

Mayor's Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2022

Presented by Cllr Sowry-House

I am pleased to present the report from the Town Council to the Corfe Mullen Annual Parish Meeting as the Mayor and Chairman of the Council. I would like to thank Cllr Mattocks for undertaking the role of Deputy Mayor and Vice Chairman for the last 2 years also.

A strange and difficult two years for all

The last 2 years have been exceptional, and on behalf of Corfe Mullen Town Council, I should like to express sympathy to all those in the Parish who have lost friends or relatives affected by the Covid-19 virus.

When the first lockdown was announced, myself, Cllr Jefferies and Cllr Lortie worked with lots of volunteers to set up and run the Corfe Mullen Resilience initiative. This saw the most vulnerable people in the Parish having their shopping and prescriptions delivered to them avoiding the risk of going out and catching the virus. This initiative ran through until the first vaccines were provided and other methods of delivery became readily available for those individuals. I am extremely proud to have been a part of something which was entirely run on community spirit and I should like to thank every single volunteer who went above and beyond during what was an extremely challenging time.

The virus and the national restrictions made planning and implementation of many of the Council's activities difficult and uncertain, and the retirement of the long-standing Clerk, Katrina Blee, at the start of the pandemic, saw the Council recruiting a new Clerk in the middle of the first lockdown. Despite this, the general day to day functions of the Council and the many areas for which it is responsible remained a priority and I would particularly like to thank Nicola Gray, Town Clerk, for enabling the work to be achieved and ensuring the Council remained compliant and legal. She joined the Council in unprecedented times and has not only maintained safe and compliant procedures in all Council activities but has implemented many efficiencies across the working practices of the Council, saving time and public money. During the pandemic the Council continued to meet virtually using Zoom and this has enabled ongoing attendance by members of the public and did in fact see an increase in the engagement from the Public with meetings.

In October 2020, the Council restructured its administrative workforce and employed a Deputy Clerk to ensure consistent and robust guidance and advice to Council in the Clerk's absence. Catherine Horsley, Deputy Town Clerk, has also become an invaluable member of the Council's administrative team. In November 2021, following further working practice efficiencies, the Council reduced the number of administrative hours from 118 hours per week across 4 members of staff, to 94 across 3 members of staff. The two Assistant Clerk's decided to leave the Council and a vacancy is currently advertised for an Administrative Assistant covering 20 hours per week.

All staffing adjustments have been implemented to provide best value for Corfe Mullen residents.

Some achievements during the 2 Years since the last Parish Meeting

- The Town Council resolved to put in place a Neighbourhood Plan for Corfe Mullen, to ensure that greater control is retained by residents when it comes to development within the Parish.
- Consideration and response were given in respect of the initial consultation of the Dorset Local Plan, with lots of input from residents.

- The new allotment site was opened and despite many teething problems, in particular flooding, all plots were let with a waiting list of over 20 people being established.
- New CCTV cameras were installed at the Town Council office and village hall following an increase in anti-social behaviour and drug activity. Images have been regularly provided to the police. In addition to this, there has sadly been an increase in the amount of anti-social behaviour amongst the school children who visit the Towers Way play area after school. This has seen the involvement of the Headteacher of Lockyer's School and the Youth Leader of the Youth Club.
- The Town Council was asked to consider becoming the sole trustee for Corfe Mullen Youth Trust, which it resolved to do in November 2021.
- The Town Council resolved to have a greater presence in the local community so that residents can see where work is being carried out by branding its Trucks and the uniform worn by its Grounds staff.
- Corfe Mullen Village Hall is also managed by the Town Council as a sole Trustee. When it was legal to reopen, usage was very limited and caused a greater loss of income for the Charity and therefore it closed again. It fully re-opened on 2 February 2022. Whilst the closure took place, Council took the opportunity to obtain planning and building consent to extend the rear small hall into a more useable space with full disabled access and facilities, along with the addition of a porch at the front of the hall. It was hoped to have had the consent and work completed by the end of 2021, but the process took much longer than anticipated with the financial loss seeing the hall not in a position to fund the work at the time. The work will be commenced within the 3-year timescale determined by planning consent.
- The Town Council installed new Notice Boards across the parish, using environmentally friendly recycled heavy duty plastic noticeboards. These require little or no maintenance and should last for many generations.
- The old fingerposts across the Parish have been renovated, with the last post being underway. All 4 fingerposts will be completed by the summer of 2022 and maintain some of the parish heritage.
- The Town Council ran a Dog Fouling Sign competition for local school children in early 2021, which saw young winners across three age groups. They won £30 in vouchers of their choice and had their designs made into real signs which were put up around the parish asking dog owners to pick up after their dogs.
- The Henbury Play Park was renovated and completed in 2020.
- The Chapel was identified as needing extensive repair, and following a competitive quotes procedure, a local builder was engaged to complete the works. This is ongoing with it hoped to be completed by summer 2022.

Grants made to local organisations

In 2020:

- £2,000 Citizen's Advice East Dorset
- £1,000 Legs and Company Leg Club
- £150 Corfe Mullen 5k Fun Run and Children's one-mile fun run.
- £170 East Dorset Beekeepers Association
- £100 Phelipps Charity
- £520.81 Corfe Mullen Foodbank
- £150 Vision Wimborne Dial-a-Ride
- £800 Corfe Mullen Carnival
- £200 Growing Compassionate Communities
- £1,500 Corfe Mullen Carnival Christmas Lights Appeal Fund
- £200 East Dorset Tourist Information Centre
- £36,540 revenue funding for Corfe Mullen Youth Trust

In 2021:

- £1,000 Allotment Association
- £400 East Dorset Beekeepers Association
- £500 Corfe Mullen Foodbank
- £250 Radio Wimborne
- £1,000 Citizens Advice East Dorset
- £250 Vision Wimborne Dial-a-Ride
- £1,000 Corfe Mullen Carnival
- £2,000 Legs and Company Leg Club
- £500 Corfe Mullen 5K run and Children's fun run
- £2,500 Corfe Mullen Festive Lights and Parade
- £37,000 Corfe Mullen Youth Trust

Much still to do

There is much still to do across the Parish to ensure that Council provides the high standard of services it always has done but, in particular, the continued push to ensure that Corfe Mullen does not lose its precious green belt land and is not swamped with unsuitable housing, and to work with residents to ensure that facilities at the recreation ground reflect the needs of the community.

Lastly, I should like to thank my fellow Councillors who continue to robustly debate, discuss and enact all matters in Corfe Mullen with a passion and desire to keep Corfe Mullen as an independent, beautiful and highly desired place to live. Each Councillor brings a different perspective to what can sometimes be very difficult decisions, but as a team we ensure that whatever the outcome of those decisions, we move forward together and provide Corfe Mullen residents with a parish to be proud of.