

The Riverporter

On-line Issue 4: 15 May 2020

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

Riverporter springs into colour

After nearly 8 weeks of lockdown with the first tentative steps of reopening the economy we are already producing our 4th on-line issue and doing it in colour, mainly so we can show off the excellent work of St Ives in Bloom.

We do not know when we will be able to print again but we hope it will be soon. In the meantime we hope to bring a little colour to you with the news about St Ives and the surrounding area.

Farmers' Market returns this Saturday see page 2

Council meeting - more entertaining than TV

With television relying heavily on repeat programmes at the moment we recommend our readers join the St Ives Town Council Zoom meetings for some new and unpredictable drama.

Anyone who zoomed in on Wednesday's meeting would have witnessed an '*underhand and disrespectful attempt to subvert procedure*' as one member of the public described it (see letters to Erik).

In May the new Mayor is usually elected at a public event, in the Corn Exchange, with councillors dressed in their ceremonial robes. It follows a well-worn routine: the outgoing Mayor thanking all those who've helped him over the year and declaring which awards to give, and to whom, and what sums he has raised for his chosen charities. That is followed by the election of the new Mayor by the councillors. It isn't normally a surprise as the Council selects the Mayor Elect in February.

As face to face meetings have been suspended due to the virus, councillors have been using Zoom to hold their meetings, including Wednesdays Mayor Making meeting. The meeting followed the normal pattern at first with the outgoing Mayor, Dan Rowe naming his award winners - followed by his last job as Mayor calling for nominations for the position of the new Mayor.

As expected Cllr Jonathan Pallant was proposed by Cllr Dibben and seconded. As protocol dictates Mayor Dan asked if there were any other nominations and surprisingly there was, despite the fact that Cllr Pallant was chosen without opposition in February.

The coup fails

Councillor Rianna D'Souza nominated Cllr Tim Drye to be Mayor, which was seconded by Cllr Fuller which led to a vote being held. This was pretty exciting as council meetings go as each councillor was asked in-turn by the Clerk who they wished to support.

After a few votes Cllr Drye was in the lead and to those watching it could go either way. Eventually Cllr Pallant was elected by 9 votes to 7, a pretty close call especially as Cllr Bellamy was absent and Cllr Lynn Davies joined the meeting too late to vote.

Those who supported the coup and Cllr Drye's nomination were Cllrs, D'Souza, Fuller, Drye, Dickinson, Pope and John Davies.

Unprecedented action

The Riverporter contacted several long-serving ex councillors and none can remember such a thing happening before. To try to replace a Mayor, without good reason, in this manner and at a time when we are all being asked to work together is a clear indication that the murky side of local politics still exists here. For his part Cllr Jonathan Pallant showed great restraint and handled the situation well, setting out his plans for the year ahead, vindicating the support he received and rising above the political gerrymandering.

Long term harm?

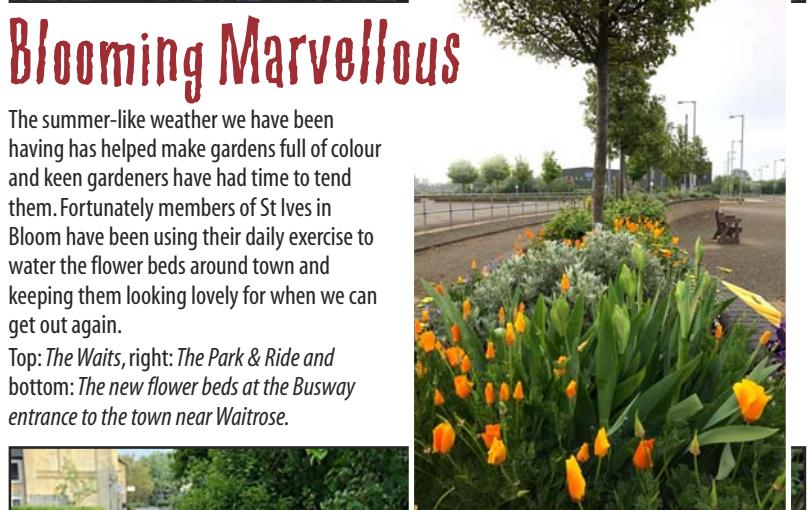
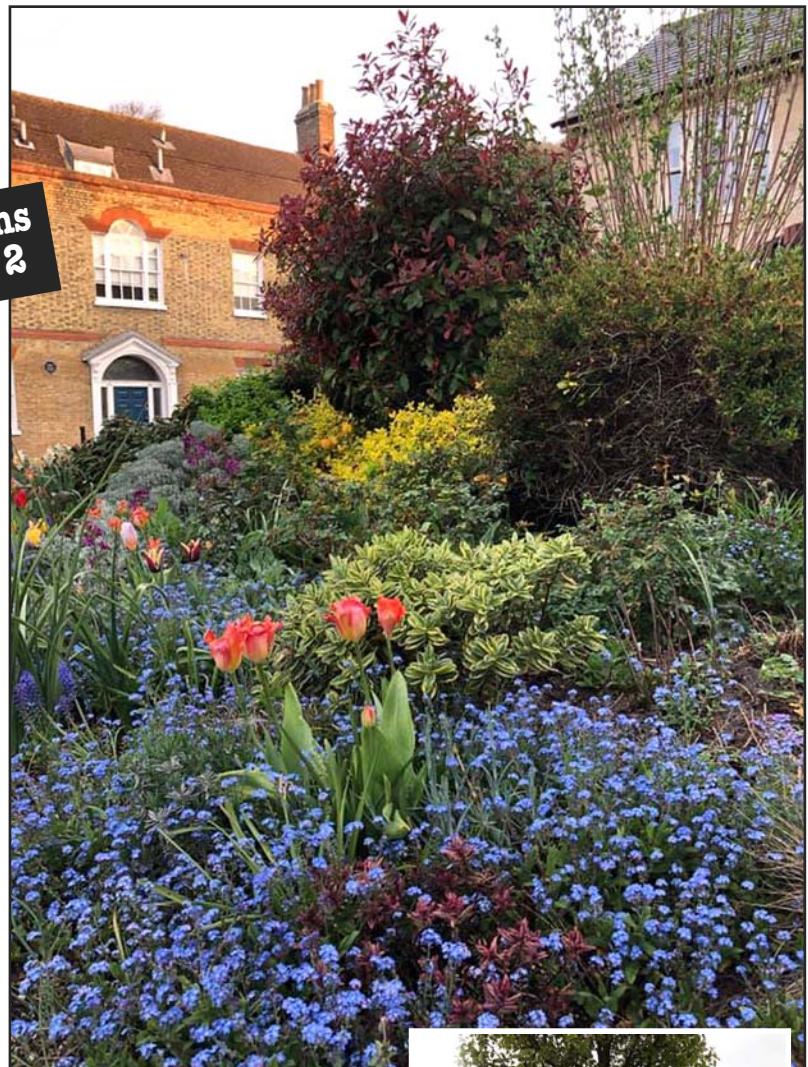
Of course this episode also suggests that the council may not speak with a united voice, which it needs to do at this critical time. Indeed the Council operates on the principle of corporate governance and collective responsibility, something this paper discussed at length with Cllr Drye, when he was Mayor, so it seems strange that Cllr Drye should have led this less than unifying action.

Rumblings started in April

The Riverporter was made aware of discussions between councillors, starting in early April with a suggestion from Cllr Drye that the Mayor should be someone retired who could give more time to the role during the crisis.

This received several responses, some supporting the change and others suggesting it was a distraction and the wrong way to elect a different Mayor, which should and could only be done at the May, Mayor Making meeting. As we witnessed on Wednesday a concerted effort by a number of councillors was attempted to make a change and The Riverporter has been looking at some of the reasons for this unprecedented action.

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Counting the cost of local politicians

Are you in financial hardship or looking for a job? Ever considered becoming a district or county councillor?

It will mean getting elected, which isn't straight forward as you are at the mercy of the voting public, but there are some things you can do to boost your chances of success. The first is to join the party that holds power, which is the Conservative party in our area. All political parties are looking for candidates and it shouldn't be too difficult to be selected to stand for one.

Assuming that you are able to knock on a few doors and speak to voters with some conviction, your chances of winning will be pretty high, especially with the support of the ruling party.

Then it can be pretty much plain sailing, the rewards can be good for a part time job. If you are a county councillor, for instance, you will receive a £10,315 allowance for attending 6 meetings a year. As a member of the ruling party you could soon be receiving a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) (for additional duties such as being a Chair or Vice-Chair of a committee), which will boost your income even more.

Having looked at the details of councillor's allowances in Cambridgeshire it is clear that quite a lot receive many thousands of pounds.

Jobs for the boys and girls?

A well-known local journalist said to me the other day that local politics seemed pretty corrupt with quite a lot of jobs for colleagues. They maintained that the press would be all over any MP who behaves as some local council members do, but because they are one step down politically their actions are often ignored.

The power bestowed on local councillors is considerable. They set their own pay and who gets what. It is pretty much accepted that the party in power will reward its own members by allowing them to take on the roles of committee chairmen etc. and with it the additional allowances. This has two serious affects. The first is that it prevents councillors from other parties

taking on important roles, even if they are more qualified to do so and secondly it gives the additional money to colleagues.

Councillors vote for even more money

Following the 2017 county elections, Cambs County Council changed to a Tory controlled one from no overall control, mainly because the UKIP vote collapsed. The Conservatives decided to ignore the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and raised the level of payment for most of the allowances. The Council Leader's remuneration was increased by £10,000 and the Deputy Leader's by £6,000 as was that of the seven committee Chairmen. At the same time the money paid to opposition leaders was reduced.

They also created a new post called Area Leads and ruled that these posts should be given in each district council area to a County Councillor belonging to the party in control of the district, which included four Tories and one Labour councillor. The outcome of all this was that the Conservative share of the Special Responsibility Allowances went up by 282% to £275,000, taking over 90% of all the money, although they had only 4 more members than before.

Has anything changed

It seems this gravy-train bandwagon enjoyed by councillors rolls on, unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since his election the Combined Authority Mayor, Tory James Palmer has come in for criticism with well-paid jobs for some of his council colleagues, such as £54,000 for the role of a part-time strategic advisor. Looking at Huntingdonshire District Council, it seems a similar pattern has emerged. Out of the 30 Conservative members 20 receive additional allowances and some, who are a District and County Councillor and sit on the Combined Authority panel are receiving very large sums indeed.

Farmers' Market returns Saturday



St Ives Farmers and Specialist Food Market will be open again on Saturday 16th May from 8.30am to 2pm in its usual location on Sheep-Market. This Saturday is the 17th birthday for the market, which the Council is very pleased to see back.

Due to current restrictions there will only be 7 traders selling both fresh and prepared foodstuffs. Fruit and veg, cheese, meats, honey, jams and prepared baked goods.

The limited number of stalls is deliberate to ensure that social distancing can be observed by traders and customers alike. Please observe the '2m rule' whilst visiting the market and queue when necessary - exactly as you are requested to do in all other shopping locations.

The Council encourage you to make 'card-only' purchases where possible although cash buying will be available. Please be responsible in terms of using the PPE that you feel comfortable with and have used when shopping in other formats.

'We look forward to seeing you on Saturday (from 2 metre distance of course) best wishes from your market team'
Roz, James and Tommie.

Continued from page 1

What prompted this attempted coup

It would appear it all started with a suggestion sent to councillors by Cllr Drye, that the Mayor should be someone who was retired and could give more time to the role during the crisis. He also wanted the council to have a close and responsive relationship with HDC as possible, supporting Cllr Fuller in his role as HDC leader.

Having put forward these ideas he suggested an informal zoom meeting to reach a consensus on the matter.

This was immediately rebuffed by Cllr Pegoraro who argued it wasn't appropriate to waste time on this matter now and Cllr Pallant responded by clearly setting out his suitability

to the role, especially his much needed IT skills. He also confirmed that he would be very happy to give HDC full support and work with them in whatever manner necessary.

Cllr D'Souza supported Cllr Drye's comments, supporting his idea of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor being Cllrs Pasco Hussain and Dickinson. She hoped councillors could discuss the matter and talk maturely about it. [Something she had failed to do in February during the Mayor elect debate when she had abstained from voting.]

At this point the current Mayor Cllr Rowe pointed out that such discussions should take place in the public forum and not in private. He made it clear that having an additional meeting was the wrong course of action at this time.

Eventually the Town Clerk, who had not been included in the discussions, was said to be aghast and appalled by them and told councillors that the May meeting would be the only time they could vote on the matter.

Of course we now know discussions did continue, resulting in the attempted coup and that raises the question of what was really behind it. The reasons stated seemed pretty fatuous so we wondered if there was an ulterior motive.

What is the real reason behind this?

One reason may be that Cllr Pallant has upset some councillors. We know that he was criticised for talking to *The Riverporter* by Cllr Drye when he was Mayor, something Cllr Drye

We have received the following information from Stagecoach ...

Paying by cash?

If you are paying by cash we are only accepting exact fares.

Our drivers will be unable to give change.

We are making this temporary change from Monday 18th May in response to Covid-19 for the safety of you and our drivers. As we are unable to give you change we will be donating any leftover change, where customers have paid more than the exact fare, to a local foundation.

You can pay by mobile tickets, contactless cards or by smartcard.

Practice social distancing at the bus stop

- Where possible, keep a safe distance when queueing
- Please keep a safe distance from the driver and other passengers when boarding and leaving the bus

As well as when you're on the bus



- Keep an empty seat next to you and try to avoid getting close to your fellow passengers.

Spotted in town



later apologised for when it was shown Cllr Pallant had acted correctly. Perhaps the motion to suspend prayers at the beginning of council meetings, which Cllr Pallant proposed, upset more members than he thought.

Another reason could be political. Did the small band of Tory councillors see this as an opportunity to wrest control of the Town Council?

We know that some of the Tories were elected as *Independents for St Ives*, but somehow these 'independents' managed to vote the same way as their Tory colleagues.

This is all speculation of course and we will probably never know for sure the real reason that some councillors were prepared to show such a public display of discord.

having your say ... The Riverporter

Get it off your chest, email Erik at:
editor@theriverporter.uk



Dear Erik,

I have just witnessed the most underhand and disrespectful attempt to subvert the proper course of traditional procedure at the annual St Ives Town Council Mayor Making ceremony. This important event in the Civic calendar is preceded by an election within the Council at a previous meeting to determine the Mayor Elect and Deputy Mayor Elect for the coming year. This is when Councillors debate the merits and suitability of prospective candidates for these most prestigious and important roles in our community, and they are voted in as such. Those proposed for, and have in acceptance of, these intended roles can then look forward to the pleasurable formality of Mayor Making with their families and friends and, in normal circumstances, Civic guests in attendance. This evening the normal celebratory atmosphere of the occasion (albeit this year in Zoom world) was marred by a deliberately unsettling last-minute attempt to propose, second and vote in an alternative candidate for Mayor by a number of councillors -who had obviously pre-planned the disruption. This was fortunately out-voted and the attempt to change what had previously been agreed failed. The new Mayor took the challenge with enormous grace and, for me anyway, confirmed his suitability for the role. No real reason for the objection to Cllr Pallant becoming Mayor was given. I was also concerned that Cllr Hussein, as elected Deputy Mayor, was not given the opportunity to say a few words in recognition of his new role and his plans for it. Having said all this I congratulate the Council in continuing Council Meetings in this manner through this difficult time, and I look forward to the new Mayor and Deputy Mayor guiding this Council through the new Civic year.

Ian Jackson

Long term councillor resigns

One of St Ives longest serving councillors, Brian Luter, has surprisingly resigned. Brian became a town councillor in 1996 soon after retiring from the RAF. He has been Chair of most Committees and Mayor three times, in 2004, 2009 and 2014.

He always encouraged transparency in Council deliberations and in 2007 was a leading light in the campaign by Action Corn Exchange (ACE) to stop the Council from selling its iconic building.

Following elections in 2008, Brian as a member of a newly elected Council voted to part restore the Corn Exchange, completely rebuilding the back of the building. It soon became the community hub of St Ives and the Community Interest Company which runs it is 10 years old this Summer.

ACE which morphed into Friends of the Corn Exchange is also 10 this year and Brian is naturally a member as well as a volunteer in the building.

Age obliges him to resign after 22.5 years. But he remains a volunteer and he is also an associate of Festival Events St Ives. In this, his second retirement, he hopes to play more bridge (he was an Oxford Blue) and definitely do more gardening on top of what the lock down, and his wife, Paula, expects of him now. [I was first elected to the Town Council at the same time as Brian in 1996 and have known him ever since. Although Brian represented a different party to me I always found him to be a kind and generous man, who supported any good initiative regardless of party dogma. The Council and St Ives will miss his experience, generosity and calm, impartial advise and hopes he will make his next grand slam.

Where's Wally?

Police received reports of an animal matching the description of a small kangaroo seen on Ramsey Road late on Wednesday evening, 6th May. It was in fact a wallaby, escaped from Johnsons Farm in Old Hurst, and officers eventually managed to capture it in the garden of a house on Chestnut Road, from where it was safely returned to its home.



NEWS UPDATE

Mayor Dan praises local people and firms

Outgoing Mayor, Cllr Dan Rowe (pictured below right) listed the recipients of his Mayoral awards as follows:

Commerce in the Community: Time for Health

Lifetime Achievement award: Ed Kelly

The Millennium Shield: St Ives Rangers FC

Services to the Community: James Noyce

Dan also donated £1000 from his charity fund raising to CALMtown with the remainder being committed to the Mayor's COVID-19 Fund.



Cllr Pallant (pictured above left) now changes into the Mayoral robes and has announced his charities will be Timebank, St Ives Foodbank, Calmtown St Ives and the Mayor's COVID-19 Fund. Jonathan is a big supporter of green transport, and keen to support initiatives to make it easier to walk, cycle and e-bike around town and help make sure people can access the infrastructure that would make an electric vehicle a viable option.

In a statement Jonathan said 'St Ives is defined by its people, and I have been staggered by the efforts of all the hard-working volunteers in the town, working away in their groups and charities, to make life better for other people. I want all these volunteers to know that I see you, I thank you for your tireless efforts, and that I want to use my year as Town Mayor to shine a spotlight on all your efforts'.

Janathan's wife, Carrie Pallant, will be the Mayoress.

Cllr Pasco Hussain (right) said he was very happy after councillors unanimously elected him as Deputy Mayor, for the year 2020/21.



Local fishing lake death treated as unexplained

The Parsons Green area saw emergency services called to the fishing lake where a woman's body had been discovered on Tuesday afternoon. The circumstances of the discovery have not been revealed but local walkers were shocked to hear of the grim find. The woman still has not been identified and police have said the death is currently being treated as unexplained. Five police cars, three ambulances and two fire engines attended the scene just off the roundabout near Parsons Green. A Cambridgeshire Police spokesman announced: 'The body of a woman has been located in water at the fishing lakes in St Ives. The woman is yet to be identified and the death is currently being treated as unexplained.'

Well done St Ives but let's keep it up

We must keep vigilant and keep up with our social distancing to maintain our low level of Covid-19 infections that is currently below the national average. An expert has commented on why Cambridgeshire has a lower death rate than other areas in the UK amid the coronavirus outbreak. Speaking at Cambridgeshire County Council's Health Committee, Liz Robin, the county's Director of Public Health, said the death rate in the county is 'Relatively low compared to the national average and the regional average'. Dr Robin went on to say the county's rural geography and distance from London have played a role, but that it is 'What the community does that is most important to prevent the spread'.

Dr Robin told the committee: 'I would like to really thank local residents for the way that they have listened to and responded to the government's stay at home rules.'

Trouble near't Mill

St Ives police reports are still coming in of small groups of people that refuse to adhere to the national guidance. Police have been called on several occasions to areas in town to disperse these groups who gather, drinking and on occasion being abusive to passers-by.

Reports that the Dolphin may be housing people released from prison early due to the Coronavirus have been circulating, so we contacted Cambs Police who told us the following: We are aware of the Dolphin Hotel in St Ives assisting with accommodation in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. Huntingdonshire District Council should be able to advise further. So we asked HDC, whose spokesperson said HDC are not accommodating any prisoners in the Dolphin. Police have said that the anti-social behaviour is not only unacceptable at this difficult time but also breaks the PSPO order forbidding drinking in the town streets. Police ask that the public should report any offenders immediately by calling 101.

VE Day Anniversary celebrations

Below is a selection of pictures of people celebrating the anniversary of VE Day in St Ives.

'What an absolutely incredible day. It has been emotional and joyous!' said Phil Pope who organised a service in The Broadway. He apologised to residents on the Broadway that had music playing for seven hours but said 'The look on peoples faces meant I couldn't stop.' This property (below) used flags that were originally used on VE Day 75 years ago.



Neighbours across the wall...

Right: Keeping 2 metres apart, thanks to the wall, whilst waving the flag.



Hopefully, things will be better

Editorial comment

More scrutiny not less

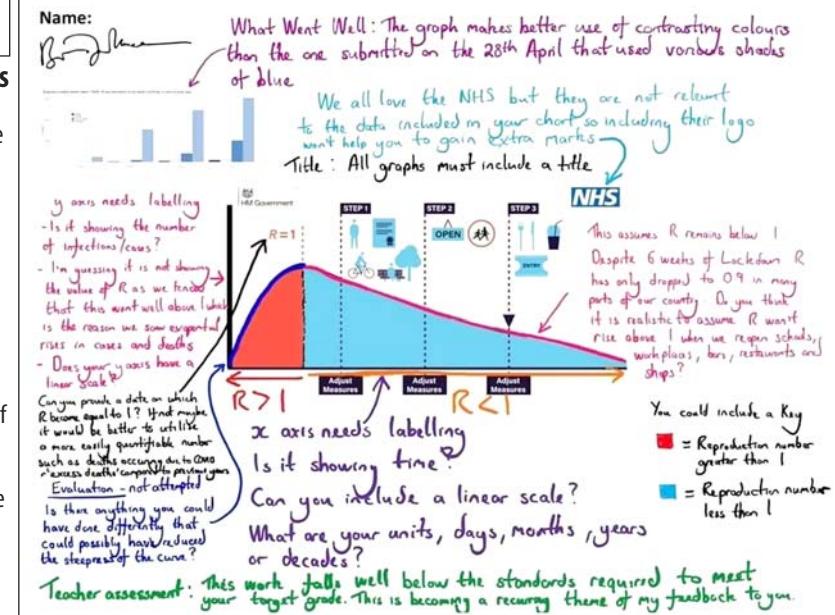
There have been quite a lot of complaints about the press over the past few years; some of which, concerning tabloid newspapers, may have been justified. However nearly all the media has come in for criticism recently, especially during the Brexit debates, with leading politicians claiming foul and, in one well-known case, calling most of the established press 'peddlers of fake news'.

It seems that the public too are beginning to agree with some of this rhetoric in this lock-down world. A friend of mine was moaning about the BBC and in particular Laura Kuenssberg for not giving 100% support to our Government. Her opinion being that now is not the time to ask difficult questions. We understand that many people will assume that any questioning, particularly of their favoured politician, is designed to trap them in some sort of way. An opinion exacerbated by some of the forceful questioning that broadcasters have developed over the past few decades.

One of the problems is that politicians have developed ways to avoid answering difficult questions. MPs and councillors will have had training in how to 'not answer the question' and this has resulted in a more forceful approach by broadcasters.

Distrust has reached a level on both sides that it is resulting in less open government, with political parties, particularly those in control, using tactics to thwart scrutiny and maintain control. Asking the most simple of questions often results in no reply. A tactic frequently used to avoid scrutiny. Most people want to avoid conflict, especially when doing their job and someone asking questions can be a real pain. The public tend to give those in power the benefit of the doubt and frankly do not know or care about issues that don't affect them personally.

Another common factor is that we often dismiss concerns over relatively simple matters as not worth worrying about. I am of the opinion that it doesn't matter whether the issue is a local matter affecting a few people or whether it is of national importance affecting everyone, any abuse of power, or poor decision-making, or corrupt practice should be treated just the same and exposed if possible. One never knows when a local matter will become a much bigger one. Just ask the people of Grenfell! The evidence so far is that several organisations ignored residents concerns, resulting in that terrible tragedy.



Humour often gets the message over well as this version of the government's graph shows. We found it on the internet but thought it worth showing as it is very funny.

council tax would not go up for five years, a promise they ultimately broke. Just three years ago Cambs County Councillors gave themselves a large pay rise whilst reducing the budget on social care.

I'm not saying we should elect those candidates prepared to spend the most, but I am saying that perhaps we will value some things more than we did. That we will value carers, social workers, bin men and the people who provide the services we depend on every day. That we will elect councillors who are prepared to work together for the community rather than those working only for their party or in self-interest.

It won't be easy choosing the wheat from the chaff and that is another reason why we need a strong press. One that can ask questions and provide the information that is often hidden from us. It is only those people with something to hide who will fear scrutiny.

Editor