**Mayor’s Report to Full Council – 15th May 2020**

My final report as Mayor should have been delivered to Full Council in the Chamber on May 13th 2020. My term as Mayor ending on May 17th and Cllr. Drummond being invested as the Mayor for 2020-2021. The Coronavirus pandemic changed everything as it has changed our whole way of life. *Following the legal briefing and guidance from the National Association of Local Councils we will not be holding an Annual Meeting this year and I will remain Mayor until we next have an Annual Meeting, probably May 2021. .*

Official engagements started to be cancelled from January 2020 as it became apparent that the virus was spreading out of China. All engagements ceased completely on 14th March 2020. It is unlikely that they will commence again for many months. We must of course wait until being advised it is again safe to do so. The sad decision to cancel the Mayor’s Drive in early July has been taken. The situation will also result in less money being raised for the Mayor’s Benevolent Fund and Mayor’s Chosen Charities.

Only eighteen engagements were carried out between 1st February and 14th March. Among them were the following:

Chairing the Twin Towns AGM. I have recently written to the mayors of all the towns we are twinned with sending our thoughts and best wishes to them at this difficult time.

On the 17th I attended a wonderful concert in Reading given by the Berkshire Youth Symphony Orchestra. A group of truly accomplished musicians.

On the 24th a small group of councillors visited Christ Hospital School in Horsham. We wished to once again establish the town’s historic link with them. It was an informative and useful event. We were really welcomed, and a full programme of events put on for us. Sadly, the inclement weather resulted in the daily band parade being cancelled. The pupil’s restaurant was amazing and lunch scrumptious. We will build on the contact and promote the West Gift.

The 25th saw the annual Pancake Race organised by the Soroptimists. There was a fantastic turn out thanks to all the councillors who took part , three teams in all. Remember winning is not everything. Thanks also to the inimitable Gary Poulson for his compering .

It was a pleasure to welcome a group of children and teachers from Les Hermites to the Town Hall. The Hermitage Twin Towns Group had requested the visit. They were fascinated by our history and traditions. Above all they enjoyed trying on the robes.

I think the event of 27th was a first for a Mayor of Newbury. We were invited to The House of Lords for an official Drinks Reception by Berkshire Youth Trust. This was a fund-raising launch by the crossbench peer Lord St John of Bletso . It was particularly in support of the Waterside project.

The 28th saw the 8th Annual Get Berkshire Active Awards which are all about young people and their supporters. Another of those events that illustrate just how active and committed our young people are. A highlight for me was the honour of presenting our own Derek Peaple former head of Park House with a special award for service to young people.

Words fail me in praise of the South Wales Male Voice Choir at St Nicholas church on 29th. The after party was as good as the concert - they never know when to stop. The poignant moments of the concert were the piece they dedicated to our colleague Tony Hiller.

One of the more unusual events was the Gracewell Retirement Homes Crufts Dog Show. Friends and relatives of residents came along with their dogs . We all gathered in the gardens where an agility course had been set out for the dogs. However, as they were family pets rather than show animals the owners were often those going through hoops and crawling through tunnels trying to encourage the pooches to follow. As a member of the judging panel I then had the unenviable task of judging the competition.

During this time Rod Thomason one of our Mace Bearers had a stroke. I am pleased to say that he is at home and recovering well. We also had the unexpected and sad death of our colleague Tony Hiller. Along with the CEO, some staff colleagues and Cllr. Jeff Beck we were able to go to the crematorium and standing outside taking part in the service.

The Civic Manager and Mayors Office has remained busy. We launched chats with the Mayor during April these are organised through the Civic Manager Individuals or organisations request a call from the Mayor who makes a prearranged call mainly to elderly self-isolating people. The amount of goodwill and kindness that has been demonstrated throughout Newbury during this difficult time has been amazing. Since March we have sent over 110 letters to recognise the positive contributions of residents that have been made to the community. Our total number of letters during the 2019/20 municipal year, so far, is 179 - so more than half of these have been sent during the Coronavirus pandemic which is incredible. The High Sheriff has asked for nominations to celebrate Berkshire Heroes , we are currently working on this.