

Borough Councillor's report 2021

Quite a different year to report on. Although dominated by the Covid 19 pandemic, services at Tonbridge & Malling have continued as normal, the preparations made for a No Deal Brexit, putting the council in a good position for staff to work from home successfully immediately the Stay at Home restrictions came into place. Once it was legally approved all council meetings were soon being held on line, with a live feed to You Tube, which has proved very popular, although councillors do miss the face to face debates in the Council Chamber. As it stands, video meetings are set to cease in mid-May, though this may yet change as the Secretary of State is being lobbied heavily by Councils throughout the country to allow Council's the choice of in-person or video meetings.

The Council was given the task of distributing Government Grants to local business, our officers stepped up to the plate and were able to do this very promptly and efficiently, they also organized many other forms of assistance for local residents who were shielding throughout the year.

The change in working patterns has given the council the opportunity to rethink how things are done, leading to some changes in working practice that has led to savings on our staffing costs.

As always the financial situation has been forefront of everything that we do, the unexpected drop in revenue, although helped by considerable government grants, has hit us hard and given us greater savings targets for future years.

The new waste collection service had considerable teething problems and was also badly hit by staff sickness due to the pandemic, but has now generally settled down and is producing amazing recycling results.

Opening hearings by the Inspector of our Local Plan took place in the autumn, unfortunately the inspector had concerns about our failure of our Duty to Cooperate with Sevenoaks Council about their inability to meet their planning requirements, so has suggested the Plan be withdrawn or they will recommend it's non-adoption. This is of course extremely disappointing, The Leader has written to the Secretary of State and we await developments.

Although the borough has not suffered from a high level of homelessness in comparison to other areas it was pleasing to see a reduction of over 30% compared to 2019. The Housing Team continues to work with providers and introduce new initiatives to help alleviate the high demand for both permanent housing and temporary accommodation. The Council have already purchased six self-contained flats in Tonbridge to help with the increasing demand for emergency accommodation and another property is currently being renovated to allow a further twelve units.

We look forward to working with you in the coming year, hoping for a return to some sort of normality.

Ann & Piers