

## Chairman's Final Report

Councillors may recall when I accepted your nomination and assumed the appointment of Chairman that I was conscious that my work profile may preclude my attendance at the full range of Town activities that my recent predecessors had been able to undertake. As you will all be aware my reservations manifested themselves fairly early on in my tenure and therefore I sought to identify how I could try and add some value to Council by taking a slightly different approach.

I decided to set myself 4 goals for the year which were focussed on trying to deliver a more robust council framework that is better placed and more responsive to take us forward in what is set to be a financially austere future. That austerity is already starting to filter through in terms of reduced funding from BDBC and the situation is perhaps only set to get more financially constrained in the years to come.

My objectives were therefore to:

**Objective 1:** Devise a strategy for the council looking ahead in the 5 to 10 year time frame and identifying what we must do (these are either legal requirements or the non-discretionary delivery of services for which we receive dedicated funding), what we should do and what we could do. In taking this forward Councillors assisted greatly in mapping out what we felt should be our main strategic lines of development going forward. This work is aligned to and compliments the Neighbourhood Plan, and provides the basis against which to slightly restructure our sub-committees Terms of Reference and shape the budget. As with all such initiatives the Vision articulates where we wish to go, how we get there can of course be subject to periodic review as the environment in which we operate evolves. Due to an IT glitch delaying the return of part of the strategy the finalised document has still not been compiled. My intent is therefor to complete this work over the next few weeks and submit the finalised version via the R&P for endorsement by Full Council in due course.

**Objective 2:** In tandem to working up the Council strategy I also set in motion a 5 year budgetary forecast that builds in inflation uplift and should negate the need for periodic large increases in the precept payable through the Council tax. The budget should be restructured in line with the strategy and it will require Committee Chairs to think slightly longer term about financial requirements in order to ensure we have a fully funded and sustainable set of deliverable services that are underpinned by an appropriately resourced

contingency fund. The financial profile is already in place, the alignment of budgetary lines to sub-committees should follow once the strategy is endorsed.

**Objective 3:** To underpin my focus on business resilience going forward I asked Councillors and the Clerks to review all the Council policies to make sure they were still relevant to the way in which we conduct council business. This was a particularly onerous task for which I wish thank all Councillors and the Clerks for supporting. It is these behind the scenes tasks that go a long way to ensuring that the delivery of those services for which we are either responsible or aspire to deliver can come to fruition in a timely and efficient manner. In taking this course of action my hope is that it will help us demonstrate more clearly what we do, enable our community to be able to better hold us to account and demonstrate more clearly the value for money aspects of council business in the eyes of the local community.

**Objective 4.** My final objective was to try and throw the full weight of the council behind our Neighbourhood Planning Team. The successful delivery of an approved neighbourhood plan is the only remaining safeguard left to us as a community whereby we can gain and retain influence over the development of the Town. As with all such ventures there are trade-offs to be made and it is impossible to please all of the people all of the time. That said we have a high quality plan that seeks to secure the future development of the town in a sustainable manner that reflects the wishes of the local community. David George and his entire team are to be commended for delivering a superb plan under very testing conditions. The plan is now on Regulation 16 review with BDBC after which the community will be asked to vote in a referendum to either adopt or reject the plan. Rejection would be catastrophic for the town and I would implore Councillors to maintain their support for the NPSC as we go forward in order to deliver success at the polls. We also need to remember that both our Neighbourhood Plan and the emerging Council Strategy clearly articulate the priority areas in which we wish to improve the service and amenities available to the local community. In turn our community must hold us to account when we fail to deliver these services or amenities; gone are the days of throwing money at 'bright ideas' that either have no basis in public support or are not resourced in terms of their whole life maintenance however the net effect should be that Council will be on much firmer ground in terms of its financial and business accountability.

I feel the biggest disappointment of my tenure was the failure of the Speedwatch initiative to come to fruition. It is a tremendous disappointment, particularly following the amount of time and effort spent encouraging members of the community to participate and then committing ourselves financially to support the project. This is an initiative that I know my successor was also keen to see implemented and I look forward to being able to support him during the next year to try and resurrect the scheme.

On a more positive note, it is abundantly clear that there is a tremendous amount of energy within the community to try and improve Whitchurch for both residents and visitors alike. As a Council there is, in my opinion, one specific area where we may be able to assist all those who engage in supporting the community and that is to improve the communications between the various groups, associations and organisations so that their efforts can become a little more coordinated. The networking at both my reception at the Silk Mill and the Annual Town Assembly only helped reinforce this view in my mind and I would ask Councillors to give thought as to how we can help improve communications across our community as we go forward.

I wish to record my thanks to our Council Clerks, Karen and Sharon. They are invariably the first point of contact for most of the community on council matters and their job has not been made any easier this year by having a Chairman and Mayor who, because of work commitments, is away for almost as much time as he's at home. The council cannot function efficiently without the people behind the scenes who make it work and I wish to place on record my gratitude for all of their work in the last 12 months. I also wish to place on record my thanks to Rebecca for all her support and in particular her patience throughout the year. We both lead exceptionally busy professional lives and without her understanding and support the task of Chairman would have been inevitably far more difficult.

It is a tremendous privilege to have been Chairman for the past 12 months and I want to thank you all for your support, not only that which has been given to me but that which you give so freely to our community. I wish my successor well and look forward to supporting him as he takes us forward over the next 12 months.