

Annual Report: Councillor Lisa J Holmes 2014/2015

The loss former Councillor, Margaret Bates

In August last year, very unexpectedly, Margaret passed away. Her death was a great shock and brought incredible sadness to everyone who knew her, of course her family the most of all.

Margaret served as a Kirklees Councillor for many years and before that worked for former MP Elizabeth Peacock. Margaret always went above and beyond the call of duty. A lovely lady, who cared very deeply about everyone. I was incredibly fortunate to be mentored by Margaret when I was first elected and I am absolutely certain that I learnt from the best. More than this, we became great friends so losing Margaret left a massive hole, both at Council, and also in my personal life. But Margaret has left a lasting impression on me and when presented with difficult situations or decisions, I often think, what Margaret would have done. I believe that this has served me well.

Participation at Council Meetings and Committees

I have continued in my role as Shadow Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Member of Heavy Woollen Planning Committee, Children's Advisory Board, Children's Trust Board, School Organisation and Planning Advisory Board and District Committee.

I have always voted in full Council based on what I believed was best for both the Ward of Liversedge & Gomersal and Kirklees Council as a whole. I will continue to challenge the lack of investment in areas outside Huddersfield and Dewsbury. The inequality of investment is nothing short of a gross injustice for everyone else.

During 2014, I entered a new role and now also represent my group on the new CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation) Members Panel. The role of this panel is to be as sure as we can be that Kirklees Council does not make the same mistakes as those seen in councils such as Rotherham & Rochdale and that Kirklees Council is doing all it can to protect our young people from this horrific crime. I have not yet identified any major issues or concerns and feel that we, as a Council, are doing what can be reasonably expected of us in the areas that have been considered by the panel. However, there are still many areas to interrogate and this work will continue well into 2016 and possibly beyond.

Tenants and Residents Associations and Community Groups

As in previous years I have attended many meetings to directly support these very important groups in the Liversedge and Gomersal Ward. As has been the case for the past 5 years,

budgets are cut as Central Government continues to address the dire financial crisis we inherited and our reliance on volunteers continues to grow.

Without residents who put in so many unpaid voluntary hours in our communities, and who work so tirelessly, Kirklees would be a very different place. I would therefore like to thank everyone who volunteers and who makes such a big difference by giving their valuable personal time to others. I think these people are incredible and I really do have no idea how we could manage without them.

Children's Services

As Shadow Cabinet Member for Children's Services I continue to work for a good start in life for all our children. Childhood is where a person's path in life is often determined. I believe that it is a right of every child to be cared for and nurtured so that they achieve their personal best, whatever that may be. There are still too many children in Kirklees who don't have the best possible start because either they or their parents have challenges they are not equipped to deal with. As available funds reduce, the need for early intervention becomes even more crucial. The Council continues to rely more heavily on schools to support children and their families who are in challenging circumstances and I will work to ensure that this is done effectively but without adding unreasonable pressure on schools.

Participation on Outside Bodies

I have completed my third year as a member of West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service Authority where I serve on the Finance and Audit Committees.

Ward Work

My ward work has increased significantly when compared to previous years. I am very proud to say that some residents come back to me to ask for further help following work I have previously completed for them. I am equally proud that residents I have worked for will recommend me to their family, friends and neighbours. I take this as a great compliment and hope that it will continue.

Of course I can't solve every problem which is brought to me. But one thing I promise all my residents is that I will never close a case before I have exhausted every possible option.

The Coming Year

As budgets are cut and available resources decrease within Kirklees, the role of Councillor becomes more difficult. Sadly, in turn, this means that residents will see a significant reduction in many of the services they have received from Kirklees in the past. I am very disappointed by the budget that was approved in February. Yes there was a reduction in Central Government Funding, but a sensible approach to how the money we do have is spent, and exploring income generation, would have avoided much of the pain we will now all endure in the coming months and years. The truth is that even though the administration knew these cuts were coming, they had done little to prepare for them so they were faced with a 'rush job' to balance the books.

There was a clear lack of innovation and smart working by the administration. The approach should have been to turn Kirklees Council into a stronger organisation, one which could compete with the private sector. Instead, the budget was simply a series of axe swinging cuts to services that could have been saved at a higher level and retention of ones that should have been either reduced or lost completely.

Council budgets should not be politically driven; they should simply serve the residents of the borough in the best way possible. Putting up council tax instead of taking a freeze grant, whilst reducing services and paying £500k a year to unions is not how Kirklees should be managed.

But, we are where we are and must make the best of the situation, which is exactly how I will face the challenges facing us all in the coming year.

As a closing note to my Annual Report I wish to thank everyone who voted for me in the recent elections to return me for a further 4 year term. I will continue to work hard in my role as a Councillor and I am looking forward to supporting many more residents, both on Ward, and by representing them in meetings, on committees and in full council.