



Chard Town Council
Annual Report
2014/2015

Mayor's Annual Report

This will be my last report as Mayor of Chard and it has been one of the best experiences of my life so far, the ability to make a difference – which I believe is every councillor's wish – has really taken a forefront in my last two years. The difference that being Mayor has made to the ability to talk to influential people has been amazing not only have I been able to use my influence to help my five charities but I have recently written a letter to the Mayor of Seica Mare to support the work of Project Romania in their most recent developments. It is amazing how for very little effort on my part I can make a difference to people from all parts of Europe.

One of these moments came across me when I sat in St Mary's Church when the celebration of the roof renovation took place. You may remember that I abseiled down the church tower with many other local people (most with a lot less fuss than myself). I am not particularly religious but when I sat and looked at what we had achieved as a community I was humbled by the thought that the roof will hopefully stay secure for hundreds of years and in the future people will remember the event with a fond heart.

The Urban Slide was another event that will stay with me for a long time. All parts of the community pulled together to enable this fantastic day to take place. We got up at 5am in order to be able to get it built in time for the scheduled first slide. People from local groups, old and young all turned up and did whatever was needed to make this happen, and although if asked I would say to other towns, don't do it, it was a nightmare, when I think of the smiles and happy faces we made that day, apart from the money we raised, it was worth every long hour spent in meetings with local bodies.

I hope we have managed to make Chard Town Council a little less distant and make the role of mayor, chaplain and macebearer more approachable to local residents of the town. I truly believe that the regalia belongs to the people of Chard. We have been out as much as possible talking to local groups and explaining how the mayor is chosen, the history of the regalia and the work we do within the community. We have also made a database within the Council with contacts of all the businesses and groups that we are aware of so that we can make contact with each other more easily. Our challenge now is to keep that information up to date and to build on the information, knowledge and skills that we share. It was also my idea to have the "Town Hall Talk" each week in the Chard and Ilminster News. It seemed to me that no one was really aware of what the mayor actually did and I have tried to make my fortnightly report interesting and factual, trying not to report my personal ideals and opinions but to give everyone a flavour of what is happening in their town. This idea came from my wish to report back to you regularly about the work I was doing.

We will say goodbye to many of our councillors after the election, some will not stand again and some will possibly not be re-elected. I would like to say a big thank you to them all. We didn't always agree with one another but most of the time I thought we debated with honour and respect for each others' ideals. Elections are funny things, what other job would you have to report every four years to 1500 people in order to keep a job – for which you don't get paid!

The Council and the town has changed and will continue to grow and develop with the times. There seems to be a real wish for Chard to be seen as the second largest town in the District at last with several improvements in the pipeline. I know sceptics will say that these have been in the background for years but I have to feel that we can achieve this or there would be no point in standing again.

Finally, it has been a great honour to be Mayor of Chard for these last two years, the new mayor will be elected on May 18th and I wish them all the best and hope they enjoy the role as much as I have.

Councillor Mrs. Jenny Kenton
Mayor of Chard

April 2015

The Town Clerk's Report

It is always interesting looking back and reflecting on the changes and developments that have taken place over the last twelve months since the previous Annual Report. And this year is no exception as I turn my thoughts to the projects and plans that have been achieved and those that are still a work in progress.

One of the big successes has been the Council's involvement with the Probation Service and the introduction of a partnership with the Community Payback Team. This has seen a team of offenders coming in to Chard for one day each week and working outdoors as part of their community service. They have been responsible for painting the railings around St Mary's Church, undertaking routine litter picking duties and also getting involved with our own Amenities Team with a deep clean of the town centre. The additional man power has really paid off and we have been able to complete additional works that would not have been possible without their assistance.

Another project last year saw a campaign to raise awareness of littering in the town centre; this was especially targeted towards encouraging the responsible disposal of cigarette butts. This was achieved with the assistance of the Enforcement Officer at South Somerset District Council and help from Keep Britain Tidy who provided publicity and posters. The purchase of a new piece of equipment that operates like a vacuum but on an industrial basis has proved useful in helping to combat this problem but it is an on-going issue in our town centre and one which no doubt will continue to challenge the Team.

The Town Team has been busy again and last year saw them organising a number of events in the town that included the Santa Run, Halloween night, and of course the big Christmas Light Switch On. In addition was the very well supported Medieval Weekend which also formed part of the celebrations for the handing back of the Charter to the town.

Whoever could have guessed that Chard would be blazing a trail in being the first town to have an Urban Slide? A September sunrise saw a group of hard working volunteers close off the town centre to install the 200 foot long water slide. This had been the vision of Chard's Mayor – Councillor Mrs. Kenton as part of her ambitious programme of fund raising events. It generated a huge amount of interest from far and near and attracted hundreds of participants eager to try 'surfing' down the High Street. The event was a huge success and demonstrated what is achievable with determination, ambition and drive.

There have been a number of changes with personnel over the last year and I am very pleased that we have been able to welcome several new members to the Council's team of staff. Ed Ringwood the new Operations Manager certainly hit the ground running when he joined us in June and has been involved with finishing a number of projects. Amongst them the installation of the markers at the allotment site in Chardstock Lane, the completion of this work now makes identifying the plots very simple and will hopefully eliminate any queries on site about the location of plots.

There have been many compliments received about the floral displays around town especially last summer when the hanging baskets and flower beds started to come into full bloom. The Amenities Team extended an invitation to the office staff to experience life outdoors and a number of the ladies from the Administration Team took up the offer and

helped out with planting up the flower beds – me included! It was certainly a good way of encouraging team building and working together which provided an insight into how other departments operate – a valuable lesson. The rather tired looking planters around the town have been given a much needed makeover and are now boasting rather attractive wooden surrounds. This was a project that was made possible through grant funding from the District Council and it has certainly improved the visual amenity in and around the town centre. I was delighted that last year's floral displays were well supported by sponsorship from businesses in Chard and without this continued support by local traders and shops the Council would have to consider whether or not to scale this back.

There has been much activity within the Council's committees and the Guildhall & Amenities Committee has approved a number of large scale projects to enhance the Guildhall. The first of these demonstrates a desire to show the Council's 'green credentials' by the installation of photo voltaic panels to the rear of the building. This will aim to not only reduce our carbon footprint but also to save the Council Tax payer's money by reducing the energy bills for the Guildhall. This project is still in the planning phase and will hopefully be commencing shortly subject to approval from the Local Planning Authority. Another large piece of work will commence in May with works to refurbish the exterior of the Guildhall, again this is as a result of many hours work behind the scenes by officers and Councillors keen to ensure this landmark building in Chard continues to not only look its best but is fit for purpose for the next hundred or so years!

One of the benefits of being Town Clerk is meeting the large number of people I come into contact with and during the last year it has been a privilege and pleasure to meet not only many local residents but a number of foreign visitors that have come to Chard too. It ceases to amaze me still the amount of time people are willing to give up for their community, and this is evident locally by the number of voluntary groups and organisations that are working in Chard to improve the lives of others. It is always rewarding at this time of year to be able to read the nominations for those people who are put forward for an Outstanding Service Award and it acts as a reminder that Chard is a place where the community is served well by those that care. I hope that Chard will continue to develop and improve and that we can all play our part in making it a great town.

Sarah Robson
Town Clerk

April 2015

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; the wards are Combe, Crimchard, Avishayes, Jocelyn and Holyrood. This arrangement makes sure that we have a truly local government in Chard. The Council Committees for 2014/2015 were Guildhall & Amenities, Finance & Personnel and Planning & Highways. There is also an Allotments Sub Committee which works closely with the Allotment Holders Association and a Personnel Sub Committee with some delegated responsibility for the Town Clerk. 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 Market working group, the Football working group and the Newsletter 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. Changes to legislation in 2014 now means that public meetings can be recorded, filmed or photographed and the Council has adopted a policy to ensure it can safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

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 External Audit last year was completed by Grant Thornton and there were no matters of concern identified or reported.

The Council's website contains a lot of information about services and functions of the Council and there are many downloadable forms available relating to allotments and the cemetery. All of the minutes of the Council's meetings and also its policies are available and can be downloaded in a PDF Format. 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. Recent news events are also uploaded and details of any vacancies that occur within the Council. There is also a comprehensive list of groups and organisations on the website – if you know of a group that isn't included please let us know as we'd like to ensure information is easily accessible for the many organisations based in Chard.

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.

The list shown below is current at this time however is subject to change due to the local elections that will be taking place in May 2015. Further information will be made available on the Council's website in due course.

Avishayes Ward

Mrs. Cath Morrison (Independent)	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

Mrs. Jenny Kenton (Liberal Democrat)	07591 087347
Tony Prior (Independent)	01460 65144
Vacancy	

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
Vacancy	

Details of Councillors' addresses, and email contact 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 twenty, is led by Sarah Robson, the Town Clerk. The Operations Manager, Ed Ringwood 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: townclerk@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 2014/15 was set at £478,102 equating to a local parish precepting charge of £121.43 for Band D properties. In addition to this SSDC awarded £67,650 as part of the Precept Support Grant, a transitional arrangement that has come about since Central Government imposed changes in the way council tax benefits are paid. This was a rise of zero increase from the previous year as Members didn't want to add any additional burden to local council tax payers.

With the changes in policy at Central Government being imposed on district councils, South Somerset has fared better than other areas where the district council has not passed on any of the funding to the parish and town councils. However the Precept Support Grant is reducing annually and reluctantly for 2015/2016 the Members felt there was no alternative but to increase the Band D percentage in order to mitigate the reduction in the grant. The Band D Equivalent for 2015/2016 is £122.20 an increase of 77 pence.

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 2015/16 at the following levels:-

- £122.20 for Chard Town Council
- £147.75 for South Somerset District Council
- £1027.30 for Somerset County Council
- £174.78 for Avon & Somerset Police Authority
- £78.42 for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue
- **£1550.45 in total and based on Band D Properties**

The average bill for South Somerset is £1501.59

Summary of Accounts for 2013/14

Item	Expenditure £	Income £
Amenities Including Capital	141260	12193
Street Cleaning	51746	54613
Cemetery	26353	29857
Market	1856	7265
Allotments	4968	5939
Guildhall	190804	38759
Tourist Information Centre	22673	3589
Support & Other Services	175834	11182
Grants	13378	0
Precept	0	530854
Transfer to reserves	65379	
Total	694251	694251

Summary of Budgeted Accounts for 2014/15

The Accounts for the year ending March 2015 have not been finalised and audited. The figures below are the budgeted accounts for 2014/15.

Item	Expenditure	Income
Amenities Including Capital	157382	11560
Street Cleaning	61554	55705
Cemetery	26689	27211
Allotments	3730	4000
Market	2180	8500
Guildhall	284115	38700
Tourist Information Centre	23268	9530
Support & Other Services	174340	7300
Grants	20000	0
Precept Support Grant	0	67650
Precept	0	478102
Contribution from reserves		45000
Total	753258	753258

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 PLCM
Town Clerk

April 2015