

Retiring Chairman's report to Sevenoaks District Council

The Year

The civic year opened with a General Election and closed with local elections for this council and the parish councils within the district. With a change of government it has been a time of new challenges for members and officers. As chairman, I considered how the chairman's role could adapt to meet these challenges

Aims

In considering the aims for their year of office, chairmen look to the Council's Constitution to see what it prescribes for their role. It sets out the ceremonial aspect and the responsibilities for chairing council meetings. The ceremonial role gives the chairman wide discretion on which events are attended. As council taxpayers' money meets the cost of the chairman's ceremonial role I decided my aim should be to further the three objectives of Sevenoaks District's first Community Plan 2004/2014 entitled "Making it happen – together". The Community Plan wants Sevenoaks District to be recognised by all as a place with: Safe and Caring Communities, a Green and Healthy Environment and a Dynamic and Sustainable Economy. In furthering this aim my message at events I attended is that "Sevenoaks District is a great place to live, work and to visit".

I take the view that the Council decides what charities should be supported by grant aiding them and it is inappropriate to use Council resources to raise money for charities selected by the chairman. I therefore did not nominate any charities. The proceeds of a raffle held at the Members Annual Dinner were sent to Demelza House hospice for sick children.

Innovations during my year of office included arranging a briefing for non-executive members following meetings of full Council, not appointing a chaplain and not having a civic service.

In achieving these aims I ensured that the civic expenses were kept within the budget.

Outcomes

Attached is an appendix of events attended by the Vice Chairman and me. It indicates the venue and 74% were within the District with 24% in other areas of Kent. In justifying civic expenses it is important that most events are within the district or its adjoining local authorities. The appendix indicates how the event contributes to meeting the aims of the Community Plan. The value of the event is scored using the national scoring system drawn up by the National Association of Civic Officers. It is not the number of events attended that is important but the quality of those events in furthering the Community Plan. During the civic year events were attended in 27 of the 30 parishes of the District. The Vice Chairman and I are very appreciative of the warm welcome received from members and officers of these parishes when we attended events in their parish.

Thanks

In concluding my year of office I express my thanks to the Vice Chairman and his wife for their support and to Margaret Hagger and my driver, Russell Meek, for getting me to events on time and well briefed. I am grateful to my wife and daughters for escorting me to various events.

Thoughts for the future

As there is now a newly elected council I leave with some suggestions that might be worthy of consideration. First, perhaps Sevenoaks should follow the example of other local authorities and use a seniority of service system to determine which members go forward for nomination as Vice Chairman and Chairman. These roles are outside of politics and all members of the Council should be eligible to take these roles.

Second, the Council will shortly be reaching its 40th anniversary of its formation. Most district councils in Kent have since their formation 40 years ago petitioned the Privy Council for the grant of a Royal Charter conferring Borough Status. This has always been granted and is a low cost way of recognising the achievements made by the Council over the last 40 years.