



Annual Report 2020/21

Michael Charlesworth CC

The year was certainly a difficult one, the pandemic broke out in March and dominated nearly every aspect of peoples lives. I believe local government rose to the challenge and generally did well – despite confusing and contradictory advice from the government. Councils were given the reassurance that any monies spent on pandemic measures would be covered by the government, so far that pledge has not been honoured.

Members were thrown into the new world of Skype and Teams as the County Council changed its way of working; face-to-face meetings were suddenly a thing of the past. I don't think it made much difference in meeting the requirements of members, we got advice and information from senior officers when we needed it. The weekly briefings were very useful, and credit must go to those who organised them.

I had expected case work to diminish, but this turned out not to be the case, emails and phone calls came in at a regular pace and I suspect that because people had more time on their hands, they addressed issues they may not have previously. Of course, questions about the pandemic were the top of the agenda, and initially it was sometimes difficult to deal with these as the rules were changing on a weekly basis.

I continued to deliver my leaflets all through the year, I thought it vital that residents were kept up-to-date and had a point of reference if they needed any assistance. Another reason for my leaflets was to counter the misinformation on social media, which was leading to all sorts of confusion.

As whip for the Lib Dem group, it was vital we kept up communications, we had regular zoom meetings and set up a group on a social media site for instant messaging. As a group we kept on scrutinising the administration and made sure the day-to-day business was carried out as usual.

Overall, I think members and officers did a fairly good job of dealing with the pandemic, we all learnt how resilient we can be, and lessons learnt will help in the future.