

Note that this article was written before Dorset Council was set up as a Unitary Authority. There is no longer a County Council or a District Council. The lowest tier of local government is the Parish Council and above that, in Broadmayne's case, is the Dorset Council.

Nonetheless John Wilson's reflections make interesting reading.

The Importance of Parish and Town Councils and on Life as a Councillor

A Personal Reflection by the Chairman of Dorset County Council

The County Council, the District and Borough Councils, then the Town and Parish Councils make the three tiers of local government that combine to provide the 404,000 residents in Dorset with a democratically elected structure to serve their local communities.

I have been a County Councillor for Ferndown since 2001. I am also a Parish Councillor for West Parley, and I was a Town Councillor for Ferndown for 2 years. Before I retired both my business and charity interests had brought me into contact with Councillors from all three levels of local government in Dorset. I formed the impression that these were all honourable people who were trying to make a difference in their communities, hence the urge to join them as soon as business interests allowed.

Links between councils

Experience has shown that no council in the three-tier triangle gets it right every time, so a healthy democratic process needs to have effective engagement between tiers. It is important that the different levels of councils in Dorset all work together to provide services and put solutions in place to help our residents. As a councillor there is satisfaction in making sure that each council works with other councils to maximise every opportunity to benefit our local communities. Parish and Town Councils are the basic building blocks of community and democratic life, so enabling us to ensure that we provide the right service at the right time and in the right way.

Life as a councillor

I believe that, as a local councillor, I should listen to and understand the views of people in my local community and then to help signpost them to organisations and people who can best address their specific issues.

Parish and Town councillors get involved with matters that range from the maintenance and enhancement of local services, clubs, community buildings, etc to ensuring that new developments bring benefits to the community while blending in sympathetically with the local environment. Often this comes about because the higher tier authorities are required to consult and listen to them.

As a County Councillor I have been part of many committees and panels at County Hall, but I also attend many joint committees where I sit next to representatives of all tiers of local government. Examples are the Bournemouth Airport Consultative Committee, the Waste Forum and, until it completed its work, the Longham Lakes Liaison Panel to oversee the construction of two reservoirs. With these sorts of activities there is the satisfaction of feeling that you are helping to achieve something worthwhile and the pleasure of meeting and getting to know many interesting people.

I have found it to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience to be a Councillor in Dorset and I thoroughly recommend it to one and all.

John Wilson, Chairman of Dorset County Council