

Outgoing Chairman's report

As I write this report, reflecting on the year it has been a delight to serve the Council and our Communities. I can't not mention the Pandemic, as I started my role as Chairman, we were under the bright lights of the Stag Theatre, trying to maintain a social distance, keep everyone safe, whilst still trying to be as normal as possible. The year didn't really take off until July 2021, where the further easing of restrictions made this possible.

The Pandemic has changed so many of our lives, it has brought sadness to many but it has brought new and innovative ways of working, and communities together. Which was reflected by the Communities and Business Team working with Eliza from St. Clere Estate who created 'Care for the Communities.' They, throughout the pandemic helped vulnerable residents obtain food and medicine as well as being a friendly voice to chat on the phone to. On 1 October 2021, I had the pleasure to help fund and co-host the Volunteers Thank you event afternoon tea with the SDC Communities Team alongside a magician and professional singer.

Another highlight was the Making it Happen Voluntary awards on 9 March 2022 at St. Nicholas Church, these awards recognised residents and organisations in the District that went the extra mile. I am full of adoration for all those who work in the voluntary sector, with many who in spite of their own difficult circumstances are still doing so much for others. It has been a joy getting to know the real people behind these groups and I've enjoyed my time attending the Voluntary Sector Forum, Seniors Action Forum, Pop up Sue's and Every Step Count walks, meeting the inspirational group who organise and run the training of Guide Dogs for the Blind as well as numerous meetings and AGM's including the Sevenoaks District Scout AGM at which I was delighted to be able to renew my Scout Promise. These being just a few of the many youth Groups and Voluntary bodies that I have visited during the year. These groups provide valuable niche service to support residents, of which to many these services are a lifeline.

I have been able to spend time enjoying the company of those attending the various Forget Me Not Cafés. I have been so impressed that I have agreed to continue working with them and now run and will continue to run the new Forget Me Not Café in Otford.

From older to younger, I have been invited to attend many schools across the District. We were dazzled by flawless nativity performances, exceptional carol services, fabulously acted school plays and encouraged by meeting inspirational Heads before being involved with the School Council at Orchards Academy and being asked to speak on 'How can you make your voice heard in your profession' at Walthamstow Hall. A topic that was close to my heart and it was a delight to have such engaging conversations with the students.

I have also had the pleasure of experiencing the vastness and great variety of Sevenoaks District, and this year has given me the opportunity to appreciate and explore the extremities of our District. There are so many hidden beauties. The District

has an incredible calibre of talent, and many times Michael and I were blown away by musical and theatrical talent from the likes of the Kentish Opera, Sevenoaks Philharmonic Choir and Sevenoaks Symphony Orchestra which would have given the West End a run for its money.

I have attended many of the Sevenoaks District Chamber of Commerce networking business events and seen the value of the work they undertake to support so many local businesses. What a pleasure it was to finally meet Members and not see them on Zoom. Although Zoom proved to be an invaluable asset it is one aspect I will be pleased to be no longer involved with.

I had the pleasure of judging over 80 entries for 'In Bloom' run by Coolings along with Cllr Hogarth, we were astounded by the variety of the gardens brightening up the District and supporting wildlife. It was a pleasure to present the awards at a prize giving ceremony in October.

It has been an honour to be involved with the tree planting of 3 oak trees for the Queen's Green Canopy, tree planting scheme to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022, celebrating 70 years of service.

After years of planning and preparation it was with immense pleasure that I attended the opening of White Oak Leisure Centre held on 12 February 2022. It was a great success. I was delighted to meet Colin Jackson and other well-known sporting figures. The occasion had a superb buzz and it was wonderful to see a huge array of facilities designed for everyone in the local community to enjoy.

I have met so many people through the Fun Days, and the free cycle rides at Brands Hatch. These events have been a fantastic opportunity to interact with families in many parts of our District and it is of utmost importance that we continue to offer and support these types of events. It was very special to be invited to present the Westerham Sea Cadets with their awards at various events throughout the year, and be on Chipstead Lake with them. To have them continue to attend our flag raising events has been wonderful, and something I hope they will continue to do. I have attended and been part of many flag hoisting events during the year including Commonwealth Day, Merchant Navy Day, Remembrance Day, Armed Forces Day and a new event NHS Day.

My heartfelt thanks to my colleagues for electing me as Chairman and supporting the fundraising events I've hosted for DAVSS, the locations of which I hope has shown aspects of the District which were not regularly apparent or even known to those who had not visited. We have raised over £5,400 for DAVSS and this money will help contribute to their valuable work throughout the District. To Cllr Collins, thank you for attending every event I have hosted and supporting me with your friendship. I have attended some neighbouring authority events, raising the profile of the District Council and of the District and been able to show case the best of Sevenoaks District. I have made many new friendships which I know will last a lifetime.

To each and every single one of the Officers of SDC, you have worked tirelessly under enormous pressures and never ending workloads during the last many months, often working from home in less than ideal surroundings. Whenever I have been lucky enough to visit the Offices staff are always busily working away with smiles on their faces. No task being too difficult to complete. You truly are an example of dedicated staff to Councillors and residents alike and Sevenoaks would not be the Council it is without you. Thank you for your dedication.

The support I have received from the Team in Democratic Services has been first class and without which, my year would not have gone so smoothly. The team have provided constant encouragement, advice and all the back-office assistance required, at the end of a phone line. The backing has never been stinting, always positive and laced with humour when the need arose. My heartfelt thanks to this tight knit team. My thanks also go to all the Officers who have supported me in my role from Daniel and the Communications team to the Chief Officers who have kept me well briefed for speeches at events. Thank you for all your support.

Cllr Hunter and Allan thank you for supporting me for this year, we have attended some wonderful events together and it has been a delight to have you supporting me with all my fundraising events. Rev Bourne, thank you for being my Chaplain for the year, the joy of actually attending the Carol Service at St. Luke's was a welcome return to normality. Thank you for your service to the Council and the residents of the District.

Last, but in no way least, my thanks to Michael. You have supported me in everything this year and worked assiduously to co-ordinate and organise my charity fundraisers. I'm so grateful for this role which brought us together. Finally, I am more than grateful for all the chauffeuring to the far-flung corners of our District and indeed Kent. According to my records we have attended over 245 events and have been invited to over 350, with a majority being within the District and most of which we attended.

The year has been a journey of discovery within the District and it has been an honour to serve.

Cllr Diana Esler
Chairman 2021-2022