

CIVIC OFFICE OF THE YEAR AWARD 2011



Waveney District Council

Serving the Community



WAVENEY DISTRICT COUNCIL



**Councillor Peter Collecott
Chairman of the Council**



**Councillor Tod Sullivan
Mayor of Lowestoft**

A Snapshot of Waveney

Waveney is situated on the coast in the north-east corner of Suffolk and is the most easterly district in Britain. It is a mixed urban and rural district, with a coastline of 26 km and a population of 112,342. Over half of the population live in the Lowestoft area (56,588), with the remainder in the towns of Beccles (9,746), Bungay (4,895), Halesworth (4,637) and Southwold (1,458). Whilst there are some more prosperous areas within the district, Lowestoft in particular has some areas of extreme deprivation and this in itself presents challenges for local people and for Waveney District Council, the local authority who serves them.

The political composition of the District Council is currently 23 Conservatives Members (ruling administration), 23 Labour, 1 Independent and 1 Green Party Member.

Waveney is unique in that it has a Chairman of the Council and a Mayor of Lowestoft, which is a historic arrangement arising from a former local government re-organisation of the Lowestoft and surrounding area. The Chairman and the Mayor work collaboratively together to provide civic representation and leadership for the benefit of local communities across Waveney.

Chairman of the Council

Councillor Peter Collecott is currently the Chairman of the Council.

The Chairman has an important ambassadorial role to fulfil as the First Citizen of the District. He acts as a figurehead for the Council and a link between the various groups and community organisations across the district. The Chairman can also obtain a unique overview of the needs and concerns of the communities he serves. He is also in a position to support local groups and to convey the messages and aims of the Council.

Mayor of Lowestoft

Councillor Tod Sullivan is currently the Mayor of Lowestoft, representing the Lowestoft Charter Trustees and the people of the greater Lowestoft area comprising of the wards of Carlton, Gunton & Corton, Harbour, Kirkley, Normanston, Oulton, Oulton Broad, Pakefield, St Margarets and Whitton.

The principal role of the Charter Trustees is to preserve historic property, privileges, rights and traditions enjoyed by local residents in Council areas which were abolished by local government re-organisation and where there was no suitable local government body such as a parish or town council in place who could take on this role.

The Mayor of Lowestoft's civic and ceremonial duties are in the main restricted to the un-parished areas of Lowestoft, whilst the Chairman of the Council has jurisdiction over the whole of the Waveney district.

Civic Support

Civic support within Waveney is overseen by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, managed by the Principal Service Manager for Democratic Services, whilst direct support is provided by a Committee Assistant on a flexible, part-time basis. Following a recent re-structuring, the Committee Assistant is a shared resource between the Democratic Services Team and the Electoral Registration Team. The other two remaining members of the Democratic Services Team therefore provide ad-hoc support to the civic function as and when required. Civic support is therefore a team effort.

The provision of a 'Democratic Service' within Waveney also covers Committee Administration (including Agenda production / attendance at meetings, production of Minutes etc), Member Development, Scrutiny and Standards.

We are therefore a multi-functional team who operate within strict statutory deadlines but in doing so recognise the importance of supporting the Chairman or the Mayor in carrying out their roles, who in turn, support local communities across Waveney. We therefore include the Chairman and the Mayor in the principals of 'team-working' in that each enhances the role of the other for the greater good.

Improved Support to the Civic Function

Waveney District Council has been awarded Charter Plus status for Member Development and is proud of the support and development opportunities offered to Councillors, many of the initiatives for which were Member-led.

As a means of improving support to the civic function, the following measures have been put in place:

- A dedicated website has been developed with links for both the Chairman of the Council and the Mayor of Lowestoft.

- Application forms for both the Chairman of the Council and the Mayor of Lowestoft to attend civic functions have been produced.
- Information pack provided to the Chairman of the Council and the Vice-Chairman of the Council providing guidance on undertaking their roles.
- Information pack provided to the Mayor of Lowestoft and Deputy Mayor providing guidance on the role of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor which are separate and distinct from that of the Chairman.
- Role descriptions for both the Chairman and the Mayor.
- Expertise from a dedicated multi-functional team to support the offices of Chairman and Mayor in both their civic role and democratic roles as chairmen of their respective meetings.
- Diary support for both the Chairman and the Mayor.
- Improved service to the public as if the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Council are unavailable to attend a civic function, then where appropriate, we are able to offer the services of the Mayor or Deputy Mayor instead and vice versa. Both the Chairman and the Mayor are able to work together for the greater good of the community, putting their political backgrounds and allegiances aside.
- Introduced informal mentoring arrangements for the Chairman and the Mayor from the outgoing Chairman and Mayor.
- Waveney has joined the Civic Officer's network and attended the Civic Officers' Conference as a means of sharing best practice and learning from others in the civic officers' field.

Involvement of the Community in Civic Events

The Council recognises the importance of promoting and maintaining links with local community groups and appreciates the importance of the civic function in recognising the hard work and commitment of local people and also harnessing the ability for the Chairman or the Mayor to raise greater understanding or awareness of local issues.

The Council has undertaken the following initiatives in involving and supporting local communities in civic life:

- Students from the Denes High School undertook a project to provide a wooden storage box for the Mayor's Chain of Office, which was presented to the former Mayor of Lowestoft. The Mayor visited the school to brief students beforehand to highlight the role of Mayor and the box was formally presented to the Mayor at a Lowestoft Charter Trustee meeting.

- Attendance of both the Chairman of the Council and the Major of Lowestoft at the Holocaust Event in January 2011, with particular emphasis on the re-enactment of the evacuation and temporary settlement of children into the Lowestoft area – a high profile event that involved presentations in schools and the attendance of local children at the event. Faith awareness is now a requirement as part of the National Curriculum and the Holocaust Day provided the backdrop for educational sessions in schools, with particular emphasis on how the atrocities of the Holocaust affected children at that time.
- The Chairman and the Mayor jointly hosted a fund-raising event for the Royal East Anglian Regiment Benevolent Fund, which involved a bucket collection through the town, engendering pride in our armed forces and highlighting the support mechanisms available to both current and former soldiers. We were able to secure sponsorship for this event from Adnams Brewery, the left-over beer from which was donated to the Regiment – an unexpected benefit for them!



- Representatives from the community and voluntary sector played an important part in the Chairman of the Council's Civic Service on 9th September 2011. A diverse range of groups submitted presentations which were displayed on large screens within Christ Church in Lowestoft promoting the work of each group. Local community groups also paraded standards as an intrinsic part of the service engendering pride and appreciation. These groups included the Royal British Legion, the Scouts, the Guides, Air Training Corps, Dial, Volunteer Centres, Alzheimer's Society, Lowestoft Hospital Volunteers, Volunteer Bureau, Citizens Advice Bureau, Suffolk Association for the elderly, Salvation Army, Community Transport, Sea Cadets, Deaf Association, Waveney Gymnastics Club, Waveney Sailability Trust, Royal Naval Patrol Association and Lowestoft Lifeboat.

Feedback received after the Waveney Civic Service:

“Suffolk Deaf Association – This was a most enjoyable event and it was lovely that so many of the voluntary organisations were in attendance. Look forward to attending future events”.

“Royal British Legion - Wenhaston - Thought the Civic Service was a lovely evening and thank you for inviting us to attend. Felt that we were made most welcome.”

- The Chairman of the Council and the Mayor of Lowestoft hosted a joint Christmas Carol Service which show-cased the talents of special needs students from the Ashley School and Warren School who performed set pieces as part of an all-inclusive service that was greatly enjoyed and valued by visiting dignitaries' and the public in attendance. The Lowestoft Signing Choir, comprised of both deaf and hard of hearing participants, also 'signed' several songs and therefore delivered visual entertainment as part of the service, promoting equality and diversity within the community and providing opportunities for positive publicity for more vulnerable community groups.

Feedback received from the Joint Christmas Carol Service:

“Bungay Town Trust – The Christmas Carol Service was a most enjoyable event and helped to set the tone for the festive season.”

- The Mayor of Lowestoft has successfully obtained 200 tickets for the Marina Theatre and the Seagull Theatre, for distribution to disadvantaged children via Social Services, thereby enabling them to experience the arts through attendance at a pantomime performance. This initiative was only achievable through the Mayor working in partnership with local charitable organisations and private enterprises to provide leisure opportunities that would not ordinarily be available to them.

Feedback received following the provision of Theatre Tickets:

“Social Services - Theatre tickets for pantomimes for disadvantaged families - the tickets had gone in less than two hours and Social Services has received thank you's from families who had attended the productions. With the help of the Mayor this was the first time many families had been to the theatre to see a show and they had a lovely time.”

- The Mayor has promoted and made available for sale 'Mayor Bears' to promote the civic office of 'Mayor'. The proceeds from the sale of the bears will be donated to local charities, including 'Jump' which is a local organisation based in Lowestoft for supporting young people and the Help an East Coast Child Appeal.

We attended the Lowestoft Air Festival in August 2011 with the 'Mayor Bears' and held a competition for young people to 'Name the Mayor Bear' capturing their interest and imagination. The Mayor Bear was subsequently named 'Benji'.

'Benji the Mayor Bear' also has his own area on the Mayor of Lowestoft's website and the public are encouraged to be involved in the site by submitting photographs of themselves and their bears whilst on their travels throughout the world and undertaking various activities. Whilst this is itself a bit of fun, the more serious purpose of promoting the Mayor and the civic function is achieved.



The Mayor of Lowestoft with the Mayor Bears



Cllr Sarah Webb, Deputy Mayor of Lowestoft (centre), Cllr Peter Collecott, Chairman of the Council, (left), Cllr Nick Webb (far-left), Peter Aldous MP (right) and Netta Collecott (Consort to the Chairman of the Council) at Lowestoft Air Festival.

- The Mayor of Lowestoft will be hosting a 'Mayor's Ball' to help raise funds for local charities but also to showcase the talent of arts in the Lowestoft area, including those of young people (The 45s, The Tigerlillies, Lily Ayres and Urban Fusion, as well as the Venue of Performing Arts in Oulton Broad). Will King, founder of the 'King of Shaves, who hails from Lowestoft will be guest of honour at the event. By working in partnership with notable individuals and obtaining sponsorship and support of local businesses, the event promises to be effective in raising the profile of the civic office of Mayor, promoting young musicians and performers in the local area and raising much needed funds for local organisations.

- The Mayor of Lowestoft is currently exploring the feasibility of staging or supporting an Arts Festival to promote the artistic talents within the Lowestoft area.

Providing Value for Money

Waveney District Council, like all local authorities, is facing decreased Central Government funding and the civic function has not been immune from the cuts that have been necessary across all service departments in these difficult financial times.

The Chairman of the Council's budget has been decreased from £6,900 in 2010/11 to £5,900 in 2011/12 a year. The Mayor of Lowestoft's budget (for which a separate precept is charged) has been revised to £2000 during the forthcoming financial year 2012/13 to allow future Mayors a greater ability to represent and promote Lowestoft without having to increase the overall size of the Lowestoft Charter Trustees' budget.

However, we are striving to continuously improve the civic service we provide to the public through working smarter, making the most of each opportunity presented to us through team and partnership working and being receptive to new ideas and best practice available. We do this by:

- Reviewing the attendance of the Chairman and the Mayor at potential civic events to ensure they meet the corporate priorities of the Council and fulfil its strategic direction through the support of community groups, whilst ensuring value for money by being more discerning about attending events outside of the district.
- Evaluating the attendance of the Chairman or the Mayor at civic engagements and events to evidence the provision of an effective civic service.
- Obtaining added value for the civic service through the collaboration of the Chairman and the Mayor in joint events such as the Joint Civic Carol Service, the costs for which are shared.
- Providing additional opportunities for civic representation at community events through both the Chairman and the Mayor but also providing 'back-up' opportunities for substitute provision in the event of one or other of the civic posts being unavailable to attend, thereby reducing the risk of disappointment.
- Involving local community groups in civic initiatives (including young people) where possible to promote equality and diversity and promote awareness and greater understanding of democracy in local government.
- Whilst we carefully project manage each civic event and endeavour to keep expenditure to a minimum, occasionally there is food left over after a civic event. On such occasions, we pack up any left-over food (eg mince pies and cheese straws from the Joint Christmas Carol Service) and donate it to the local Women's Refuge and Homelessness Shelter, where it is always gratefully received.

Endorsement from Councillor Peter Collecott, the Chairman of the Council

“As Chairman of Waveney District Council, I feel I have two distinct roles to play, namely that of Chairman of Full Council meetings and as the civic figurehead for the District.

The current political composition of the Council is extremely close and I have been grateful for the advice and support given to me by Democratic Services in ensuring the smooth running of Council meetings - no mean feat given the political complexities and constitutional and legislative requirements!

It is a great privilege to be Chairman of the Council and it has been a pleasure to meet so many individuals and community groups across Waveney. However, it is only through a dedicated team behind me that has made my time as Chairman so positive and enjoyable, enabling me to attend the various civic engagements across the District.

I would particularly like to pay tribute to the Democratic Services Team for their hard work and commitment in organising the formal various civic events throughout the year. Each time one is held, we receive extremely positive feedback but I know how much is done ‘behind the scenes’ to make each event a success. The phrase ‘beyond the call of duty’ is often quoted to describe dedicated individuals but I can honestly say that at Waveney we have an extremely professional and efficient Team who typify this sentiment.”

Endorsement from Councillor Tod Sullivan, the Mayor of Lowestoft

“Working in a civic role it is vital to have a team who are not only committed to providing a good standard of support and work but who also understand that there is a unique blend of personality and history / heritage attached to these positions. One Mayor may have a different view of the scope of his role, may be more or less engaged with certain types of event and suchlike. Here in Waveney we are blessed with people who understand this and go out of their way to ensure that sage advice is given as to what ‘can’ be done, allied to a commitment to ensure that the maximum possible will be done.

This support frequently requires lateral thinking, working above and beyond and encountering people and situations which may be utterly unique and need to be dealt with as such. I could not have been better supported in my role of Mayor than I have been, it has been my pleasure to encounter such a successful and supportive team.”

Summary

We believe that Waveney District Council is worthy of consideration for the Civic Officers' Award for 2011 because we are a flexible and dedicated team that operate within tight financial constraints and operate in innovative ways to support both a Chairman of the Council and the Mayor of Lowestoft to deliver a quality civic service that is responsive to and supportive of the many community and charitable organisations within the district.

The Chairman and Mayor work collaboratively together to enhance the civic function and the Members and Officers work extremely well together, having complementary functions, that help enhance the civic service overall.

Our overall aim is to continuously improve the service we provide so that local community groups and organisations are supported in their roles, feel appreciated, can identify links with their local Council and local Councillors and are able to make use of publicity opportunities to promote their own organisations' aims and objectives. The role of Chairman and Mayor is vastly under-estimated in providing this very important link but with each new municipal year, we can see a new Chairman or Mayor and so the Democratic Services Team plays a fundamental role in maintaining high standards and continuity of service.

Waveney District Council's submission for the Civic Office of the Year Award for 2011 has been submitted by Donna Offord, Principal Service Manager for Democratic Services.