

At the end of another 4 year cycle, we are pleased to be able to give a very positive report on the work of Tonbridge & Malling borough Council albeit that they have been difficult financially for everyone and the council has had to make some enormous cuts in the budget, however this has been achieved without any noticeable cuts to our frontline services, due to some very positive changes to our working practices and some better than expected news on our income streams.

We took the decision to introduce fairer charging across the borough; that has corrected the imbalance between the parished areas and the non-parished area. We have looked carefully at the assets held by the authority and have chosen to dispose of some that are worth millions of pounds but have little public value. This money has then been invested into property unit trusts to generate an income for the foreseeable years. We have also facilitated the building of a modern medical centre in Tonbridge that will be for the benefit of many of our residents.

Grant Thornton, our auditors, again recognise that the council is a well run and controlled authority. They always offer very good reports on the accounts, and without fail recognise the very good value for money Tonbridge and Malling represent for their residents.

Given the financial constraints we have changed the way the summer playscheme is delivered and have created the Leisure Trust both of which have gone from strength to strength, gaining even more places in the industry ranking (Quest) with Tonbridge & Malling appearing amongst those at the very top.

The tender of the waste contract, or recycling contract, as we prefer to call it, is an amazing outcome for our residents which will allow everyone in the borough to recycle with ease, kerbside collections will make it very simple to recycle a whole host of items.

The investment of S106 developer contributions in some flats in Tonbridge, to be used as temporary accommodation for the homeless, thus saving considerably on B&B expenses, has proved very successful. It is hoped that a similar opportunity can be found to do likewise in the north of the borough.

Some of the other ways which improvements have been made include investment in new Gym equipment and a free weights area at Larkfield Leisure centre, as well as improvements to the changing areas and provision of two dance studios. Also, an improved the car park at Leybourne Lakes the provision signage and improved paths. A 4Ha wildflower meadow has also been provided together with a park run operating successfully around the lake.

The Local Plan has been a major factor in our work this past year as it was so important to meet the deadline set by the government to avoid having to start all over again under the new and even greater housing number requirements. We are well aware that there are difficult times ahead, as we do need to build so many new homes, putting pressure on both our countryside and the current infrastructure.

We have both been honoured to represent the communities of Downs and Mereworth Ward over the past four years.

Ann Kemp and Matthew Balfour