



WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

JOINT REPORT OF THE TOWN MAYOR, COUNCILLOR GARY JAMES AND THE TOWN CLERK, GREG DYKE

1. Introduction

This Annual Report of the Council will be available on the Council Web Site and at the Town Council Offices. The summary of funds which is submitted separately to the Council forms part of this report as will the Audited Accounts when they have been received from the Council's external auditors.

2. Town Council

The Town Council comprises 15 members who were elected for a four year period at the local elections on 7 May 2015. Since then we have welcomed two new councillors. Mark Lithgow was elected on 8 June 2017 to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Gloria Copley. Following the resignation of Councillor Charles Biscoe on health grounds, Ben Shepherd was elected to fill the vacancy on 26 October 2017. The names, addresses and telephone numbers, together with the Wards they represent are listed at Appendix A to this report. The political composition of the Council is Conservative: 9, Liberal Democrat: 4, Labour 1, Independent: 1

The Council have three part time employees. The Town Clerk (Greg Dyke - 30 hrs pw), Deputy Clerk (Debbie Bere – 30 hrs pw) and Finance Assistant Janet Palmer who is employed for 11 hours a month. Debbie has just started maternity leave. During her absence her post will be covered by Gill Croucher (25 hrs pw). The officers can all be contacted at the Council Offices, 28 Fore Street, Wellington TA21 8AQ Tel 662855, email info@wellingtontowncouncil.co.uk The office is open to the public between 9a.m. and 12 noon Monday to Friday (although you will usually find someone in the office outside of these hours).

3. Committees

We continue to operate a formal committee system with specific councillors being given responsibility for certain areas of the Council's business. A committee delegation scheme is in place which allows most committees to make decisions in accordance with their agreed terms of reference. This speeds up the decision making process. Decisions of the committees are normally implemented as soon as they have been made without having to wait for the formal agreement of the Council. Details of the committees that are currently operating are attached as Appendix B to this report.

4. The Mayor

The office of Mayor continues to be used to achieve its original aim to promote the town, raise the profile of the town council and represent the local community. Civic events such as the Civic Service, The Two Minute Silence, Remembrance Sunday and Armed Forces Day have become regular parts of the Mayor's calendar. The Mayor has continued to undertake the usual wide variety of engagements and represented the Council and the community throughout the year both locally and at many locations all over Somerset (over 125 in all).

The Mayor this year has been proactive in welcoming new businesses to the town. He has also supported local charities by donating his Mayoral allowance to five different local organisations, celebrated his 70th birthday by playing 70 sponsored squash matches for local charities and even danced the time warp!

5. Financial Support

The Town Council have a proud record of giving financial support to many local clubs and organisations. It has also used its limited finances to support a number of initiatives which all help to make the town a better and safer place in which to live. This year has been no different. Grants this year have included:

Citizens Advice Bureau – Wellington Outreach
Wellington Churches Together – The Big Tent
Wellington Museum and Local History Society
Reminiscence Learning
Wellington Wildcats Girls Football Team
Wellington Cricket Club – Youth Coaching
Wellington Churches Together – Howard Road Fun Day
Wellington Quakers – Celebration of Light
St John's Primary School (crossing patrols)
Wellington Community Support Services (Youth Service)
St John's Community Support Group
WHERE
Wellington Community Association
Wellington in Bloom
Wellington Carnival
Red Arrow Majorettes
Sticky Fingers Play Group
Wellington Library Friends
Wellington Choral Society
Wivey Link
Wellington Medical Centre Patient Participation Group

Just over £15,000 has been awarded from the annual Grants budget. It can be seen from the wide variety of organisations that have successfully applied for grants, that many different parts of the community have received financial help from the Council. The Council consider applications on a regular basis. It aims to ensure that finances are directed to the neediest organisations and those whose proposals are in line with the Council's aims and aspirations. In addition to the Grants budget, funds have been used from the Devolved Services and Promotion of Wellington budgets to assist organisations that support those services that the Council have identified as ones on which it wished to focus.

6. Communication

It is important for the Council to be as clear, open and transparent as possible and to make details of its work readily available. We have continued to work with a local publisher to produce the Town Guide in 2017. A new Guide will be produced in 2018. The Guide is produced at no cost to the Council. The Council produce a regular newsletter which we include in "The Edge" (a local service directory) widely distributed in the town and surrounding area. In addition we have a presence on the "Around Wellington" web site. We also rely on more traditional methods of publicity by the use of press releases and are fortunate to have regular, balanced reports in the local Wellington Weekly News and Somerset County Gazette.

We continue to make good use of modern technology. We have a web site, a Facebook page and Twitter account. These methods of communication continue to grow and are an increasingly good way of bringing up to date information to the community as and when it happens. There is, however, a continuing need to be aware of the dangers of entering into debate through social media.

7. Planning

The Town Council have devolved planning powers from TDBC which enables it to make decisions on certain categories of minor planning applications. All councillors have undertaken specific training so that they can exercise this devolved power. It also considers and makes recommendations on all other planning applications that are made within the town.

The Council were excellently represented by Councillor Thorne at the Local Inquiry held in relation to a controversial proposal to develop land at Bagley Road. Decisions are keenly monitored and scrutinised and as a result the Planning Office has been asked to provide the Council with further information in relation to developments at Tone Mill and at the Mount Veterinary Surgery. The town continues to develop and grow. The Town Council, therefore take a keen interest in all planning applications that affect the town.

8. Working Together

The Town Council is an important part of local democracy and the closest tier of government to local people. We continue in our own, limited way, to work hard to help prevent social isolation and loneliness, shape future development, encourage and support new businesses, save vital community assets and improve health and wellbeing. We want to ensure that essential local discretionary services from public conveniences to dog bins, from libraries to local events continue to be provided. We have found that the best way to do this is to work with other agencies so that a joined up approach is taken to the problems and issues that arise in the area.

An evening in a Church hall at a Council meeting is not everybody's idea of a good time but we continue to have a very active public participation time at all of our Council meetings. Indeed, there are many larger local authorities in the area who would be pleased to receive the level of interest that we get at our meetings. Apart from interested individuals having the opportunity to make their views known at our Planning meetings we have a good number of local people regularly attending meetings of the Council to make representations or purely to take an interest in local proceedings. This has gone a long way to keeping councillors in touch with local views and giving local people an opportunity to see

what the Council does and to address issues of interest and concern. It all helps in developing mutual understanding and in managing expectations.

This report also gives details elsewhere of how we work with local agencies and organisations all with a view to addressing common problems, responding to community concerns and sharing aims and aspirations.

The Council hopes to continue to encourage interest in the community and civic affairs. The civic award scheme which we run with Beech Grove Primary School and Rockwell Green Primary School continues to flourish and encourages Year 6 pupils to improve their skills and use them to impact on their community. The scheme has now been running for a sufficient period of time for us to see the results as the pupils get older. Let's hope it's not too long before we see one of our Civic award students popping up as a local councillor.

Following the County Council's decision to discontinue youth services we continue to work actively with interested parties in an effort to maintain a meaningful youth service in the town. We make a significant grant to Wellington Community Support Service to ensure that this service continues to be delivered and the young people's centre remains open.

We are keen to ensure that young people have an opportunity to make their views known on local issues that concern them. The Deputy Clerk has been working with pupils at Court Fields School to find out their views on topics the Town Council discuss. By working together in this way it not only gives the Town Council an insight into the views of young people but has also helped shape some of the Personal Development curriculum at the school as well as create a closer working relationship between Court Fields School and Wellington Town Council. This work will be delivered in a different way during the Deputy Clerk's maternity leave so we hope that this very important connection between young people and the Council is not lost.

We maintain a connection with the National Trust regarding the repairs to Wellington Monument. The Trust will shortly launch a fund raising campaign in relation to this scheme and the Council have already emphasised its support.

Wellington One – this project, which involves taking a multi-agency, one team approach to statutorily provided services, continues to make progress and is a significant example of working together. The Council part fund the employment of the Co-ordinator and have made additional finance available once again this year to provide extra services. By working with a multi-agency group such as this the Council are able to realise some of its aspirations and focus on the areas it considers to be important.

Wellington Heritage - Dr Joanne O'Hara has been appointed by Taunton Deane Borough Council to lead the conservation management programme of a number of high profile regeneration projects including Tonedale, Toneworks, Cornhill and the Monument. We welcome her appointment and hope it will lead to progress in regenerating these areas.

9. Transport

Town centre traffic continues to be a problem. This has been exacerbated this year by lengthy works to replace gas mains. The Council have been speaking to the Highway Authority for some time in an effort to improve traffic flow at the Longforth Road junction. Now that the road works have been completed we

hope to see work start on resequencing of the traffic lights and the introduction of improved filtering of traffic.

The situation regarding the proposed link road from Relyon through the new Longforth Farm development has taken a step in the right direction. In December 2017, Bloor Homes submitted detailed engineering plans to Somerset County Council for their approval, showing a road leading to the Relyon boundary across the current pavement and landscape verge. Somerset County Council have now reviewed the submitted plans, and will be requesting some minor changes. Once the amended plans have been approved, Bloor Homes will implement the revised scheme. It will then be up to Relyon / Pritex to undertake works within their landholding to connect to the road link when they are able to. The Council have also helped with the provision of some community transport schemes by making grants to Wivey Link and to the Wellington Medical Centre Patient Participation Group.

10. Promoting Wellington

A number of events have taken place during the year which has either been promoted by the Town Council or which it took part in. For instance, the Mayor used the annual Carnival reception to network with a variety of other councils, civic offices and local organisations. The Council continue to fund the Christmas Lights and the Switch On ceremony has become a regular event in the town calendar.

Town Centre Working Group

In an effort to promote the town and encourage local business a Working Group has been formed to investigate and report to the Council on the current issues faced by shops and businesses in Wellington, with an emphasis on:

- Shops and other commercial premises which are currently vacant;
- The problems and issues faced by the businesses already operating in Wellington;
- Facilities and amenities open to the public (including public open spaces); and
- Proposing practical solutions to issues identified which are affordable and within the scope of the Council's powers.

The Group are working with representatives of shops and businesses.

Town Centre Promotional Space

In November last year the opportunity arose for the Town Council to take on responsibility for licensing the promotional space in front of the Old Post Office. The Council see this as an opportunity to help contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre and at the same time gain some income from commercial letting of the space.

11. Devolution and Transformation

We continue to see a reduction in the services traditionally provided by TDBC and SCC. In addition TDBC and WSDC are a long way down the path of forming a single new Council. This is something that will reduce representation for Wellington at this level of local government. In many ways it could be seen as an opportunity for this Council to take on some of those services. It will certainly place greater responsibility on the Town Council to be the voice of Wellington and represent its views. We are ready to respond to the new possibilities offered by these changes. However, this will present challenges for a Council of our size

with effectively just two part time members of staff. We need to be open to different ways of working. We are beginning to do this already by monitoring services carried out on our behalf by others (Community Warden, Youth Service, C.A.B., WHERE) We need always to remember that Council tax payers don't look at tiers of local government – they look at the quality and provision of services.

The Council has re-emphasised its wish to focus on the following areas:-

- Improving the environment
- Co-ordinating support for older people
- Supporting families and young people
- Be proactive in getting people into employment
- Promotion of Wellington
- Health and Well Being
- Supporting traders and businesses
- Transport issues
- Community Safety

Once again arrangements have been made to improve the environment by funding extra cuts of highway grass and weed spraying next year. TDBC will no longer be providing dog bins and their dog patrols now take a lower priority. This is an issue currently being discussed by our Environment Committee.

We continue to maintain the Longforth Road public conveniences. A service we saved from being discontinued.

We have appointed a Community Warden for 12.5 hours per week. The person employed will supplement TDBC's street sweeping service and undertake certain jobs like collecting litter, weeding and cleaning bus shelters, picking up litter and inspecting equipment at Tonedale Play area. The duties are sufficiently flexible to allow the Council to react to unforeseen situations that might arise. As from 1 April the Warden's hours will be increased to three days a week. This will give us the opportunity to widen his brief and use him for example to carry out re-painting, refurbishing and repairing street furniture in the town centre. The Town Clerk regularly meets the ID Verde Contract Manager to monitor this service.

We continue to support the call for the re-establishment of a Railway Station in Wellington whilst being mindful of the need to manage expectations in view of the many challenges that face this particular aspiration. We are represented on the Devon and Somerset Metro Group and receive updates as and when they are available.

We continue to work closely with the Wellington Sports Federation and Sports Clubs to develop the vision identified in the TDBC Playing Pitch Strategy. All parties have now agreed to the appointment of Stuart Todd Associates to undertake Phase 1 – the first step in realising this ambitious project.

12. Conclusion

The public expenditure cuts introduced in recent years continue to impact greatly upon the local council sector. Changing legislation also provides the Town Council with the opportunity to take on services or facilities previously operated by larger authorities. This will continue to have implications for the Council's finances and its resources, particularly as some of them will involve ongoing commitments. The work of the Council continues to increase and has become much more diverse. Local Councils are growing fast and delivering a wider range of services than they have ever done before – Wellington is no exception. Fortunately local councils are not currently reliant on Government grants to meet their expenditure and have the ability still to set a precept in order to raise funds to meet revenue expenditure, although this is something that may change in the future. By doing this the Council are getting itself into a position to deliver effective services in response to local needs and aspirations and meet any challenges that might arise. Life with the Town Council continues to be varied and is never boring. We are open to new ways of working and are confident that we can deliver at the most local level.

We all look forward to another busy year.

Gary James
Town Mayor

Greg Dyke
Town Clerk

8 May 2018

APPENDIX A

Town Councillors

Wellington East

Councillor Peter Critchard, 41 Jurston Lane, Wellington TA21 8DW Tel 668698

Councillor Ross Henley, 20 Trinity Close, Wellington TA21 8TZ Tel 665988

Councillor James Hunt, 49 Millstream Gardens, Tonedale, Wellington TA21 OAA
Tel 664400

Councillor Gary James, 6 Blackmoor Road, Wellington TA21 8ED. Tel 662112

Wellington North

Councillor William Brown, 8 Chelston Terrace, Chelston, Wellington TA21 9HT
Tel 661602

Councillor Andrew Govier, 47 Laburnum Road, Wellington TA21 8EN Tel
667589

Councillor Mark Lithgow, 19 High Path, Wellington TA21 8NH Tel 662540

Councillor John Thorne, 3 Rose Mews, Fore Street, Wellington Tel 663146

Wellington South

Councillor Ben Shepherd, York Cottage, Langford Budville TA21 ORD Tel
401039

Wellington West

Councillor Robert Bowrah, BEM, 30 Holyoake Street, Wellington TA21 8LD Tel
666739

Councillor Janet Reed, 10 Bulford, Wellington TA21 8DE Tel 660584

Councillor Vivienne Stock-Williams, Lane End House, Northend Lane,
Nicholashayne, Wellington TA21 9QZ Wellington Tel 673244

Rockwell Green

Councillor Marcus Barr, 16 Brooklands Road, Rockwell Green, Wellington TA21
9DJ Tel 661817

Councillor Janet Lloyd, Hazelwood, Whiteball, TA21 0LS Tel. 672877

Councillor Lynda Russell-Cairns, 6, The Corams, Waterloo Road, Wellington
TA21 8JQ Tel 974305

APPENDIX B

(a) Finance Committee

This meets on a monthly basis and is responsible for overseeing the financial affairs of the Council. This provides the opportunity for members to undertake the necessary checks and balances of the Council's finances on a regular basis. The aim is to make all financial transactions as transparent and accountable as possible. The Finance Committee becomes involved early on in the budget setting process. This initial work has allowed better consideration of the setting of the precept. It also gives initial consideration to any applications for grant prior to a decision being made by Council. Chair: The Mayor

(b) Emergency Committee

This Committee continues its close links with the Emergency Planning teams at District and County level so that it knows what response would be expected of the Council in the event of an emergency. The Committee has in place a Winter Weather contingency plan. It had to be implemented on a couple of occasions this year when local arrangements were made to help maintain access at certain locations in the town during bad snow conditions. As well as maintaining access we even managed to help a local bride to get to church on time! The Committee had just one "virtual" meeting during 2017/18 to deal with the above issues and to update the Wellington Emergency/Contingency Plan.

Chair: Councillor Bob Bowrah

(c) Footpaths Committee

Somerset County Council has overall responsibility for Footpaths and Rights of Way and this Committee continues to work closely with their team. We said goodbye to Sally Vickery who had been the County's Rights of Way Officer for this area for some time. Sally had been a great support to the Council over the years and we shall miss her. We receive a small grant from Taunton Deane towards the cost of footpath maintenance to which this Council add a sum of its own if necessary. The maintenance of public rights of way is very important to the local community. The definitive footpaths within the town boundary are regularly inspected and a schedule prepared designed to keep them clear and passable. We continue to make very good use of the services of local volunteer Tom Borg who, together with his wife, Eunice, has proved to be an excellent Parish Path Liaison Officer. They keep the Committee up to date with any problems. The "Strimmer Project" set up several years ago by the County Council continues to be a great success. It has allowed us to react to any unplanned maintenance that has become necessary.

Chair: Councillor Gary James

(d) Environment Committee

As well as dealing with all environmental issues affecting the town this committee also has responsibility for the production of the town guide and promoting and encouraging tourism. This year it has had to deal once again with the ongoing problems caused by irresponsible dog owners. It has embarked on a programme of providing town centre seating, grit bins and an additional

defibrillator. As usual it has co-ordinated extra cuts of highway grass and road side weed killing. All aimed at improving and maintaining the local environment.
Chair: Councillor Janet Reed

(e) Community Safety

The Council are keen to ensure that it does everything it can to help the Police reduce the perception of crime and reduce incidents of anti social behaviour. It wants to make Wellington a safe and pleasant place in which to live and work. Although the Committee has not had to meet this year the Council has maintained direct contact through the Deputy Clerk's attendance at meeting of the Police Independent Advisory Group. Regular reports of crime statistics are submitted to the Council and when operational duties allow, the Police attend Council meetings.

Chair: Councillor Andrew Govier

(f) Staffing and Training Committee

Staffing issues together with training of both staff and members is the responsibility of this committee. During the year it gave consideration to the staffing structure to be implemented during the Deputy Clerk's absence on Maternity Leave. Two councillors have attended new councillor training courses and also received the necessary Planning training. The Clerk has attended the occasional training day organised by SALC.

Chair: Councillor Vivienne Stock-Williams

(g) Allotments Committee

This has been another very busy year for this Committee. The Council own an allotment site at the Basins with just over 100 allotment plots. It works hard to establish good relations with its allotment tenants and to ensure that all the plots are actively used. There are currently just 6 people on the waiting list. Regular inspections of the allotments ensure a high standard of most of the allotment plots. As part of its aim to be an allotment site for the community, two plots have been re-developed for use by persons with disabilities. One plot has been allocated to Court Fields School and the really young generation have been catered for with the letting of a plot to the Children's Centre. The Committee meetings continue to be open to all tenants and it enjoys a significant level of attendance from keen allotment holders.

Chair: Councillor Janet Lloyd

(h) Neighbourhood Plan Working Party

Nothing has been done this year in respect of the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. The stage had previously been reached where we had carried out extensive consultation, gathered qualitative evidence and reported outcomes. However, when it got to the point where we needed to identify quantitative evidence to justify the development of policies/allocations and gives examples of who we would need to talk to we floundered.

We were given examples of a structure for a report which showed how we needed to gather evidence to support it. It appeared to envisage us going back to organisations, other Authorities, Councils and statutory stakeholders and speaking to them.

Unfortunately this epitomised the problems we have found with the development of a Neighbourhood Plan right from day one when we were fearful of having to

follow a prescriptive procedure and prepare a plan using well meaning amateurs (rather than professional planners) which will then be judged on the basis of a properly prepared planning policy document. We could probably do the things that are required but with the limited staff resources of the Council it would have to be at the expense of everything else we do. This, of course, is not practical and the development of a Plan came to a halt.

Chair: Vacant

As well as the formal committee structure, the Council form working parties and sub committees to deal with single focus issues.

The Council also nominate members to represent it on a variety of local committees and organisations.