

Cabinet: November 2019. Outsourcing, transparency and accountability.

'We, the undersigned residents of Bath and North East Somerset petition the Cabinet and Administration to re-consider the decision to dispose of the family silver, ie 11 children's community playgrounds.

These well-loved, much used areas are essential to young people's mental health and physical well-being, and the creation of community spirit both in long established villages and new estates. The safety and security of children is our highest priority, and we expect the professional standards of care and maintenance to be retained.'

These are the words of a petition gathering signatures in my area, but which with 'purdah', I am assuming cannot now be presented to Full Council. Even in the pouring rain last weekend, BANES residents of all political persuasions in Midsomer Norton were eagerly signing it, and that for two reasons.

Firstly, as any seasoned campaigner in the Somer Valley knows, for the local community it is children and young people who matter most. If the opportunities for outdoor play are reduced, the likelihood of their health problems is increased – not to mention that of parents and grandparents having to deal with all the pent up energy children and young people have. Secondly, they pay their council tax, and along with grit bins, rubbish collections and recycling, and pothole repairs, they expect the council to deliver for the welfare of their children. Where the play equipment has been provided by their own fund-raising, as in the case of Colliers Way, Haydon, or from Section 106 money covered by the developers' sales of over-priced houses to them, they are the more offended.

We have seen a continual process in B&NES since 2000 of outsourcing. First it was council housing to what is now Curo. Other housing associations also take over the required percentage of 'social housing' to be delivered through the council's Homesearch system. Then it was re-cycling, which was such a disaster it had to be brought back 'in house'. Successive administrations cheerfully backed the government's academisation of 'state' schools. Home care and other community medical services went the same way, and now it is litter collection. Parish councils are increasingly expected to take up the burden and raise precepts which residents see as 'double taxation'. Now it is parks and play areas. What all these areas have in common is the lack of transparency, residents being told what will happen, not properly consulted and scrutiny processes being cut to the bone, so that challenge is virtually impossible.

You are all probably aware of the failings of VirginCare, so I will not add my dreadful experience at a clinic at St Martin's Hospital to the litany of failings.

Recently I had a holiday staying in Avila, Valladolid and Salamanca in Spain. I could not believe how clean everywhere was, except for cigarette ends, and what beautiful parks and green spaces there were. I was told that the town council precept was 50% for the parks departments. We are told the problem here is adult social care. Could it possibly be that Spanish children and indeed adults get so much fresh air and exercise that their old people need less care? I only ask  
Eleanor Jackson.