



Annual Report 2011-2012



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Introduction



Stanley Town Council was created by Statutory Instrument (No: 1185, Local Government, England) dated the 11th April 2007.

Parish and Town Councils are also known as Local Councils and are the first tier of local government in England. They are statutory bodies with 'Members' elected for a set term of office whose activities are principally funded by an annual precept.

Local Councils have a wide range of powers and are involved in an extensive range of activities intended to benefit the community.



The area covered by the Town Council is divided into seven electoral 'wards' represented by a total of twenty elected members known as Town Councillors. These wards are: Annfield Plain; Catchgate; Craghead and South Stanley; Havannah; Stanley Hall; South Moor, and; Tanfield.

The population living within the Town Council's boundary is in excess of 31,000 making it one of the largest local councils in the region.

The original group of Town Councillors were elected during the 2008 local elections in County Durham. Unless they vacate office mid-term they remain in office until the next local elections in 2013.

Following public consultation, the Council's "Strategic Town Plan 2009-14" (the Strategy) was published and is now being put into effect.

The current 'Town Clerk' took up office in March 2009 and the Council began to operate in April 2009. In accordance with Section 112 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Clerk must remain at all times, independent, objective and professional in the manner in which he

provides: administrative support, advice regarding lawful decisions; recommendations for implementing decisions; unbiased information to help inform choices and many other duties. Whilst the Council is responsible for taking all decisions and the Clerk takes instructions from the Council as a body corporate, he is not answerable to any individual Councillor - not even the Chairman of the Council. The Clerk's role is analogous to that of the Chief Executive Officer of a District or County Council.

The new 'unitary' County Council also came into effect on the 1st April 2009 and is known as the 'Principal Authority'. The County Council "recognises local councils as the first tier and 'grass roots' of local democracy.... [and] is committed to full parishing of County Durham and to building the capacity of local councils who wish to play an even stronger role in their local communities..." As can be seen within the Strategy, the Town Council successfully completed an exhaustive process in order to be able to do just that.

Chapter 5 of the Strategy is titled the 'Action Plan'. This Plan is based on what the public told the Council during the consultation and what the Council intended

to do in response. As can be seen by accessing www.stanley-tc.gov.uk the Action Plan uses the easy to follow format: You Said.... We will do....

The use of You Said; We Will Do means that the public can track progress towards aims, objectives and targets, known as performance.

Although with the advent of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council is not subject to the duty of 'Best Value' placed on local authorities by the Local Government Act 1999, it nevertheless opts to pursue best value principles by having due regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness in all of its activities. A 'Scrutiny' Sub-committee of the Finance and General Purposes Committee was therefore established in 2011-12.

As part of this commitment to scrutiny and being accountable to the public, this document, which has been officially approved by Councillors, is the second such Annual Report which is set out in a format that can be easily compared to previous year's and the 2009-14 Action Plan.

Statement of Responsibility

To ensure compliance and regularity, the Town Council is subject to both internal and external audit on an annual basis. In this regard an 'Annual Statement' (the Statement) is read out verbatim before a meeting of the 'full' Council for consideration, scrutiny and approval. This practice is recorded in the related minutes of the meeting for transparency and future reference.

The Town Council has a designated 'Proper Officer' (PO) who acts in relation to all matters relating to law and governance in a similar manner as the Director of Law and Governance of a Principal Authority, (as set out within the Local Government Act 1972).

The Town Council also has a designated 'Responsible Finance Officer' (RFO) who is responsible for all financial records of the Council and the careful administration of its finances. The RFO's role is analogous with that of the Director of Finance of a Principal Authority, (Local Government Act 1972).

Both the PO and RFO roles are performed by the Town Clerk (Russell Morgan) as the Council's Chief Officer.

The Town Council is responsible for the preparation of this document and for the information and assessments set out within it and the assumptions and estimates on which they are based. It is also responsible for ensuring that 'fit for purpose' internal policies, procedures, performance management mechanisms and internal controls are in place, and thereby, that in all material respects, the contents are accurate, complete, realistic and achievable at the time of writing.

In July 2010, Robin Tunstall took up the position of Deputy Town Clerk whose primary role is to manage all financial and related

matters on a 'hands on' and day to day basis.

By way of contingency planning, rather than the role of Assistant Clerk, the Deputy Clerk becomes the Acting Clerk to minimize the adverse impact of any unforeseen absence.

As befitting what are senior executive roles, the Clerk has a relevant honours degree and is a qualified member of the Crime and Community Safety, Housing, Health, Economic Development and Regeneration, Local Government, and; Leadership and Management professions. Likewise the Deputy Clerk has relevant accountancy and business management qualifications.

As well as advising the Town Council as a 'body corporate' on the legal basis of any given matter, for example, the legal power under which a particular project may be supported, the RFO also oversees the Town Council's compliance with the Audit Commission Act 1998 and the related Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011. In so doing the RFO annually publishes 'Notice' that the accounts are available for inspection by local electors.

With effect from February 2012, Cameron McGhee joined the Council on a six month fixed term contract. In the position of Executive Assistant (Finance and Administration), Cameron is a qualified accountant and experienced international, national and local government auditor whose expertise has been of great benefit regarding financial regularity and risk management.

Chair's Review of 2011-12 (Councillor Tina Parry)

Having been Vice-Chair of the Council in 2009-10 and 2010-11, I was naturally delighted to be elected as Chair for 2011-12. In this context, it therefore falls to me to review the year just ended.

The Town Council came into being in 2009 at the same time, but not as a part of, local government reorganisation of County Durham. This process replaced the previous form of Durham County Council and seven District or Borough Councils, including Derwentside District Council, with a single 'unitary' County Council.

One of the main reasons for forming the Town Council in the years leading up to 2009 was to give the Stanley area a stronger voice due to a perception that the decisions affecting the Town and surrounding villages and hamlets were being taken too far away (in Consett Civic Centre). As the Principal Authority is now based even further away (in Durham County Hall), having a strong local voice that is independent of bodies such as the County Council, Police or national government etc, is, if anything even more important.

With regard to this report which covers financial year 2011-12, I would like to

recognise the hard work of the Clerk who's previously challenging workload was effectively doubled when the Deputy Clerk was the injured party in a serious road accident, through no fault of his own. The injuries sustained required a series of operations and the long hard road back to health is still on-going some nine months later. Naturally, everyone connected with the Council wishes Robin a full recovery.

I should also acknowledge the support of my fellow Town Councillors, my work colleagues at the Derwentside Council for Voluntary Services (DCVS) and my family, especially my two sons.

Whilst remaining independent of other organisations, the Town Council continually seeks to develop effective working relationships with outside bodies. A good example of this would be the joint Participatory Budgeting event in May 2012 which has arisen from positive relationships between staff and Elected Members of both the Town and County Council, and; the related 'Stanley Area Action Partnership' (AAP).

During 2011-12 Councillor David Walker was the Town Council's designated representative on the AAP Management

Board whilst Councillor Mark Boyd continued as Deputy Board Member. The Clerk also participated at Board level as a co-opted (non-voting) member although his ability to get involved was severely constrained by his Deputy's serious accident.

As the Localism Act was finally enacted in November 2011, and the current emergence of the Open Public Services Whitepaper, (not yet an Act), it is increasingly likely that the Town Council may seek to directly deliver services from within, and for, the communities it serves. The main consideration regarding the possible devolution of services to the most local level will simply be whether the service will improve in delivery and customer satisfaction terms without increasing costs.



Chair's Review of 2011-12

As it's always best to 'walk before you run', the experience gained during 2011-12 in retaining the free provision of dog-waste bags to Town Council residents, whilst albeit a relatively small service in monetary terms; will be helpful as more costly or technically complicated service proposals are considered in future, for example – litter and dog-waste bin provision, maintenance and emptying.

In the meantime, during 2011-12, the Town Council's commitment to community safety and improving the local environment has entailed the continuation of the local enhancement of the County Council's 'Streetscene' service. The enhancement more than doubles the number of Neighbourhood Wardens patrolling our communities (see Appendix 4) and introduces an additional fulltime 'Civic Pride Officer' (CPO) and two full-time 'Community Environmental Caretakers' (CEC) to undertake outdoor 'odd jobs'.

Thanks to joint Town and County Council negotiations and funding, the CECs are now being supported by ten local youngsters who are undergoing environmental and cleaning apprenticeships through the Urban Blitz programme. Towards the end of 2011-12

the CECs and apprentices started working on pre-determined zones in order to really make a visible and lasting difference to the localities tackled. Wherever you may live in the whole area, your locality is on the list and will therefore benefit too.

The success of the CECs has led to the further appointment of two full time Environmental Wardens (EWs) through Groundwork North East based at Greencroft. The idea of the EWs was piloted in the second half of 2011-12 to enable the continuation of responsive works across the whole Council area whilst the CECs focused on specific zones on a more long term and concentrated basis. I'm pleased to say that the early signs were positive and therefore the EW service has been extended throughout 2012-13.

However, in keeping with the Council's aim of creating or otherwise enabling job opportunities, during the next phase, the two EWs will be supported by two local youngsters as trainees. The trainees will gain supervised hands-on experience of a vast range of practical 'outdoor work' which will hopefully increase their longer term job prospects as well as making the local area cleaner and greener for all.

Although the atrocious weather of the past two years didn't materialise this winter, the Town Council has acquired additional snow clearing equipment and the CECs and EWs have been trained to use it when necessary. An additional quantity of road salt has also been acquired and properly stored for future use. In this regard the Council has negotiated with the statutory highways authority to treat footpaths that are officially classified as 'none-priority' routes, but, which local knowledge tells us need attention in times of severe weather. Examples include town or village car parks and entrances to medical practices or sheltered housing units.



Chair's Review of 2011-12

The Neighbourhood Wardens act as the community's eyes and ears and report matters they come across, or are made aware of by the public, to the relevant authorities. They also intervene in appropriate circumstances and take enforcement or other legal action against the troublesome minority who spoil things for the majority. This includes issuing Fixed Penalty Notice's (FPNs) for dog-fouling or littering and gathering evidence for the prosecution of fly-tippers etc, (see Appendix 4).

The CPO complements the work of the Wardens by providing specialist advice, support and capacity to the community so that environmental and anti-social behaviour issues can also be tackled using the 'carrot' rather than the 'stick'. A good example of the CPO's ability to think 'out of the box' or to engage 'real' people in the process of improving the area by taking a pride in it, started on my

watch in 2011-12 in the form of the Stanley Heart project – Love Where You Live.

Whilst the project will be much more visible to residents using the Town Centre bus station from 2012-13 onwards, much of the research, preparation, negotiation, design and related funding was thrashed out in 2011-12. Ultimately, the aim is to make the area around the bus station a more attractive and safe place to wait or visit and as someone who works very nearby I naturally await the outcome with optimism.

By funding the salary costs of such staff that are employed and managed by our partners, rather than taking on the much more costly responsibilities and liabilities of the 'Employer', every penny spent by the Town Council can be directed to front-line service delivery – You said... We will do...

Building on the experience of last year, in 2011-12, the festive season lighting display was extended from the Town Centre to include several surrounding settlements with more to be considered for next year.

During 2011-12 the Council's commitment to tackling crime and anti-social behavior (ASB) saw the piloting of a 'Special Projects Fund' which made £10k available

to the (Stanley area) 'Local Multi-agency Problem Solving Partnership Group' (LMAPS) made up of management level specialist officers from Crime and Community Safety services. In accordance with their judgment over 90% of the fund was used to provide a security presence at the Bus Station on weekend dark nights and to enable the Police to provide extra support and equipment to victims of crime, particularly repeat victims. The effectiveness of the fund will now be reviewed by the Crime and Community Safety Committee and the Scrutiny Subcommittee.

During 2011-12, Town Council funding has enabled LMAPS partners to pursue the long and complex legal process required to introduce 'Designated Public Place Orders' (DPPOs). Under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, DPPOs enable the Police to prevent the consumption of, and confiscate, alcohol from anyone in the 'designated' area. They apply to over eighteens as well as juveniles. As we approach the final hurdle of the legal process, the many members of the public who continue to express their concerns about public drinking and related nuisance to residents, will hopefully be buoyed in 2012-13 as they see the DPPOs enforced.

Chair's Review of 2011-12

This sentiment is certainly shared by Councillor Michele Hodgson, who as Chair of the Town Council's Crime and Community Safety Committee; represented us on the Stanley Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP). The CAP which I had the privilege of publically launching in 2011 was an innovative pilot scheme that sought to engage secondary school aged students, offenders whose alcohol consumption was a factor in their behaviour, local retailers and law enforcement agencies etc, in the reduction of harm, crime and Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) in the Stanley area linked to the supply or abuse of alcohol. During the CAP the incidence of such behaviour reduced, so we are cautiously optimistic that the evaluation exercise that is currently underway, will provide evidence of successful practice and recommendations for future action to ensure momentum is not lost.

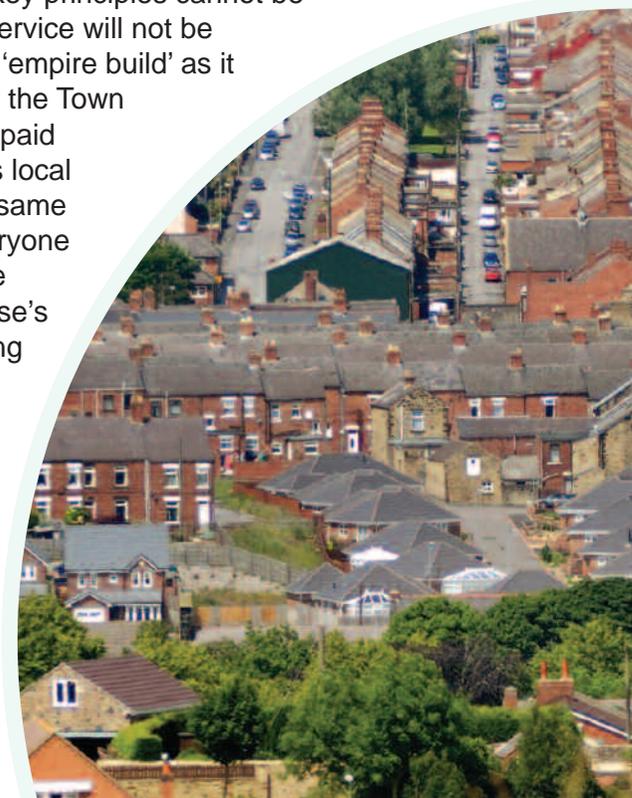
To augment its support for 'Neighbourhood Policing', in 2011-12 the Council signed off an agreement with Durham Constabulary to sponsor two additional marked police cars over three years for the specific use of the Stanley Neighbourhood Teams operating from the Catchgate and South Moor stations respectively. The aim is to improve

the efficiency and visibility of routine, i.e. none-emergency, police activities in the interests of crime prevention and reduction and public awareness and reassurance. The liveried vehicles will be operating in 2012-13 onwards and the intended outcomes will be analysed in due course.

The three tier funding stream introduced midway through 2010-11 based on individual Town Councillors (Member Initiative Funding); electoral wards (Ward Initiative Funding), and; the whole area (Strategic Funding) was continued throughout the entirety of 2011-12. Regardless of which tier, every pound allocated had to clearly contribute to the achievement of the Action Plan which, as mentioned above, is based on what the community told the Council it ought to be prioritising. Whilst a comprehensive list of projects, community groups and other activities funded from this source is included elsewhere in this report, beneficiaries have ranged from pre-school age through to old aged pensioners and from recreational, drama and sporting facility improvements to major pedestrian crossing alterations and installations. In other words the Town Council is here to serve all sections of the population that

reside in the area.

The 'Localism Act 2011' gained royal ascent on the 15th November 2011 and was later 'implemented' by Parliament in March 2012. In all probability, the qualification criteria for the related 'General Power of Competence' (GPoC) will be pursued to enable the local and devolved delivery of public services in the interests of improved efficiency, responsiveness and better value for money. However, the Council takes the view that if these key principles cannot be met, a particular service will not be pursued simply to 'empire build' as it were. All twenty of the Town Councillors are unpaid volunteers, and as local residents pay the same council tax as everyone else. Therefore we share everyone else's interest in achieving value for money, particularly in a time of national austerity.



Chair's Review of 2011-12

Other aspects of the Localism Act that the Town Council's Planning Committee began to study closely in 2011-12 include planning reform and the increased role of neighbourhoods in the process; social housing reform including new social housing tenure forms, and; community rights to buy assets, propose that assets be designated of social or community value, challenge local authorities over the provision of a service, and to build homes. The Committee's 'Neighbourhood Planning Working Group' led by my predecessor as Chair, Councillor Tom Pattinson shall continue this work in 2012-13 and I look forward to seeing their recommendations accordingly.

As always seems to be the case, life and the natural course of events inevitably throws up a stream of challenges and opportunities to the Council and the communities it serves. The adverse impact of the long term absence of the Deputy Clerk has recently

been partially alleviated by the appointment of two new employees on six month fixed term contracts starting in February 2012.

As Executive Assistant (Finance and Administration), Cameron McGhee brings full professional accountancy qualifications and significant experience of local and national government auditing. This expertise is already being put to use to ensure value for money is scrutinized and achieved. As Clerical Assistant, Nicola James brings a wealth of customer service experience, a 'can do' attitude and an ability to free up some of the Clerk's costly time previously taken up on administration in order to focus on more strategic and complex matters such as streamlining the Council's decision-making process and Committee structure; pursuing the GPoC to enable flexible and innovative local services, or; to prepare a case for taking a stake or ownership of key local buildings or land assets that maybe at risk due to national and regional cut-backs etc.

I would also thank the Council's many partner bodies and contractors for their commitment during 2011-12 and confirm that we shall continue to strive to get more for less by working in mutually beneficial partnership with others.

As my predecessor stated last year, we have sought to balance front-line service improvements and new projects on the ground with behind the scenes corporate development in readiness for the future. The Town Council shares many peoples' concern about the effect of the economic downturn on the local area, which as we know, has experienced more than its fair share of economic decline over recent generations, and; is committed to playing its part in trying to encourage and support a recovery. In so doing, and in keeping with the reason the Council was formed by local people a few years ago, the emphasis will remain on putting the local interest first.

Please refer to the following sections of this report to see what all of these words translate into on the ground in your neighbourhood, and you may well be pleasantly surprised by what's happening. More information can be downloaded from our web-site: www.stanley-tc.gov.uk and as of 2011-12, you can also follow us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/stanley.towncouncil. Remember our meetings are open to the public and Stanley Town Council is YOUR Council.