everyone, including the trans community and the wider LGBTQ+ community, remains protected under the Equality Act. This council's stance will remain positive, endorsing and caring towards the trans community as has been made clear through our motions on this issue.

Following my recent conversations with them, I know that I speak for all the group leaders and I believe that I speak all members, as well as the vast majority of the citizens of our district, when I say this.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is in the process of offering formal advice regarding the best practice to deliver services to our trans residents. Officers will continue to monitor this advice against the clear direction from full council that we provide caring thoughtful and inclusive services to everyone within the law.

Oliver Forder
Chair, Vale of White Horse District Council

REVIEWS

Original Sin: President Biden's decline, its cover-up and his disastrous choice to run again by Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson Penguin.

Until eighteen months ago, it was likely Joe Biden would be regarded as a successful president. His administration had implemented policies putting America back to work after the pandemic, and the economy was among the world's strongest. Progressives respected him for his decency, while the international community breathed a sigh of relief that diplomacy had returned to normal under Biden.

Original Sin describes in painful detail the lies told to the American people hiding the rapid deterioration of Biden's mental and physical condition.

This devastating book charts the deception, starting as far back as 2016, that covered up just how decrepit Biden was. His family and staff thought they were saving the US from Trump, but by stubbornly deciding to fight for a second term, they delivered the presidency to Donald Trump in November 2024.

The authors, Tapper and Thompson, are respectable journalists, not gossip mongers, and they are motivated by horror that Biden's arrogance handed America to the reckless MAGA leader and his self-enriching supporters.

Biden's 'Politbureau' prioritised staying in the White House, even while their boss struggled to complete a sentence and thought Francois Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl were still alive.

The true nature of Biden's decline became apparent to the world in June 2024 during the first presidential election debate with Trump. The crisis was compounded by the three and a half weeks it then took for the Biden team to surrender to the inevitable, bowing out of the race.

Biden's family and advisors refused to ever show him the opinion polling that put him far behind Trump. By hanging on, they denied the Democratic Party the chance to hold a primary or to choose a stronger candidate than Kamala Harris. Biden still tells anyone who will listen that he would have defeated Trump, had he been the candidate. This is unfair to Harris who had only 100 days to start a presidential campaign from scratch. It is also delusional.

Given the episodes related in this carefully sourced and researched book, Democrats are at a disadvantage if they hope to accuse Trump of lying and protecting his family from scrutiny:

Biden's coterie did the same. It was particularly unhelpful of Biden to pardon his son Hunter as one of his final acts. Hunter's behaviour, as described in the book, speaks of the degenerate and privileged lifestyle of a man lacking any sense of personal responsibility, knowing his father would protect him. The authors argue that by pardoning Hunter, Biden set a standard that made it easier for Trump to pardon the hundreds of men and women who flooded the Capitol on 6 January assaulting police officers and staff and trying to destroy the heart of America's legislature.

The authors could not predict just how profoundly Trump and his Heritage Foundation-MAGA cabal would deconstruct the federal government and ignore the constitution from the moment they took power. Nor could Tapper and Thompson imagine the impact Trump 2.0 would have on the rest of the world. But the book is essential reading for those of us concerned by how power corrupts and how lies can lead to disaster.

Rebecca Tinsley

A Different Kind of Power by Jacinda Ardern Macmillan 2025 £25.

Leading a country is a difficult task. Leading a country within ten years of entering elected office is even more challenging. Leading a country within ten years of entering office while dealing with a tragic terrorist incidents, difficult world leaders and while giving birth to a first child is a feat of strength. Enter Jacinda Arden, former prime minister of New Zealand, whose new book walks us through the challenges and tribulations of a world leader thrust into the limelight.

Ardern's political memoirs follow almost her entire life from childhood to leaving office, recounting the trials and tribulations she experienced throughout this period. Detailing her experiences growing up in her small conservative community,

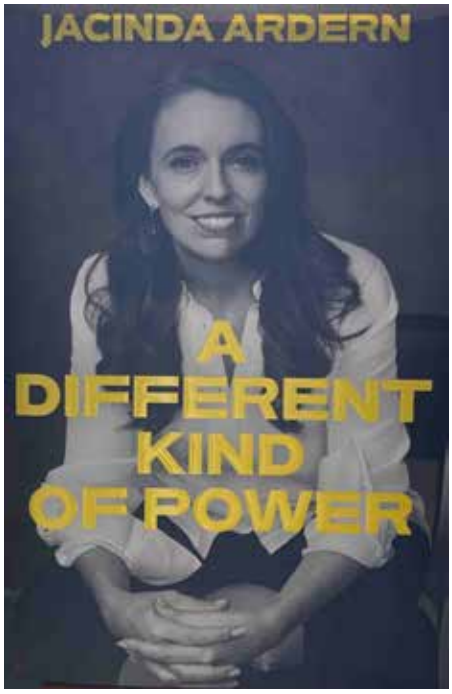
figuring out her place in the world, and her time as a Labour MP and prime minister, juggling public dissatisfaction, a livestreamed terrorist atrocity and giving birth.. It is also a reflective book, considering the direction of travel not only of New Zealand, but of the wider world, in which Ardern makes the pitch for a more compassionate and understanding nature of political debate.

Like many, it was the response to the 2022 Christchurch terrorist attacks that first brought Jacinda Ardern to my attention; her compassion, personal response and then steadfast political abilities that brought tough gun regulation to New Zealand in a matter of weeks. Her book is not only a reflection of that ability and dedication, but also her caring nature, one that has been forged by her own experiences growing up in a uniquely diverse culture.

Ardern's book manages to avoid what many memoirs and other tomes of leaders past all too often fall into the trap of. It doesn't read as if a lecture, attempting to justify unpopular decisions, lecturing the reader as to how their actions were, of course, the correct course of action and any criticism levelled is a misunderstood interpretation. Despite being a confident recount of her time in office, it is one that is unafraid to point out her own mistakes, shortcomings and things she would do differently. The humility, even going beyond levels that are, in my opinion, warranted, is a breath of fresh air.

Ardern is also unafraid to speak about issues that only a minute number of world leaders would have ever experienced. Particularly surrounding being the first elected world leader to give birth whilst in office, she speaks about all manner of challenges that only she can attest to.

Whether this was hiding her pregnancy from media attention, repeatedly answering questions about whether she would be suitable for the role of prime minister if she had a young child, and even attempting to visit clinicians without the media or her personal protection becoming aware, her words highlight just some of the extra burdens that being a strong female leader in the political world can bring, and the challenges of rising through the



ranks in what continues to be a world made for men.

I particularly enjoyed also the manner in which Arden brings herself down to the level of her readers, explaining as she goes concepts that for many international, and possibly even local, readers may not understand. Particularly when discussing her time as a 'List' MP, she takes the time to walk readers through what this means, and how it differs from being a constituency MP; one of the many quirks of a system which to outsiders can seem alien. It's this ability to understand, empathise and bring people with her which is so evident throughout the book that served her so effectively when in office.

Finally, there is an unusually positive tone that is maintained throughout the book, even when discussing harrowing national or international events. Despite the myriad challenges Ardern faced she manages to retain a strong feeling of hope on almost every page. This is not a former world leader who sounds exhausted, but one who is clearly not finished with her work, whom I am sure will continue to have a marked impact on the world.

Ardern is one of the most 'real' politicians the world has seen in a long time, and one of the most respected world leaders for a generation. A Different Kind of Power is not just a reflection of this, but an embodiment of who Ardern is as a person. A leader, a mother, a family-oriented legislator, a community member and, above all, a real person just like any one of us. Ardern 's book is a reflection of the kind of leader the world needs right now, packaged in a beautifully written and personal account that will have any reader on side. Tt is one of the best political memoirs I have read.

Sophie Layton

The Rise and Fall of Margaret Thatcher [play] by Edmund Green Gatehouse Highgate Theatre

There is plenty of drama in both Margaret Thatcher's rise to power and in her eventual ejection from it.

A pity therefore that this play felt at times like extracts from Hansard were being read out. The writer could perhaps have tackled either her rise or her fall, or simply condensed both parts of the script.

It is staged in the 'rise' half in 1974-75 with Edward Heath seated at a small table and other performers either offstage or sitting at the back and coming forward as needed. Heath was famously abrupt and rude (and to his credit by all accounts loathed the Tory grassroots) and is played here rather as caricature.

Heath has lost two elections and is here fast losing the confidence of MPs. The main action of the first part comprises Airey Neave persuading Thatcher to stand on the grounds that the anti-Heath right needed a champion and the most likely one - Sir Keith Joseph - had withdrawn having made a public idiot of himself with unwise speeches about the breeding habits of the working class. Indeed he became nicknamed Sir Sheath.

Neave has to convince Thatcher that a woman could stand a chance of winning but does so at such interminable length that one's attention began to wander. Neave is shown up to all kinds of discreet questioning to ascertain MPs views but there is little sense of the drama of the leadership battle, which Thatcher won helped by the candidacy of the forgotten backbencher Hugh Fraser. He took 16 votes, more than the margin by which Thatcher beat Heath.

The second half starts in the late 1980s with Thatcher at the stage's table facing mounting disquiet in