

Firstly, can I say it's an absolute honour to be taking on the role of Town Mayor today. People often say they are 'proud and humbled' on these kinds of occasions and sometimes it's an over-used phrase, but I can honestly say I really am thrilled to be here. Thanks to Cllr Liz Thorpe for taking on the role of Mayoress and thanks to Cllr Ben Jancovich and Mayoress Cheryl for all their hard work and commitment in the last 12 months.

It's over 10 years since I was first elected as a councillor for Todmorden. As some of you will know, for eight years I was a Calderdale councillor before joining the Town Council in 2022. And it's been an absolute privilege to serve the local community in both capacities.

Those of us who choose to put ourselves forward for election at whatever level and whichever party don't always get an easy ride. Why should we? We are all accountable not just to those who vote for us but everyone who lives here and cares about their communities. And not everyone shares the same opinion.

However much we may disagree about what we do have in common is a wish to improve life not just for our close friends and families but everyone who lives here and the future generations who will follow us.

Todmorden Town council is a vital link in the chain of community and friendship which binds all of us who live here together. The Town Council supports all kinds of groups from Todmorden Choral Society and Todmorden in Bloom to the local Scouts and Community Brass Band. Town council funding also pays for two PCSOs who help keep our streets safe from anti-social behaviour. In the coming year, our Town Council led projects in Centre Vale Park, including the restored band stand and new bowling pavilion, will be complete – and I hope people will see that all the hard work which has gone into renewing the rest of the town will be more than worth it.

Todmorden is a town with a long history of local governance. Before becoming a Borough under Royal Charter in 1896, its three townships of Stansfield, Longfield and Todmorden and Walsden each had their own constable, an overseer of the poor and a surveyor of highways.

Until 1974's Local Government Act the local Council managed everything from education to policing, parks and sewage and I guess a fair few Todmordians out there might wish we still had that kind of local control. However, for the past 50 years the Town Council has still been able to retain a separate identity and lobby for our residents on everything from planning and public transport to issues like anti-social behaviour and climate change.

Town councillors are all volunteers. They give their time freely in the interests of the constituents they represent and get involved in the issues they feel strongly about.

The two charitable causes I have chosen for my mayoral year represent one of the things which matters to me most and that is making sure that our most vulnerable groups and individuals are taken care of. That's a concern shared by all of us on the Town Council and it's why every year we now allocate funds to the town's two food banks at the College and in Cornholme.

Throughout this year, with the help of my Mayoress Cllr Liz Thorpe, I will be doing as much as I can to raise money for Tod Support and Age Concern Todmorden who both do a great job offering emotional and financial support to all those who need it.

We live in a town renowned for kindness and looking out for one another and that's definitely something to be proud of in an often cruel and hostile world.

Thanks to all of you for coming here today and thanks to our Town Council team for organising the day and Town Hall staff for ensuring we could have our traditional celebrations in the middle of major refurbishments. I'm really looking forward to the year to come and hope you all are too. Thankyou.