

Quiet Undramatic Provision of Local Services

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP
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Sir Keir Starmer has visited Worthing at least twice since his party preferred him to Jeremy Corbyn. On Monday Meridian TV needed balance. Former Mayor Hazel Thorpe and I agreed to be interviewed. None of us could promote individual candidates. I did not raise unpleasant treatment of candidates I know.

Welcome volunteers willing to stand for election in each of the main parties. If not successful, many go on to worthwhile careers of value to the public. Walking from Christ Church in Portland Road down to the pier for the interview, I passed the former Beales site in South Street where Whitehead Ross are now established. Ian Ross, the founder, was my Labour opponent in 2010.

As impressive independent training providers, his professional colleagues support everyone to reach their full potential, through free government funded courses. Accredited and regulated, they lead to formal qualifications. You cannot pay to train with them.

One learner says: 'I recommend this course as I found it very useful in learning about all aspects of supervision and leadership in hospitality.' Another learner said their course was brilliant, that it was easy to take in what was said. Their goal became finding a job and making a living to move on to the better things in life.

Hazel Thorpe and I competed in parliamentary elections when she was the Lib Dem candidate. I agreed with the tribute to her when she was succeeded as Worthing Mayor by Councillor Lionel Harman. Her year was affected by C-19. Still, she attended 300 face-to-face events and she helped raise over £15,000 for her nominated charities – West Sussex MIND, Care for Veterans and the NSPCC.

One of her team said Hazel's great strength was her ability to unite the community, inspiring the best in those around her. 'She never hesitates when you need help so that is why no one hesitates to help her.' Hard work and commitment are shared by just about all the councillors I have known in Arun District Council and at Worthing Borough Council. We have had great mayors from each party.

The Meridian interviewer suggested Worthing has long been a one-party stronghold. UKIP did well once. Green support has been evident. When I was selected to be prospective parliamentary candidate, the town and the county council were led by the Liberal Democrats. There were amusing years when the Lib Dem mayor became Conservative, followed by a matching change the other way.

The more party-political points I made need not be reproduced here. Passing bicyclists and a local shopkeeper were amused. I made a serious point about the bin strike. My past included long-term union membership and professional activity in industrial relations, when there were a quarter of a million volunteers serving as shop stewards or as safety representatives at work.

They helped to resolve potential disputes and to represent the individual at risk of being steamrolled by an unsympathetic system. They were seldom thanked for often exceptional dedication. Church wardens and faith elders of all ages fulfil similar functions; so do youth leaders and sports instructors. Ward activists in political parties are also found leading other community groups too.

The quiet undramatic provision of local services is at the heart of our shared local government. It is good when people with experience as small traders are willing to serve as councillors. They will find officers keen to make a positive difference, making life better for residents, visitors and enterprise. I welcomed Martin Randall's breakfast presentation to the Adur and Worthing Chamber of Commerce.

There are differences between parties and there can be difference within parties. Discussion, argument and then decision-making: that keeps things moving and improving, with regular opportunities for review.