

Downs Ward Borough Councillor's Report 2011

As we said in our report last year, this year promised to be interesting, and indeed with the change of government and the plethora of new and promised legislation, it has proved to be so.

Having recognised that the profligacy of the last Government had to come to an end, the Borough council has worked hard over the last few years to achieve many of the necessary savings so that, despite the huge cut in our grant from Government which is now the lowest in Kent, we have been able to agree a budget for next year that does not necessitate a rise in our Council Tax, maintains front line services and avoids any staff redundancies.

This is a considerable achievement which few if any other authorities have been able to achieve. However, we remain deeply concerned as to this Government's attitude towards local authorities who achieve what they are asked to do but are still criticised. It is worth noting that this year's Audit Commission letter gave the borough a clean bill of financial health and indeed praised it for its husbanding of your precious resources.

In line with Government requests, the Council now shares many backroom services with other neighbouring councils and this has been working well sharing expertise as well as manpower. In July we move to another milestone, when our Chief Executive takes on the dual role of CE of Gravesham & Tonbridge & Malling.

As ever we have taken great care over Planning Applications in our ward, always looking to do the best for our communities and maintaining the very special nature of our villages. We look forward with some trepidation to the new Localism Bill because of its underlying aim to increase housing development. We will work with all our Parish Councils to ensure that they have a full understanding of the changes to the planning system when they come into force. Our hope is that the new regime will really mean that local views will be paramount in controversial decisions.

Once again the severe weather conditions before Christmas made life difficult for us all, but the experience of last year helped alleviate many of the problems, and our refuse service, although disrupted, was soon back on course.

Despite financial restraints, Tonbridge & Malling continues to invest in our well used and excellent leisure facilities, keeping them at the top of the league tables in the whole country.

We were delighted with the new Licensing protocol that now permits us to alert Parish Councils of applications for licenses on their patch, and also represent them if required at any hearing.

This is the end of another four years serving as your representatives on the Council, we hope that we have done so and look forward to another four years working for the benefit of the community!

Ann Kemp and Matthew Balfour