

## **District Councillor Annual Report**

This past year has been full of challenges, and change. The ward and in particular Milborne St Andrew and Winterborne Kingston & Whitechurch have had to deal with the very real dangers and upheaval of the floods which we experienced in December/January. It was heartening to see how well the villagers all pulled together along with the officers at North Dorset District council, to help those who were so badly affected by the water. In some places this is an ongoing problem and I encouraged all villages to respond to the request of the Leader of NDDC and provide the council with a full and detailed list of what needs to be done. This together with all the other affected areas in the District will be compiled in to a request for assistance from County. We will await the outcome!

Cabinet requested that Overview & Scrutiny committee (O&S) review the Community Partnerships and grants given to voluntary groups in the district, the committee has neared the end of its work and in addition to the normal O&S meetings, I also attended 9 other meetings as part of the working party.

As Vice Chairman of O&S I also sit on the joint scrutiny committee for the Stour Valley Partnership (SVP). Recent meetings have been looking at the now newly formed partnership to include Poole. SVP deals with all council tax issues along with benefits for housing and council tax and with business rates, its annual turnover is around ½ billion pounds, so it is important that scrutiny is carried out diligently. SVP is now also moving to have in house bailiffs for recoveries, this will undergo intense scrutiny to ensure the work is carried out fairly and without increased costs to those affected. This is something I feel needs to be considered with great care.

I have attended around many parish council meetings as well as Full Council, Cabinet, Planning Policy, and Development Management Meetings along with site visits representing a cross section of views from residents within the ward. There have been some controversial planning applications which the committee has made decisions on. Some of which I have agreed with and some not!

As with all Local Government, NDDC needs to look to the future for itself and how it works. Members have agreed to move forward with discussions towards a partnership of some kind with West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Councils, these are in very early stages and I will keep you informed as these discussions develop. It is inevitable that a different model will be needed as we can only expect further reductions in funding, and what is important is providing better services in a smarter and more cost effective way.

We have seen that partnerships can work and the DWP is a great example of this, and although I know from time to time there are have been problems with waste collection, overall it has been a success, and recycling rates have increased dramatically.

I look forward to another fully packed challenging year representing the residents here in the ward. There may be some controversial planning applications coming along soon and as a district councillor it is my duty to represent the views of residents. This is sometimes conflicting, but what makes this harder for me as a councillor is misinformation and pointed pressure to commit to an opinion before the application goes to the planning committee. I must also add that although I'm interested in views from those outside this ward and that I can also look at the bigger picture, on a national level, it is the views of residents who live in the village and are directly affected by any decisions made that are most important to me.

Cllr Jane Somper