

In the meeting that follows the Council will look closely at its governance arrangements and financial position over the last twelve months before submitting an annual return to the external auditor. The public have access to the process and are informed of the results, the purpose of which is to give assurance that the Council is financially responsible and well-managed.

However, the process doesn't really give an idea of how effective the Council has been over the last year. Our prime functions are to represent our community and improve the quality of life and wellbeing of our residents. How well have we done? How do we measure success? Is it important?

I believe it is important because it takes a significant amount of public money to administer the Council regardless of whether it achieves anything. We employ a clerk, hire venues, pay insurance and a myriad of other things regardless of whether we do anything that actually benefits our community. If nothing is achieved we simply become a talking shop funded by our fellow residents. Therefore, one possible way of assessing our effectiveness is to look at the proportion of our annual turnover that has been spent on our own administration compared with what we have spent in the parish. It's not an exact science, is influenced by the size of the Council, and doesn't take into account important functions that don't necessarily attract costs. However, the exercise can be informative.

At our interim audit the auditor estimated that at the six month mark we had spent 67% of our turnover on simply administering the Council, expenditure just to maintain our existence. To a casual observer this may be worrying but is actually to be expected because administration costs are higher at the beginning of the financial year and project work tends to be completed later in the year. Nevertheless, at the end of the financial year I took it upon myself to do another assessment, particularly as the auditor hadn't commented further. My calculations showed that on completion of the financial year we had flipped this figure around and had spent 64% of our turnover on the community and 36% on our own administration. This is an indication that we have been highly effective in working for the community, particularly as we are a low-precepting council and would expect our overheads to be proportionally greater than some larger councils. We certainly couldn't be described as simply a "talking shop".

In the previous financial year:

- We have managed to get the speed sticker and SpID projects over the line and two state of the art units are now being rotated around the parish. Initial analysis of the data shows that they are successful in slowing traffic.
- We are at an advanced stage of procuring two additional static SpID units for Southport Road.
- We have installed and arranged for the stocking of flood equipment cupboards to aid residents in times of flood which are now occurring with regularity.
- We have noted the increased usage of the Millennium Wood since the pandemic and improved the access arrangements, now inclusive of those with disabilities, and also undertaken work to improve the overall safety of the facility having taken professional advice.

- We have acted quickly to fill the void left by the demise of *Scarisbrick Village Matters* and we are producing a parish newsletter. This is a huge achievement and great credit goes to those involved in its production and distribution.
- We have refurbished seating benches at Turning Lane, Bullens Lane and Diglake. This is in addition to maintaining grassed areas, our own hedges, bus shelters, noticeboards and many other things that tend to go under the radar.
- We have organised an ecumenical civic service and Remembrance Sunday event, and this year saw the successful resumption of the gardening competition following the shutdown due to the pandemic. Many thanks to all involved.
- We have made successful applications for grant funding from WLBC, LCC, and the Heritage Association for various aspects of project work within the parish.
- We have considered 48 planning applications. A number of these were highly contentious and involved the Council making detailed written representations to planning authorities and representing resident's views in person at planning meetings both within the Borough and at County Hall. We have also provided written submissions to the planning inspectorate with regard to appeals.
- We provided opportunity for residents to question, in person, those responsible for delivering and formulating policy with regard to policing within the parish and county.
- We have provided feedback on behalf of the parish to WLBC with regard to their Citizen and Stakeholder Survey and to LCC with regard to a Parish and Town Council Charter and their Public Realm Works Agreement.
- We have set a budget for the current financial year that will allow us to move forward with work within the parish yet has contained the financial burden on our residents to an increase in precept of 3.8%. This is well within inflation and represents an annual increase of only 69p for an average band D property.

I believe that this describes a Council punching significantly above its weight. Councillors are to be congratulated and I offer my personal thanks to you all, particularly those who have gone the extra mile during the course of the year. It's important that members of the public appreciate that parish councillors are not remunerated for their work, neither do they receive expenses. However, we are not volunteers. We are elected representatives of the people we serve and this brings responsibility that goes beyond volunteering. I believe that our work over the last twelve months demonstrates that this responsibility is taken seriously. It would also be remiss at this stage not to mention the assistance afforded to us by our representatives on the Borough and County Councils for which we are very grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank our Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer for her work over the last year. Judith is an exemplary financial manager who is repeatedly congratulated by auditors on the standard of her work. It is not simply the standard of her bookkeeping that draws comment because she has also introduced several innovations that add transparency and efficiency to our financial management. She also administers the Council and organises much of the work we do on behalf of the parish, often going well beyond the call of duty. A busy Council invariably means a busy Clerk and I know we are all grateful for the effort Judith puts into the role.

Congratulations to everyone that has ensured that Scarisbrick Parish Council is well-managed, effective, listens to its residents, and remains relevant.