

As the Localism Act 2011 was implemented by Parliament in March 2012, 'localism' is becoming a cornerstone of national government policy regarding local government practice. In this context, it is increasingly likely that the Town Council may opt to directly deliver services from within, and for, the communities it serves.

However, as all twenty Town Councillors are unpaid volunteers who live in the area and pay the precept, we are not interested in bringing services 'in house' for the sake of it.

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.

During 2012-13, the Town Council's commitment to community safety and improving the local environment meant 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'.

The CECs work on pre-planned 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. The EWs are based at Greencroft and they enable the continuation of responsive works across the whole Town Council area whilst the CECs focus on specific zones on a more targeted basis. In keeping with the Town Council's aim of creating job opportunities, during 2012-

13 the two EWs were supported by two local youngsters as trainees. As well as 'more hands makes less work', the trainees will benefit from hands-on experience of a vast range of practical 'outdoor work' intended to increase their longer term job prospects.



Chair's Review of 2012-13 (Councillor Peter McLaughlin)

As the third atrocious winter in the last four years hit the area hard, the Town Council deployed two tractors with snow clearing equipment operated by the CECs and EWs. An additional quantity of road salt was also acquired beforehand and stored ready for use when needed. As there are always more worthy areas for clearance than bodies and equipment available, the Town Council negotiated (with the statutory highways and 'footways' authority) to treat footpaths that are officially classified as 'non-priority' routes, but, which local knowledge tells us need attention in times of severe weather. Examples include entrances to medical practices or sheltered housing units. The list of footpath routes the Town Council will clear over and above the routes already taken care of by the County Council is reviewed annually during the warmer months and then published in Town Council News before the next winter sets in.

The tractors and other equipment are used at other times to support general 'clean and green' and environmental maintenance works.

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 Notices (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' as well as the 'stick'. A good example of the CPO's ability to think 'outside the box' or to engage 'real' people in the process of improving the area by taking a pride in it started back in 2011-12. The project known as "Stanley Heart—*Love Where You Live*" continued during 2012-13 and physical works near to the Town Centre bus station based on the views of local young people are due to

'go on site' towards the end of this year and into 2013-14. Stanley Heart will complement the major programme of Public Realm Improvement Works being jointly funded by the Town and County Councils which is also scheduled to go on site at the same time in the Front Street area.

By learning from the experience of the festive season, whereby the success of a series of four successive Christmas festivals and the installation of numerous festive lighting assemblies across the whole area, all of which was funded by the Town Council, was undermined by the negative publicity arising from a last minute technical hitch concerning a festive tree; the pre-planning of the December 2013/January 2014 festive season began in February 2013. In this regard dealing with any and all technicalities has been included within the Town Centre regeneration programme which entails the long overdue improvement of the Front Street.

£1,000 to White-le-Head Chapel for Community Hall Improvement Works (Tanfield Ward)

During 2012-13 the Council's commitment to tackling crime and anti-social behavior (ASB) saw the provision of two additional police vehicles to the Stanley Neighbourhood Police Team. The vehicles which operate from the Catchgate and South Moor stations are for the day to day delivery of 'neighbourhood policing' to, and for, the communities within the Town Council's area. A series of performance measures have been agreed to assess the improved performance and increased support to the community arising from the availability of suitable vehicles.

Town Council funding has also enabled the "Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving group" known as the LMAPS partnership to successfully pursue the long and complex legal process required to introduce four "Designated Public Place Orders" (DPPOs).

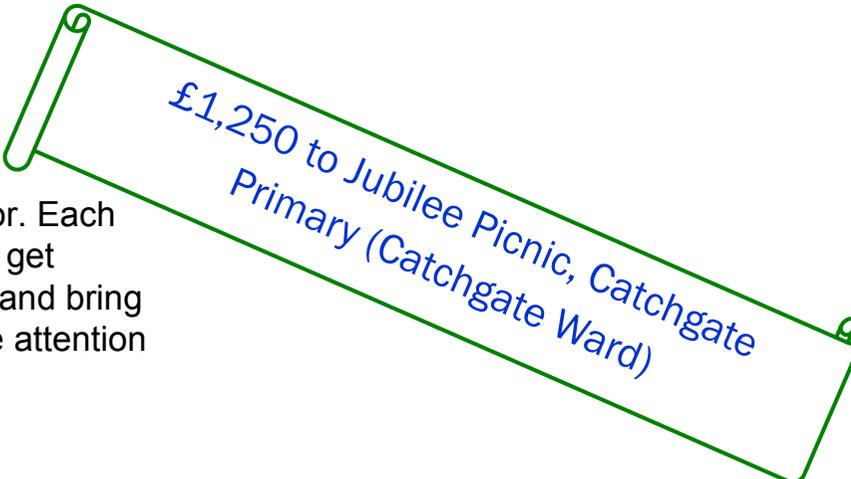
Under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, DPPOs enable the Police to prevent the consumption of, and confiscate, alcohol from anyone in the 'designated'

area. DPPOs apply to over eighteens as well as juveniles and whilst the Town Council made their introduction possible, the Police Service is responsible for enforcing them. DPPOs are one measure intended to address the nuisance caused to residents by public drinking and rowdy behaviour in specific locations.

The previous three-tier funding process was simplified during 2012-13 into a single-tier community grants and donations process. In essence, the Town Council identified a sum within its annual budget setting exercise for use during that financial year and delegated the assessment of the merits and eligibility of funding applications to its Chief Officer.

The total funding pot was notionally divided into twenty sub-pots, one per Town Councillor. Each Member was then encouraged to get involved in their local community and bring the possibility of a donation to the attention of local groups and projects.

Eligibility was based on whether or not the Town Council had the legal power to make a financial contribution to the project or activity proposed, whilst the merits of the application were assessed on the degree to which the proposal would contribute to the achievement of the Town Council's Strategy and Action Plan. As mentioned above, the Action Plan is based on what the community said the Town Council ought to be prioritising, and therefore, it was possible to ensure that community donations were consistent with local priorities and opinions. A comprehensive list of projects, community groups and other activities funded from this source is available on request.



£1,250 to Jubilee Picnic, Catchgate Primary (Catchgate Ward)

Chair's Review of 2012-13 (Councillor Peter McLaughlin)

As mentioned above, the 'Localism Act 2011' was 'implemented' 2012. Accordingly, the professional qualification which is necessary before the Town Council can exercise the newly created "General Power of Competence" (GPoC) has been pursued by the Town Clerk during 2012-13 despite an already challenging workload. If successful, the Town Council can resolve (i.e. officially decide) to use this legal power in order to engage in a much wider range of activities than current statute allows.

As all twenty Town Councillors are local residents who pay the same council tax as everyone else, the Town Council nevertheless continues to take the view that no new services or activities are to be embarked upon for the sake of it. Only if a better local service or facility and no extra cost to the public purse can be achieved, will existing legal powers, or, new powers to act be used.

This is an important principle in times of national austerity which unfortunately transfers down to the most local level. Put simply, the Town Council cannot realistically off-set all of the effects of national or regional public funding cuts or welfare reforms and so on. Accordingly, genuine value for money and social or heritage value to the community will be important factors in the Town Council's consideration of whether or not it is justified to make some form of

intervention, such as, for example, taking a stake or ownership of key local buildings or land assets that maybe at risk due to cuts.

In terms of what programme the Town Council follows, it is also necessary to appreciate that the Town Council has one of, if not, the smallest core staff teams of any similar sized Town Council. Therefore, workload and roles and responsibilities began to be reviewed during 2012-13.

The Deputy Clerk's long term absence following a serious road accident in 2011, for which he was entirely blameless, continued throughout 2012-13 in the form of a series of shorter term absences linked to his long road to a full recovery. Support arrangements are in place and at the time of writing, it is anticipated that a return to full-time office-based working will be possible early into 2013-14. Without wishing to tempt fate, if that proves to be the case, on behalf of all Town Councillors and employees, I warmly welcome this development.

£200 to Re-site the Westfield Youth Shelter (South Moor Ward)

