

# Annual Report: Cllr. Gwen Lowe 2011/12

## Introduction

Dear Labour Group Support Manager,

Many thanks kind Sir for your email informing us that "Don't the years fly by - your Annual Report for the last Council year is now due!"

And here to please findeth that such a thing as thee hath just requested of me now doth exist.....

I suppose it's really just an essay/assignment. Like all human beings essays/assignments have a face, in this case it's the introduction, it's me. It is the readers' first look into the subject and understanding of what is being written. So really this is an insight into my diary and daily life as a councillor amongst being a wife, mum, daughter, sister (THANKS guys, couldn't do it without your support and particularly your patience and my husband's cooking) and working too. As I write this I've been a councillor now for 6 years but just to confirm I still love it! You'll see yet again how varied a life it is and that my life is not really my own. I don't want to bore you with too much text so I will hopefully add some visual stuff. I still continue with doing things "my way"- emailing is useful but it is far more productive to bring Council Officers and resident(s) together face to face to have a focused discussion where issues are resolved so much more efficiently. It would be so easy just to list "I've been to this meeting, I've been to that meeting" but that would only show that I've a fetish for attending meetings and not a feeling as to whom I am. So let's pan out a bit.....

## Participation at Council Meeting Committees

I have attended every Full Council meeting except one (that was due to my elderly mum not being well, she's 82 and still tells me off!). I attend our Labour Group Meetings and still find myself in the Chair's seat, Batley Labour Branch and CLP meetings.

Batley Birstall Birkenshaw Area Committee - I am very honoured to still be in the Chair's seat. Although we still continue to have a more strategic approach to these meetings nowadays (and most of you know that I prefer to be out there in the community with my sleeves rolled up) I am getting my head around this way of working. I prefer the "Keep it Local" approach to be honest. I still find these meetings most enjoyable and we have a wonderful attendance from local residents who feel relaxed and able to contribute. The meetings are themed around important issues which affect us all to some degree i.e. Local Transport, Health, Community Safety. We continue to support funding for various local groups and their projects both big and small. Local community groups are an asset to everyone in the community. Unfortunately yet again Mr Cameron reduces our money pot.

**Batley Neighbourhood Management Group** - This is most definitely my favourite role as a councillor of which I am Chair. Initially set up to tackle anti-social behaviour we also tackle environmental issues. This is achieved through a multi-agency approach -police, fire, council services such as StreetScene, Young Peoples Services, and K.N.H. This is great partnership working and we have achieved soooo much again over the last 12 months in order to make our communities a safer and cleaner place to live.

*"The public rightly expects to live in neighbourhoods free from the corrosive effects of intimidation and harassment. I want to see both police and local authorities using the powers they have been given in a way that is effective and responds to peoples' needs at the right time."*

- Rt. Hon Alan Johnson MP

This is the arena where I can actual challenge the officers, police and other agencies that are accountable for improving our ward. Our meetings have a wonderful atmosphere; we can have a laugh in between the very serious business. Everyone is just so willing to pull together, good working relationships have formed and we all have a greater understanding of each others role. My thanks to Zak Lunat, Community Safety Officer, for his dedicated professional support.

Heavy Woollen Planning Committee - OK, I admit I sometimes have problems getting my head around planning policies but over the last 12 months have I felt more confident and have found myself being quite vocal at the meetings. Applications can be a one house extension to a large development.

Appeals Panel - mainly School Transport issues.

### **Participation on Outside Bodies**

**West Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority (WYITA)** - I am the Chair of the Kirklees District Liaison Committee, its role to encourage coordination between Kirklees and the ITA, with 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 people. As a bus user myself I can hopefully empathise with other bus users, especially when it comes down to grumpy drivers!

**Batley Girls (Rae, Taylor, Hirst & Talbot) School Leavers Scholarship Awards** - It's always a pleasure to meet with these lovely young ladies, to hear about their lives and ambitions. Once they contact us with their A-Level results along with confirmation of their place at their chosen Uni we can hopefully help them with a small amount of money towards books. Life at Uni is now thanks to Mr Cameron a rather expensive journey.

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

### **Ward Work**

My main reason for wanting to be a councillor is because I want to help people. Would have been more helpful though if the role provided you with a magic wand! On many occasions I find myself being a "counsellor" as well as a "councillor". Sometimes people just want someone to listen to them. I think my main worry when I was first elected in 2006 when addressing issues was "Who do I contact to help me?" But this is second nature now. And if I don't directly know I always know someone who will know someone! Ward work does take up the majority of my time but that's what I'm here for. Sometimes it can still be a challenge but it still feels great when things work out right. I still continue with "my way" of working where I meet with my constituent(s) AND the appropriate Kirklees officer (I refer to them as the Service Experts) as this always makes the individual/group feel their concerns are genuinely being heard and they know immediately what plan of action can be taken to resolve the problems. Continuous communication and feedback are paramount.

Unfortunately anti-social behaviour still dominates my ward work. I was actually a victim myself many moons ago and this is what lead me onto the path to becoming a councillor. I have a great working relationship with Batley Neighbourhood Policing Team who deals very effectively with problems I pass to them.

[flytipping on Flickr](http://www.flickr.com/photos/canal_ken/7675795148/ "flytipping on Flickr") 

I enjoy tackling Environmental issues e.g. fly tipping, overgrown pieces of "no mans land" - you know, a piece of unkempt land that must belong to someone but doesn't belong to anyone! Dog fouling still continues to be a bone of contention! Will we ever understand why some folk don't clean up after their dogs?

We hold regular meetings with Highways Officers to discuss highways and byways problems. The pittance Mr Cameron now allows us does not go far and we have to prioritise any works. Highways do work very hard with a very limited budget.

Planning issues come my way, with positive/negative effects on our ward. On larger issues I feel local residents and developers should come together as its important local people have their say as larger developments can have a big impact on quality of life - but there again so can small ones.

GOSH! Ward work is just so very varied .....

- <li>Neighbours from hell!
- <li>Housing/council tax</li>
- <li>Welfare benefits and all the forth coming changes</li>
- <li>Dangerous trees</li>
- <li>Maggots (my greatest phobia along with heights!)/ant problems</li></ul> .....the list is endless!

Amongst the ward work I attend meetings and events with groups including: -

- <li>The Friends of Staincliffe Park" - this on going project is just SOOO exciting! </li><a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/canal\_ken/7675795744/" title="Friends of Staincliffe Park, on Flickr"></a><li>Tenants & Residents Associations - we are in the early stages of setting one up in Staincliffe Estate</li><li>P.K.W.A.</li><li>I.M.W.S.</li><li>Denham Court</li><li>Tichbourne Street Residents</li><li>"The Millpond Support Group" </li></ul><a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/canal\_ken/7675794536/" title="Cleaning up the millpond, on Flickr"></a><ul><li>Woodhall Drive Residents - I worked closely with the Police, Highways and Community Pay Back to have a long stretch of dangerous wall repaired</li><li>Children's Centres</li><li>Local Schools</li><li>Carlinghow Neighbourhood Watch meetings</li><li>Friends of Wilton Park</li></ul><a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/canal\_ken/7675795564/" title="Tai Chi at Wilton Park on Flickr"></a><ul><li>Batley Cemetery Support Group</li></ul>

<em><b>Batley Music Centre</b></em>

I have to give a special mention here to Batley Music Centre as it was threatened with closure due to cuts at Kirklees Music School. I was heavily involved at BMC for over 13 years, both my children attended and I ran the tuck shop all that time (all profits bought instruments which were then loaned to students), the last 3 years as Music Centre Co-ordinator. Along with parents and pupils we fought a hard battle but won and long may it continue!

<em><b>StreetScene</b></em>

I have to give this a special mention as I've said it before and I'll say it again - this is one of the best things ever to happen to Kirklees Council! When I first became a councillor the hardest task when tackling an issue was "who do I contact? Why can't we have just one person at the top of the pyramid who can then delegate the work out to the appropriate officer?" StreetScene just does the job! From a pothole to a complete road resurfacing, from a single weed to a ten acre grot spot I know where I'm going. So thanks to officers Colin Spink and Martin Bowler for always answering the phone when you know it's me ringing 'cos I can be a somewhat persistent pest 'till I get something sorted!

Through this I've carried out "visual audits" in Batley West and Batley Town Centre. Lots of repairs and improvements have already been carried out and will continue to be done.

### **Achievements During the Year**

This has to be everything I've done and continue to do really, whether it's an individual or a group I've helped or been involved with. I still find it all very rewarding and fulfilling. I don't just sit around though and wait for issues to come my way. When I'm out and about I do see things that I'm not happy with and get it sorted - but then I'm the only one who knows that I've done it - except my husband of course 'cos I have to tell someone!

Ok, one blow of my own trumpet exciting moment was to have my photo appear in the Yorkshire Life magazine!

As I write this annual report I had a wonderful moment this afternoon. A resident I helped a while ago phoned me on behalf of her neighbour with housing repairs issues. Mrs A. said she told her neighbour that she would phone her "friend" to help. "Friend"! It felt so nice to be thought of as friend who can help, not just one of them there councillors.

### **Training and Development**

I continue to take advantage of the council's development programme, attending courses and briefing sessions especially along with our own Labour Group sessions which all help me gain the knowledge and know-how to continue to be an effective councillor so that I can continue to serve my ward the best I can. I chat regularly with my Group Business Manager Cllr Sokhal who helps and guides me with my own needs. Thanks to all Officers for their guidance as they are the service experts. My very grateful thanks as ever to Mr Ken Lowe and the Labour Group Support staff whom without we wouldn't sanely function!