

Annual Report: Cllr. Gwen Lowe 2010/11

Introduction

Dear Labour Group Support Manager,

Many thanks for your kind email which I have just received from your good self requesting "GET YOUR ANNUAL REPORT DONE NOW!!!!"

OK OK OK! Message received loud and clear! Will this do for now?

Because last year my Annual Report consisted of some text, photos and even a couple of short video clips with some of the wonderful people I have helped and worked with (many thanks for that folks!). Many of you commented on how good it was as it wasn't just loads of boring text to read but that you were able to see a bit of me and also see and hear "real life stories from real folk first hand". I would have liked to have used the same format this time but due to the many Government cuts (thanks Mr Cameron) the funding and resources aren't available to us. However, at the moment due to working shifts and then taking a summer break time is limited, but in September I want to tart my report up with a visual bit of me, an informal chat I suppose about the everyday stuff I do as a councillor, plus some photos. So please retune your sets in September in time for an addition to my annual report (as well as the forthcoming digital switch over!)

This has been my 5th year as a Labour Councillor for Batley West and this year has just flown by and I continue to be busier than ever (you can tell by the untidy state of our house - sorry Darlink husband !). I still thoroughly enjoy the role and dearly wish I had more time to give you all. But I promise I will always continue to be totally committed and serve you the residents of Batley West as best I can.

A big THANK YOU as always to my fellow ward Councillors, Mike Wood MP, David NO RELATION Lowe (!), and also our brilliant Labour Group Support Staff for all your continued help and support you give to enable me to be the kind of councillor the people of Batley West want to represent them.

My thanks of course to my wonderful husband (chef and decorator at the mo!) and family for their continuing support, understanding, patience (and creased clothes as I never have time to iron).

Participation at Council Meeting Committees

I have attended every Full Council Meeting, even September 15th my birthday! I have attended our Labour Group meetings and remain sitting in the Chair's seat.

Other Council Committee & Panel Meetings attended: -

Batley Labour Branch meetings & CLP.

Batley, Birstall & Birkenshaw Town & Valley Committee Meetings - This thankfully returns this year to the title of Area Committee. As we continue to develop a more strategic approach to neighbourhood working I continue as Chair which I thoroughly enjoy plus am getting a better understanding of the strategic approach which I wasn't too sure about as most of you who know

me know that I would rather be out there getting my hands dirty. The meetings are themed around major issues which affect us all to some degree i.e. Community Safety, Health, Local Development Plan, Transport. We continue to support and help fund smaller various local groups so that they can continue to be valuable assets to everyone in the community (the pot is much smaller though now thanks again Mr Cameron).

Batley Neighbourhood Management Group - A multi -agency approach (police, fire, young peoples service, environmental services etc.) tackling crime, antisocial behaviour and as well as environmental issues like fly tipping). Yes, definitely my favourite role as a councillor of which I continue to Chair. Must just add my thanks to Zak Lunat, Community Safety Officer for all his dedicated help and support here.

Heavy Woollen Planning Committee - still trying to get my head around the many planning laws! I was actually leaving Planning May 2011 but have been asked to remain so I can't be that bad then!

Appeals Panel - mainly School Transport issues.

Batley Tenants & Residents Forum.

Participation on Outside Bodies

West Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority(WYITA) - I sit on the Scrutiny Committee for Bus Services which includes reviewing local bus services, reliability, possible route alterations etc. I am the Chair of the Kirklees District Liaison Committee, its role to encourage the coordination between Kirklees and the ITA and efficient and effective implementation of transport related policies, including those set out in the Local Transport Plan. I Chair the Kirklees Passenger Consultative Committee where we consider and, where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations to the ITA Executive Board/Joint Authority with respect to issues affecting local public transport.

Batley Girls (Rae,Taylor,Hirst & Talbot) School Leavers Scholarship Awards - We recently carried out our interview process and once again it was lovely to meet these lovely young ladies, hear about their ambitions and hopefully, in these particular hard financial time for students (thanks Mr Cameron), help them with a small sum of money towards books etc for university.

Kirklees Church Partnerships Trust - where we discuss funding for Places of Worship to help preserve and cherish some wonderful buildings.

Ward Work

GOSH! This is so very varied. Where do I start? To list but a few: -

- Anti Social Behaviour is always at the top of the list unfortunately
- Neighbours from Hell!
- Housing
- Council tax/welfare benefits

- Footpaths
- Street lighting
- Unkempt properties & gardens
- Inconsiderate parking/cars for sale on highways
- THE LIST REALLY IS ENDLESS!

My main reason for wanting to be a Councillor is to help people. I have said on many occasions that I find myself being a "counsellor" as well as a "councillor". Only the other week an elderly lady phoned me as she was experiencing a problem but after we chatted for over thirty minutes she said she felt much better that someone had just listened and that made her feel so much better as someone cared! It is compliments like this that make this whole manic life of a councillor so very rewarding. The main problem in addressing some issues has often been "Who do I contact?" But my knowledge and confidence continues to grow and this is becoming easier. Ward work does occupy most of my time and the range of many queries is quite challenging but I admit I still get a wonderful feeling when things work out well. I have conducted numerous home/site visits which do help me tackle issues in a more focused approach. "My way" of dealing with issues is to meet with my constituent(s) AND the appropriate Kirklees officer as this makes the individual/groups feel their concerns are actually being heard and they know immediately what plan of action is being taken to resolve the problems. Continuous communication and feed back are paramount and everyone must be kept in the loop.

Anti-social behaviour still seems to dominate despite the wonderful work of our Batley Neighbourhood Policing Team and other agencies. This was the main reason which led me on this path where I find myself being a councillor as I feel very passionate about community safety issues. As Chair of Batley Neighbourhood Management Group I have an arena where I can challenge the Police and other agencies that are accountable for our improving our ward. I do have a good working relationship with the Batley NPT who deals very effectively with problems I put their way.

I do enjoy tackling Environmental issues e.g. fly tipping, overgrown pieces of "no man's land" I refer to them as. I often feel I have to be a detective to find out who is responsible for keeping it tidy. Dog fouling still continues to be a bone of contention! Rats again are raising their ugly (some may think they are cute) heads too.

Highways and byways are an ongoing problem, be it an individual worry or a wider community issue. We hold regular meeting with our Highways Officers to discuss our budget (fast decreasing thanks again Mr Cameron) and our priorities for works. Last winters extreme weather left us some roads not gritted and hundreds of potholes. But Highways worked very hard with the resources available to maintain services as best they could.

Questions around planning applications come my way frequently. These nearly always have positive/negative effects in our ward. On larger developments it is important local people have their say.

As well as tackling issues as an individual councillor I continue to work closely with my ward colleagues and we are a great team. Having three good Labour councillors in our ward I feel we have done a great deal and we will continue to be committed to everyone and work hard. It is good to work with people who have the best interests of their community at heart, with people who care. Our much varied work has included highways, anti-social behaviour, health, Fox's Biscuits (as a biscuit addict so relieved to hear Fox's is staying in Batley), the future of our local schools (I was unable to participate in formal group and Council discussions as I had prejudicial

interests as I am a Governor at St John Fisher RC High School and my son is a pupil at this school too. But I did attend some local group discussions and received many correspondences via email).

As well as dealing with individuals I also have attended numerous meetings and events with groups including: -

- Tenants and Residents Associations
- Staincliffe Church luncheon club - but I may be banned as on the last occasion I won the house at bingo!
- P.K.W.A.
- I.M.W.S.
- Denham Court
- Charles Jones Court
- Tichbourne Street Residents
- Thorncliffe Estate Residents
- Woodhall Drive Residents
- Childrens' Centres
- Neighbourhood Watch meetings
- Local Schools
- "The Friends of Staincliffe Park" - where work continues, update to follow
- "The Millpond Support Group" - this is a new group which I helped set up and continue to support, update to follow

Achievements During the Year

Mmmmmmmmm? How long have you got! I just feel that there are so many because when I can help someone, be it just an individual with a personal worry or a large group with a major challenge, it is all so very rewarding and fulfilling.

Members Surgeries

2nd Tuesday of the month

I.M.W.S. 10am -10.30am

P.K.W.A. 10.35am - 11.05am

Healey Community Centre 11.30am - 12noon

3rd Saturday of month

St John's Church, Carlinghow 10am - 10.30am

Bleak House, Wilton Estate 11am - 11.30am

St Saviour's Church, Brownhill 11.45am - 12.15pm

Training and Development

In my 5th I have continued to make my way along this steep learning curve which doesn't feel as hard an incline as in previous years. I take advantage of the development programme that the council operates and have attended various courses and briefing sessions available to help me gain

the knowledge and know-how to continue to improve my role as a councillor enabling me to be an effective councillor so that I can serve my ward as best I can. This all helps my own personal development and improve on those areas where I need to focus on to become a better councillor all round. I chat regularly with my Group Business Manager Cllr Mohan Sokhal and also the Council's Member Development Officer about my own needs and draw up plans to implement these. I still continue to help with the D.O.C.K. Project, Development of Officer Councillor Knowledge, which enables Officers to get a better understanding about the role of a councillor and help improve the service they offer you. But all councillors do work differently.....

One of the main changes made by the council has been the introduction of "StreetScene". This now covers all Environmental areas, Parks & Open Spaces, street cleansing, refuse collections, "grot spots" etc. When faced with certain problems it wasn't always clear which "Service Expert" (as I like to call officers at times) to turn to. I used to say why not just have one officer at the top of the pyramid to report the issue to so he can delegate to the appropriate officer to deal with it. Hooray! And at last we have it folks, and for assisting me solve problems I just think it is one of the best services Kirklees has.

As I said at the beginning Mr Group Support Manager, I will revisit my Annual Report in September to make it smarter, visual and a bit more interesting to look at.