

SOMERSET ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
AND ALL AREA GENERAL MEETING – SATURDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER 2014

I attended the morning session of the AGM. Apart from officers and speakers there were 37 other attendees (my understanding from the SALC website that this was from 250+ member councils)

The morning's agenda was welcome and then AGM followed by 4 guest speakers, Dr. Jonathan Owen – Chief Executive of the Association of Local Councils (ALC), Issy White of WISH (Warmer Improved homes), Joan Neil of Health Watch and Tessa Munt (Lib Dem) MP for Wells.

The salient feature of the AGM was that thanks to the number of workshops SALC was running it was in a satisfactory financial position. It was suggested that it might be possible to lower or at least not raise subscriptions. A representative of one of the smaller communities suggested that it would be better to lower the cost of workshops on the basis that it was harder for those communities to afford them. I resisted the temptation to point out that the inhabitants of the villages were, on average, richer than those of towns like Ilminster.

Dr. Jonathan Owen gave a rundown of the work of the ALC with 700 legal enquiries responded to, high quality publications, 60+ press releases annually, 22 consultations responded to, 100+ ministerial meetings and excellent (his assessment) conferences. In looking for improvements they would review their services, promote improvement, seek affiliation from larger towns, assist in audits and create a new website. There were 100 communities looking to set up new councils.

He said that in the aftermath of the devolution debate that there would be changes and that parishes and town councils needed to be included in any review. He also pointed out that times were hard and there was a lack of funding.

Ms. Issy White of WISH, which operates out of Bristol, told the meeting of the assistance that WISH gave to people in minimising their energy bills (the number of agencies doing so seems to be multiplying).

Ms Joan Neil of Health Watch said, as far as I could make out, that health watch advised people on how to get the best out of the National Health

Service. Having 3 development workers, they relied to a large extent on volunteers and were looking for more. She quoted 3 areas of involvement

Representatives – Sit on local boards and working groups

Those who enter and view – observe services being delivered

Champions – Bring in views and experiences.

Finally we had Tessa Munt MP who led the parliamentary group on local democracy. She appeared a very pleasant and competent lady, who listened to quite a lot of comments/complaints from the floor, generally agreeing with people who raised the points, saying where appropriate that she would look into the matter.

The agenda for the afternoon's All Area Meeting, which I did not attend was:

Apologies

Minutes of Area Meetings held in March/April 2014

Notice of items to be taken in open forum

Policy Update :

Financial Regulations 2014 – Update

Audit and Transparency – Update

The revised Quality Council Scheme – Update on proposals

Council Tax Support Grant and Capping

Future changes to CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration)

Consultation on future service provision and the structure of the association

Representatives' reports

Open Forum

Dates of future Area Meetings