other Council officers may be contacted through the Town Clerk or by phoning the reception desk on 01460 239567.

Information about the Council may be viewed on the official website www.chard.gov.uk, including minutes of all Council and Committee meetings.

Finance

The precept for the year 2011/12 was set at £533,600 equating to a local parish precepting charge of £117.17 for Band D properties. For this financial year 2012/13 after staff re-organisation and prudent financial management it has been possible to reduce the precept to a total of £530,854. Chard's town precept continues to be in line with other towns of similar size within the South-West Region.

Council Tax

Council Tax for the three Local Authorities responsible for Chard has been set for the year 2012/13 at the following levels:-

- £117.17 for Chard Town Council
- £150.74 for South Somerset District Council
- £1027.30 for Somerset County Council
- £168.03 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority
- £73.92 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
- **£1537.16 in total and based on Band D Properties**

The average bill for South Somerset is £1485.14

Summary of Accounts for 2010/11

Item	Expenditure £	Income £
Amenities Including Capital	164,215	10,000
Street Cleaning	51,397	51,843
Cemetery	26,677	27,600
Allotments	1,900	2,750
Guildhall	201,248	50,660
Tourist Information Centre	21,273	13,000
Support & Other Services	218,943	6,200
Grants	10,000	0
Precept		533,600
Total	695,653	659,653

The forecast Accounts for the year ending March 2012 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 are presented to Council in the Summer of 2012.

Item	Expenditure	Income
Amenities Including Capital	148,608	7,400
Street Cleaning	52,160	52,160
Cemetery	28,947	29,000
Allotments	6,082	5,000
Guildhall	183,529	49,150
Tourist Information Centre	22,837	4,700
Support & Other Services	230,047	1,200
Grants	10,000	0
Precept		533600
Total	682,210	682,210

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998, The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and has adopted the Model Code of Conduct for the conduct of its Councillors.

The introduction in 2011 of the Localism Act will see many changes to democracy at a grass roots level with the need for wider engagement with the electorate on a range of issues. This will also enable greater opportunities, with provision under the General Power of Competence, for Town and Parish Council to take responsibility for a broader range of services and a greater freedom to act.

Sarah Robson MILCM
Town Clerk