

## **Annual Report to the Parish Council 2017**

### **Three Valleys Division Dorset County Council**

#### **County Councillor Jill Haynes**

This has been a difficult and challenging year at the County Council. Increasing budget reductions coupled with increased demand on services have tested the resolve of councillors and staff alike.

Both Adults and Children's services returned at the end of the year overspent on budget. In the case of Children's services there are two main causes, firstly the large number of children in care, over 500 at the moment. These numbers are very slowly starting to come down and as much more work is being done with families at an earlier stage. Secondly the trouble in recruiting suitably qualified social workers. A lot of the problems with recruitment is the cost of housing in Dorset although there is a national shortage of social workers. The directorate was successful in an innovation bid to central Government for £2M to look at different ways of recruitment and retention and this has successfully provided about two thirds of the new staff we need. We now provide a better relocation package along with professional development opportunities at Bournemouth University.

The issues in Adult services are around the rapidly increasing cost of care. In some cases this has risen by over 10% in the financial year. We have a framework of providers which we try to use but as there are so many self-funders and a limited pool of care workers we often are unable to purchase at the framework price. In the east of the county the regular cost of residential care is running between £1300 and £1500 per week, eye watering!! In an effort to control the market we are moving towards joint commissioning of care with the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group for Dorset. This should give us a much bigger buying power and with pooled budgets should stop all those arguments about whether the care is social care or NHS responsibility.

With the moves towards a greater health integration there are now starting to be much more sensible conversations with partner health organisations about early help and prevention. We need to work closely with our GP's and stop people getting into hospital in the first place. On the subject of GP's there has been some misinformation about that says the county council are closing GP surgeries. As GP's are their own businesses the county has no influence or responsibility in this area, they are however important partners. The Primary Care Board, which is made up of representatives from GP localities throughout Dorset, recently published their strategy for future sustainability. In that document it was said that practices (businesses) with 3 or less GP's would struggle to survive and that practices should merge to ensure they were viable. There is also considerable concern about GP recruitment. If this were to happen then there would be less practices but in rural areas it is not the intention to reduce the number of surgeries.

The Gypsy and Traveller Transit site at Piddlehinton has been a success and has not been open in the financial year. Travellers have made illegal encampments in the county and because of the transit site the Police have had the powers to move them to the site. This has proved an appropriate deterrent and they have then left the county. The long court case for the removal of the travellers near Frampton is, I think, finally at an end. They moved onto land which they owned but did not have permission to live there in the AONB. This has been to planning committee and refuses then appeal and the inspector also refused. We have now waited the appropriate time for an appeal on that decision and none has been forthcoming so eviction notices will be served.

The Highways section and Dorset West Partnership are both rated in the top ten best in the country. In particular by being very proactive in the highways management plan Dorset highways have managed to bring into the maximum amount of funding available as this is now paid on a performance basis.

Finally I don't often talk about these bits. We have a very successful County Farm estate with farms for rent/lease across the county. Unlike other counties we have not sold these farms off and they provide an invaluable starting point for new farmers. As some have left or retired we have made the land holdings larger so that the farm numbers are fewer but larger and therefore sustainable. They are very much valued in the industry.

Country Parks, we have a number right across the county and many of you may have visited them. Thorncombe woods, looking lovely with the bluebells at the moment, Durlston Castle and Avon Heath are all managed by the county and are run in a way that their income makes them self-supporting. If you haven't been before they are all very different and all well worth a visit.