



## **David Crowhurst Reports to Parish Councils**

I have in the past prepared for each Parish Council that I attend a report giving an update on issues for that Parish and the wider picture. The following report gives a snapshot over main heads of activity within the County and the area that I cover.

I propose to circulate this report on a bimonthly basis, updated as appropriate, to the Clerk of each Parish Council for the information of members, It should help to limit the time taken to report at the meeting, but with the opportunity for members of the Parish Council to ask questions.

### **Finance Government Funding and Council Tax**

Over the past two years there has been a significant reduction in the funding gap between what we need to spend and what is available from the Government. This has been achieved by service cuts and other efficiency savings. To assist further a national firm of consultants has been brought in to help in establishing more economical and efficient ways of service provision and management. The "Fit for Future" programme will range across all services. It will be an opportunity to address for example the shortfall in levels of service for older people that has been the subject of concern by Government Inspectors. The grant settlement that was finalised in January 2008 confirmed grant levels for a three year period. There was a higher than average increase in the Revenue support grant from the Government that saw the grant rise by around £4million. This is a very small sum when compared to the total budget of around £590million. In the next two years the grant will rise at a lower rate. As part of the "deal" the Council was required to indicate the level of increase in Council Tax for the three years. For 2008/9 the Tax will increase by 4.5% and for the next two years by 4% as a target. For the year 2008/9 money from additional Government grant of around £4m has been used as follows. £700,000 to keep the increase in Council Tax down to 4.5%, and £2.8m to be applied to Adult Social Care to improve and enhance services. The balance has been applied in other service areas.

### **Continuous Performance Assessment**

The County Council was inspected by a Central Government team during September/October 2007. This was the first major review since 2003 when the Council was judged to be Excellent. During the past year there has been continual approval of the performance by way of accolades in the fields of Mental Health with NHS partners, the Service provided at the Archives and History Centre and more recently an award for commendable work at Sherborne by the Welfare Benefits Section. Despite all this the rating of the Council has dropped from 4 to 3 star. We hope that the work that we are doing with the Fit for Future programme will help to restore the position at the next review.

### **Libraries**

Following the decision by the Council to invite Communities to take over the Library buildings and extend the use there has been a disappointing response. Of the 20 that were invited only three are taking up the offer. Opening hours will be reduced in all Libraries effective from September 2008. There was an offer to Communities either to buy extra hours or introduce volunteers, the latter to be trained by and at the cost of the County Council. Of the 34 Libraries that were invited only 10 have offered volunteer assistance to enhance the core opening hours, with a smaller number having opted to buy extra time. The training for volunteers will commence in the next few months and they will start work in September. This will coincide with the use of a new self- service arrangement to be installed in all Libraries, with the first being the 10 where volunteers will be involved. Charges will be introduced for use of computers at Libraries, with concessions for children, students and older people.

### **Trading Standards and Registration**

This important area of control covering amongst other things food quality and distribution works to protect the public. Work to investigate the sale of alcohol to minors is a significant area currently high on the Agenda within the service. The registration service for Births Marriages and Deaths has recently been the subject of a review by a visiting team from other authorities. We are awaiting the outcome of that inspection. There is a constant review of the placement of facilities for Registration in order to ensure that people have a reasonable level of access to that important service.

### **Dorchester Pedestrian and Traffic Management**

The working group under my chairmanship meets regularly to review progress on the preparation of the scheme that is seeking to achieve a balance between the needs of the motorist and the pedestrian in the Town. With two significant developments taking place during the next few years it is important to get the balance right. The views of people living in the surrounding areas are important as they contribute to the prosperity of the County Town. At present the money for the Scheme, coming mainly from the County Council, is not high on the list of priority but is being kept under review. It is hoped that parts of the scheme such as the pedestrianisation of the southern end of South Street can proceed.

### **Safer and Stronger Communities**

This theme group of the Dorset Strategic Partnership, meeting under my chairmanship, is funded by the Government Office for the South West with targets over a range of issues affecting Communities. Included is the problem of Domestic Violence where targets have been achieved to reduce and control the levels. Recently a special Court has been set up in Weymouth to deal with offenders. These initiatives are encouraging more people to report incidents as they arise. A special support post to drive the initiative has been firmed up within the establishment. There is an interface with drug and alcohol consumption that is being addressed.

### **Highways**

In all areas of the Division that I cover there are highway issues concerned with volumes, speed and pedestrian safety. In Broadmayne there is a continual flow of HGV traffic through the village on the A352, likely to increase if the proposals for waste disposal at Winfrith go ahead. At Owermoigne pedestrian safety in crossing the A352 is an issue with a pedestrian refuge to be installed. The Weymouth Relief Road features heavily in the Winterbourne Farringdon Parish that includes Bincombe. Most of the issues that impact on the environment are within that parish boundary. Speed of traffic through Osmington, Martinstown and Crossways still gives concern. Warmwell Parish is particularly concerned at the high level of HGV traffic that passes through the village on the B3390. At Dewlish there are concerns about safety in the centre of the village and Cheselbourne is looking for an extension to the 30mph limit. Finally in Puddletown there are concerns about parking on both sides of the road with cars and commercial vehicles, some high sided vehicles obstructing the light into residential property. Each of these issues is being addressed and kept under review.

### **Waste Disposal and Recycling**

Collection and treatment of waste, is a service shared between the County and District Councils. Recycling is an important issue and the provision of Recycling Centres for use by the public supports the initiative. The siting of these Centres is causing some problems in parts of the County, significantly at Dorchester and Bridport. The year 2012 is the date by which all disposal of domestic waste to landfill must cease. The County is on target but there are heavy financial penalties for failure.

### **Call Centre**

Dorset Direct, the call centre set up to deal with incoming calls by the Public is now functioning. In summary it provides a service that ensures in most cases a quick and full response to enquiries. The initial response to the Service by the Public has been encouraging.

## **Adult Social Care**

Sometimes referred to as the Cinderella of the Services this is a major portion of the work that I cover, referred to by other members as my "day job". Any move to change the way in which we offer services results in resistance and protest, as witness the recent attempt to rearrange the way in which we offer Day Care for older people. Most Centres are significantly underused, some as low as 42% take up against capacity, a situation that has been worsening over the past three years. This prompted a review that would have seen a more efficient and economical way of service provision, but with the guarantee that all who currently want the service would continue to receive it, albeit at a different Centre. Serving around 1000 older people, the annual cost of providing the Centres is around £4.3m. There is no charge for attendance at the Centre, the cost is borne by the Council Tax payer. The issue was heavily debated following a period of consultation with the final decision by members to allow centres to stay as at present. As regards care of people with disabilities there be a review that will include a reassessment of need in individual cases with a view to widening the opportunities for involvement in community activity.

David Crowhurst  
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