

Outgoing Chairman's report

Well, this is the last time I will be sitting at the top table. However, in doing so I think I might have a small claim to fame and go down in the history of this council as being the only chairman to have served two consecutive years in office.

My first year in office was spent representing the Council to the best of my ability - ranging from a very damp and wet Queens Garden party to meeting with the many volunteers from the various sectors - West Kent Mind, The Good Care group, Forget-me-not café, Age UK, Pop-up-Sue, to mention just a few.

And as I have said at many of these meetings - without the volunteers, if SDC had to pay for the work and support they provided, we would have been bankrupt a long time ago. Those of you that have supported some of the events organised by the voluntary sector will know exactly what I mean - dedication - dedication - dedication.

The visits I made in the early days to the groups that we support has also made me realise the importance of the financial contribution we give to them, and believe me, they are really grateful and appreciative of that support.

The family fun days were enjoyed by so many families and children and myself, and by the way, I am now a fully trained up Badge maker! This event was especially important in the more remote rural areas in advertising the support they get from SDC.

I have attended remembrance services at Sevenoaks and Swanley, as well as raising the flag at SDC on Armed Forces Day, Merchant Navy Day and Commonwealth Day.

I attended the launch of Every Step Counts at Swanley and Chiddingstone and supported walks at Otford, Riverhead, Hartley and West Kingsdown. I have been really impressed with the organisation of these events by fellow councillors, bringing gentle exercise and socialising, to people who would otherwise just not have met.

The Christmas period was busy with carol services, visits to Sevenoaks Hospital, the CCTV room, and lunch with Age UK and the residents at Hollybush who would otherwise have been on their own, and for whom it would have been just another day.

The Chairman has the opportunity to support a charity throughout their term in office and mine was the Demelza Hospice for terminally ill children. Up until the closedown I had held several events to raise funds and took the opportunity to raise the districts profile and present some of the many district's assets to my guests who came from Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Essex and outer London. During this time, I managed to raise just short of £6000.

But what surprised me most of all while I was selling the District to my guests, was them asking me, how does SDC manage to stay in the black financially. Most were surprised when I responded - excellent staff, sound investments and good housekeeping.

However, in my second term there have been no events for me to attend in person, all being replaced by Zoom. Hopefully we will be moving away from that culture and get back to some sort of normality. I certainly hope that the situation improves for the incoming chairman.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Vice-chair and consort (Diana & Mike) for the support they have given myself and Frances and I wish them both a very successful coming year, and I know their Vice chair will be supporting them in the same manner.

I would like to give a special thanks to the "Team" from Democratic Services - Vanessa, Charlie, Emilia and Amanda, for all the help they have given me especially during the period of lockdown which has been difficult for all of us.

And whilst I am handing out the accolades, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Vanessa for all her specialist knowledge at council meetings and to wish her "bon voyage" when she leaves us in the middle of next month for a job in the big metropolis.

And last but by no means least, a really big thank you to my wife Frances who has been at my side throughout these two years and supported me in all my undertakings - and more recently has taken care of all the phone calls during my Zoom meetings.

Thank you all.

Councillor John Edwards-Winsor, Chairman 2019/21