



Chard Town Council
Annual Report
2013/2014

Mayor's Annual Report

It seems only a few months ago that I was elected Mayor and now we are at the year's end. At the beginning of my term of office I promised to lead the Council with dignity, honesty and pride, to achieve this I have tried to visit as many groups and organisations as possible. Mark Hambrey the Mace Bearer, Revd. Cresswell Whitton my chaplain, Andy my Consort and I have taken the mace and regalia to as many people as we can. Some of the more memorable events have been the overseas visitors to the town, such as the Helmstedt visitors who came on a twinning visit and the Rotarians from Texas who we treated to a traditional cream tea in the Town Hall. Great Britain has a proud tradition for its customs and our visiting parties were both greeted by Chard's own Town Crier Stuart Cummings welcoming them to Chard. They loved the traditional costumes and history of the chain and the mace (I even attempted a short speech in German for our Helmstedt visitors).

I was proud to parade the regalia at the Carnival along with eight other mayors in their finery. We also had other visiting dignitaries that were not able to walk the route but watched the event from the Town Hall balcony alongside some of Chard's former mayors and other guests. Chard Carnival is one of the town's biggest events and has Chard Town Council's continuing support along with several other organisations such as the Museum and the Youth Club.

During the year the Council has developed stronger links with many other community bodies. After many years the Christmas Lights "hot potato" has at last been settled with the Town Team taking responsibility for arranging not only the lights but also for providing a whole evening's entertainment for everyone to enjoy. This has been helped through the purchase of a high lift platform by Chard Town Council to help the erection and dismantling of the lights in addition to the pledge of an annual grant of £1000. Work has continued with a small number of Councillors and representatives from two of the town's football teams to enable temporary changing facilities to be provided on Jocelyn Park for the teams that have played on the park for many years. The purchase of new grass cutting equipment will also hopefully provide a better environment and use of the park until the new Chard Regeneration Plan provides the pitches that we so very badly need in Chard. Jocelyn and Henson Parks have also been used by community groups such as Streetspace and the Town Team for events such as the Henson Park Community Day and the Summer Festival.

The annual grants scheme has continued with many small community groups benefiting from small amounts of money to move projects that may have fallen by the wayside otherwise.

The running of the Saturday outdoor market has been taken over by the Town Council and we are about to have the Royal Charter, which was drawn up in 1683, returned to us by SSDC. It is hoped this will form part of celebrations that will take place in July as part of a series of events arranged through the Town Team.

As Mayor I have tried to be as accessible as possible, visiting groups such as the Stroke Club, Chard Hospital and the Methodist Youth Club, and inviting many organisations to 'tea with the Mayor' during a Tuesday afternoon in the Mayor's Parlour. We have eaten too much cake but we have met and talked to an amazing amount of volunteers and people within the business community within our town and tried to understand what it is that makes their organisation work and how we can help - quite often it is the same thing, for voluntary groups - more members, perhaps you can help? I also sit on the front desk of the Guildhall from 9am – 10am every Thursday to be available to people to talk to. I have found it is a great way of getting to know people, not just for problems but maybe just to say hello.

You may not know that the Mayor has an allowance from the Council; this was £3,500 for the current year. Before I was Mayor I did not fully understand how this was spent and for the first time this year I will be publishing at the Annual Parish Meeting a breakdown of expenditure showing how the allowance has been spent. You will see that a lot of the money has been spent on hire of the Guildhall. Whilst the Mayor has free use of the Mayor's Parlour all other event hires have to be paid for just as any other hirer using the Guildhall would have to. I have used my £3,500 to raise over £7,500 for my three charities who will all benefit from an equal third, this will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting.

Finally, it has been a great honour to be mayor of Chard for this last year, it has given me the opportunity to do things that I would not have been able to do as a councillor alone. Andy and I have gained many lasting memories and for this I thank you all.

Councillor Mrs. Jenny Kenton
Mayor of Chard

April 2014

The Town Clerk's Report

It has been another exceptionally busy year which has seen many changes and a number of initiatives, projects and exciting events taking place in Chard.

A number of projects have been completed that have been done in partnership with other organisations. One of these has been the refurbishment of Pig Lane with the new brick paving, this was done through South Somerset District Council with financial support from Chard Town Council. This area has really benefited from the works and as one of the gateways into town it now creates a more favourable impression of town when you enter. Chard in Bloom/Chard 2000 gave a generous donation towards the refurbishment of a number of the town's blue plaques and this work was carried out earlier in the year. It is hoped shortly to update the leaflet that accompanies the trail to include the most recent plaque that was commissioned to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

During July last year a week long event called Chard Festival hit the streets, it included a show by CATS (Chard Amateur Theatrical Society), a display of the town's regalia in the Mayor's Parlour, a themed fancy dress parade through town to the 'party in the park', a horticultural and craft show all culminating at the end of the week with an exciting fireworks display and the lighting of the town's Beacon. These were just some of the events that took place. All this was organised by a small, dedicated group of volunteers who worked tirelessly to put on a series of events that catered for all tastes and was something that Chard could be proud of!

The Town Team has been busy again over the last year and has managed to pull off some impressive achievements too. The opening of a new 'Pop-Up' shop to enable budding entrepreneurs an opportunity to have a low cost retail experience without any long term commitments has been successful. October saw a very popular Halloween event in the Guildhall that had the young people of Chard queuing to get in and who could forget the biggest and best yet Christmas Event. It also turned out to be Chard's inaugural Santa Run, organised by the Mayor, with an amazing turnout of people running, walking, jogging and a few determined citizens in their mobility scooters – well done to all who took part! Let's hope this will become part of the annual celebrations.

The Autumn was busy and saw the culmination of a project to improve accessibility to one of the Council's parks in Bampton Avenue. The new pathway means that people pushing prams and other wheeled vehicles can also enjoy this area with a new bench to sit on and enjoy watching the children play.

The storms before Christmas posed some real difficulties for staff, particularly those working outside and the high winds and rain made all tasks frustrating and challenging. A number of calls were received and the team responded well to the increased work by clearing fallen debris and removing trees from areas where they had been blown over. Assistance was provided to Somerset County Highways in closing off Pig Lane as roof tiles were flying around and also to the District Council with some chainsaw work. I think we can count ourselves lucky though as Chard did not suffer the flooding that was experienced elsewhere, the aftermath of which is still felt not far from here on the Somerset levels.

There have been a number of changes to the staff that work for the Council, both outdoors on the Amenities Team and those behind the scenes based in the Guildhall. Eva White retired after twenty three and a half years of loyal and dedicated service to the Council – what an achievement! Two departmental reviews also saw a number of internal change overs and the staff has responded well to new members joining their teams and making them feel welcome. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of staff who have worked hard and supported their colleagues during this period of change and I am proud that despite often being shortstaffed, have continuously delivered a high standard of service across all areas.

I have no doubt that further changes will undoubtedly be afoot, this is an ever changing landscape and it is a challenge to meet new demands and embrace new methods of work.

Despite the continuing pressure on the economy Chard has much to be thankful for and we can all enjoy the strong sense of community that exists within our town. It is always so heart warming at this time of year to look at the nominations for the Outstanding Service Awards and recognise how many people selflessly give of their time and energies in helping others. Chard Town Council, its Members and Officers, is committed to serving our community and has a real desire to see it continuing to develop and flourish.

Sarah Robson
Town Clerk

April 2014

Organisation and Accountability

Chard Town Council is comprised of 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 saw some changes for 2013/2014 and are now made up of Guildhall & Amenities, Finance & Personnel and Planning & Highways. There is also an Allotments Sub Committee which works in association with the Allotment Holders Association. This year has also seen a number of working parties that have been set up on a task and finish basis as and when necessary. These included the Chard Festival working group, the Football working group and the Guildhall Promotions working group.

All meetings of the Council and its committees are open to the public and press to attend. There are some occasions when for reasons of confidentiality 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.

The Council has a new website which contains a lot of information about services and functions of the Council. There are many downloadable forms available relating to allotments and the cemetery. All of the minutes of the Council's meetings are available also and can be downloaded. If you do not have access to a computer and wish to see copies or extracts of minutes these can be made available for you to view at the Guildhall upon request in advance.

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 but act in a voluntary capacity to serve their local area. It is the Councillors that make the decisions and steer the direction in which the Council goes.

Avishayes Ward

Mrs. Cath Morrison (Liberal Democrat)	01460 239120
Graham Forsyth (Independent)	01460 67202
Mrs. Tricia O' Brien (Liberal Democrat)	01460 66104

Combe Ward

Mrs. Sara Dowell (Liberal Democrat)	01460 261898
Andy Kenton (Liberal Democrat)	07591 087347
Martin Wale (Conservative)	01460 65190

Crimchard Ward

Julian Dorse (Liberal Democrat)	07882 191108
Mrs. Jenny Kenton (Liberal Democrat)	07591 087347
Tony Prior (Independent)	01460 65144

Holyrood Ward

Mrs. Brennie Halse (Conservative)	01460 67422
Garry Shortland (Liberal Democrat)	01460 67357
Mrs Sue Wyatt (Liberal Democrat)	01460 61370

Jocelyn Ward

Dave Bulmer (Independent)	01460 67917
Martin Dowell (Independent)	01460 67143
Ms. Sandra Pittwood (Independent)	01460 67481

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 under the page 'Council'.

Council Officers

The Town Council's team of staff, which currently stands at eighteen, is led by Sarah Robson, the Town Clerk. The Operations Manager is the second most senior officer who 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: operationsmanager@chard.gov.uk

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

Finance

The precept for the year 2013/14 was set at £530,854 equating to a local parish precepting charge of £121.43 for Band D properties. This was a rise of £4.26 from the previous year which equated to an approximate increase of 3.6%.

Last year saw changes in policy at central government being imposed on district councils relating to the Council Tax Benefits Scheme. This in turn had a knock on effect on town and parish councils. In 2013/14 Chard Town Council received a Support Grant of £67,825.00 to offset the effect of the Council Tax Benefits Scheme but this grant is not guaranteed for future years and is only a transitional arrangement. For 2014/15 the Council has approved its budget which totals £708,258.00 with a precept request of £478,102.00. The Members were keen to ensure there would be no increase in the level of local precepting through the Council Tax bills. Other income will come from the Precept Support Grant which for 2014/15 is £67,650 monies taken from the Council's reserves and other income from the provision of services and outside contracts. Chard town's precept continues to be in line with other towns of similar size within the South-West Region.

Council Tax

Council Tax for the other local authorities responsible for Chard has been set for the year 2014/15 at the following levels:-

- £121.43 for Chard Town Council
- £150.74 for South Somerset District Council
- £1027.30 for Somerset County Council
- £171.37 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority
- £76.89 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
- **£1547.73 in total and based on Band D Properties**

The average bill for South Somerset is £1498.19

Summary of Accounts for 2012/13

Item	Expenditure £	Income £
Amenities Including Capital	147561	20151
Street Cleaning	55084	57378
Cemetery	26762	26237
Market	337	3933
Allotments	3686	4015
Guildhall	188947	45490
Tourist Information Centre	21004	8309
Support & Other Services	177954	6047
Grants	12397	0
Precept	0	530,854
Contribution to/from reserves	68682	0
Total	702414	702414

Summary of Budgeted Accounts for 2013/14

The Accounts for the year ending March 2014 have not been finalised and audited. The figures below are the budgeted accounts for 2013/14.

Item	Expenditure	Income
Amenities Including Capital	176684	11920
Street Cleaning	61615	57000
Cemetery	27071	29511
Allotments	3940	3610
Market	5000	9200
Guildhall	204638	48450
Tourist Information Centre	22818	9600
Support & Other Services	188479	5100
Grants	15000	0
Precept Support Grant	0	67825
Precept	0	463029
Total	705245	705245

Other Legal Requirements

Chard Town Council is registered with the Information Commissioners Office to enable it to hold information 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 saw many changes to democracy at a grass roots level with the need for wider engagement with the electorate on a range of issues. This new legislation has enabled greater opportunities, with provision under the General Power of Competence, for town and parish councils to take responsibility for a broader range of services and a greater freedom to act.

Sarah Robson MILCM
Town Clerk

April 2014