

Report from Future Communities Conference organized by NALC

The Conference focused on some of the Town and Parishes' roles and responsibilities, looking forward post Covid to the benefit of the communities they serve. I listened in earnest and particularly focused on elements that, I thought, could be relevant to Battle CP.

I was frustratingly late joining the conference due to administrative and poor wi-fi connection but the first speaker Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson was still inspiring but very grounded. She stated the startling statistics that people are hitting frailty at 40 due to inactivity. This links into the value of social prescribing and promoting the link between G.P's and places of activity. She also talked about the value of learning to debate at a young age and getting involved in local and national politics. I think these are areas that we can continue to build on.

The next session was by CCLA (Churches, Charities and Local Authorities) which is an ethical investment company which is growing rapidly as more organisations want to use their funds for good outcomes. If not already known to BTC, I would certainly suggest that it is worthwhile for BTC to explore their 3 funds.

The next speaker was Michael King from the Social Care and Local Government Ombudsman. This is a large organisation with over 200 staff. Currently available only to principle authorities, i.e. not Towns and Parishes, but it has recommended to government that T and P's should be included in the future. (Some towns have bigger remits than some districts) He emphasised the value of listening to complaints but their role is to look at the bigger picture and recommend changes to improve services.

Next was Jackie Weaver who was made famous for her role as a negotiator in the Handforth Parish meeting. She passed on her expertise when dealing with bullies and emphasised that a parish meeting needs to be safe to encourage healthy and diverse debate. This led on to how Councils encourage younger people (under 50's) to become Councillors. As principle authorities look inwards in their service provision, parishes are doing more but this requires funding.

The next workshop was focusing on Community Engagement and combating loneliness. There were lots of ideas including The Big Lunch facilitated by the Eden Community.

The second workshop was about Neighbourhood Plans and different places' experiences. The important point for me is emphasising that guides are not statutory but only guidance and the need to strengthen and develop NP's over time.

The last speaker was from The Committee of Standards in Public Life. The 7 Nolan Principles are applied to employment and public office and are still very important.

The concluding Speaker was Sue Baxter the retiring Chair of NALC.

Her key messages were to stand together with our M.P.'s over issues, and to keep people and places at the heart of what we do and stressed how important the first tier of Local Government is, as we move forward.

Notes by Cllr Sue Burton
9.12.21