

LOCALISM IN PRACTICE



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**LOCALISM
IN PRACTICE**

Contents

Foreword <i>by Cllr Michael Chater, NALC</i>	6
<i>Young people</i>	
Iver Parish Council, Buckinghamshire	10
Awre Parish Council, Gloucestershire	12
Great Aycliffe Town Council, Durham	13
<i>Power of Wellbeing</i>	
Hatfield Town Council, Hertfordshire	17
Oswestry Town Council, Shropshire	18
Lanchester Parish Council, Durham	19
Halewood Parish Council, Merseyside	21
Honiton Town Council, Devon	22
<i>Crime and Safety</i>	
Watford Rural Parish Council, Hertfordshire	25
Harwicke Parish Council, Gloucestershire	27
Hessie Town Council, Yorkshire	28
<i>Innovative practice</i>	
Hethersett Parish Council, Norfolk	31
Horndean Parish Council, Hampshire	32
Littleport Parish Council, Cambs	34
Sudbury Town Council, Suffolk	35
<i>Participatory budgeting</i>	
Crowborough Town Council, East Sussex	38
Dulverton Town Council, Somerset	39
Hampton Bishop Parish Council, Hereford	40

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present this third publication in the series of Localism in Practice booklets, showcasing how local councils are delivering for their local area.

Local (community, neighbourhood, parish, town and village) councils are the first tier of local government in England and work to represent the local community, deliver services to meet local needs and improve quality of life and community well being.

The National Association of Local Councils fully supports a fundamental shift of power to encourage initiatives by councils, communities, neighbourhoods and

individuals. Empowered local people taking responsibility for their community through local councils is a tried, tested and trusted model of action at the neighbourhood level. Given this important role local councils have in their communities, they are well placed to demonstrate how best to approach and achieve localism.

In this booklet you will read how councils across England have unique and innovative ways to deliver more for their communities. These councils have identified needs within their communities and set about addressing them, sometimes in conjunction with other organisations, often independently. Each case study demonstrates lateral thinking, a desire for change and, above all, a commitment to the

local community.

As these councils demonstrate, in order to fully respond to the needs of the community, local councils must communicate well and engage properly with local people. Research affirms that the reputation and effectiveness of local councils depends upon public awareness. So a big part of our job is to ensure we communicate what we do and help raise the profile and reputation of local councils to a wide ranging audience – from parliamentarians in Westminster to civil society groups to people in areas currently without real local democracy.

This publication complements the first and second Localism in Practice booklets. From participatory budgeting, to the variety of uses of the power of well-being, local councils are being inventive, innovative and collaborative to overcome barriers and deliver solutions for local people.

I hope that you will not only enjoy reading about ideas being put into practice, but you will also be inspired to share your own experiences as we continue together to make a central contribution to the Big Society and our local communities.

Cllr Michael Chater
Chairman

National Association of Local Councils



Iver Parish Council, Buckinghamshire

Population: 9,925

Precept: £352,000

In Iver there are a number of factors that limit the number of activities young people can engage in, and in recent years the parish had seen an increase in incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage by young people. A number of local young people were on the streets during the evening with little to do and the council was prompted to consider how it could better provide for the needs of young people in the parish.

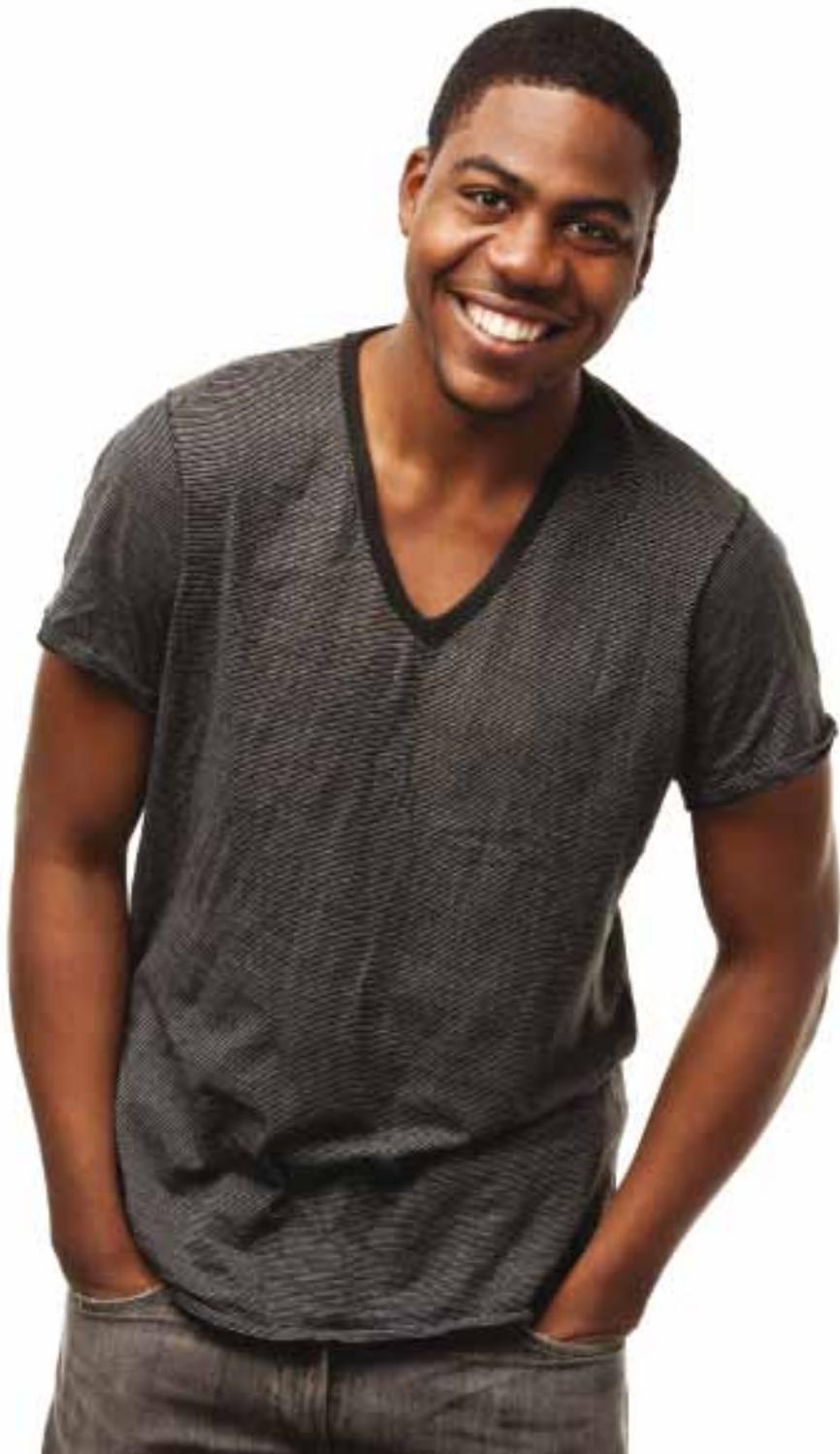
The parish council works with a local charity, Iver Educational Trust to employ its own street based youth worker within the parish. It is a unique synergy of partnerships – the district and county councils (who used to provide a limited service in the area) are now both working with the parish council to enhance youth services and the local police are also involved.

Initially the youth worker took to the streets in an effort to build a relationship with young people in the area.

This gave young people the opportunity to articulate their needs, voice concerns and engage in dialogue and helped them feel more a part of the community. The role has developed over time and activities are now provided during school holidays. To help tackle the problem of graffiti, the youth worker works with young people on arts projects.

Another positive aspect of the project was that a group of young people who were concerned that they were being treated as though they were anti-social, came forward and asked to organise a clean-up day. This was facilitated by the parish council and saw the young people cleaning graffiti, painting walls and litter picking.

This project has reduced instances of anti-social behaviour and has made the council better aware of issues that affect young people on the margins.



Awre Parish Council, Gloucestershire

Population: 1,644

Precept: £14,500

The parish of Awre in Gloucestershire is set in a rural area between the River Severn and the Forest of Dean proper. The parish has a fairly stable population with a significant number of senior citizens and young people. There is little provision for young people who have to travel to Gloucester for any significant nightlife and transport links are poor. The lack of provisions for young people leads to issues with anti-social behaviour in the parish.

The parish council was only too aware of the lack of facilities for young people and was concerned when the local youth club, run mainly by volunteers, closed.

In 2004, the council conducted a Parish Plan survey and as part of this included a specific questionnaire aimed at young people in the community. The responses from young people in the parish were very clear: there was nothing to do, and nowhere to go.

The council was lucky enough to be able to call on a newly elected 21 year old councillor who took on the brief to liaise with the young people in the community to find

out exactly what they wanted and how the parish could improve things for the young people. A mobile cinema was identified as a priority.

Funding was allocated through the Acorn Trust, administered by the district council and equipment hired from Monmouthshire county council. The provision of the cinema proved to be very popular, attracting an average of 40 people to each monthly screening.

Unfortunately the county council decided not to continue providing its equipment. This resulted in the parish council having to discontinue the cinema service and take time to consider how to resolve this problem. Eventually a commercial equipment supplier was found which enabled the council to restart the screenings. Hiring equipment through a commercial supplier and the council then secured alternative funding to help support the service into the future and has now been able to purchase its own equipment, which is also available for use by other community groups.

Great Aycliffe Town Council, Durham

Population: 29,000

Precept: £1,623,000

The parish of Great Aycliffe comprises the town of Newton Aycliffe and the villages of Aycliffe and School Aycliffe. The population of Great Aycliffe is approximately 26,500. (Sedgefield Borough council, regeneration statistics 2007) Newton Aycliffe is a new town which is still growing today. The parish is surrounded by countryside and incorporates a large number of green areas. There is also a large business park within its boundary and it has good road and rail links.

Great Aycliffe town council's original website was created and hosted by Sedgefield borough council. It was a dedicated content managed system, supplied as part of the borough council's policy to assist town and parish councils have an internet presence.

The council embarked upon a process of community inclusion by creating a customer panel, youth council and encouraged participation by the public on the website in a 'Have Your Say' area. The council provided links to and from other websites and ensured that the website address

was publicised wherever possible. It also published council policies, financial information, minutes, agendas and supporting papers and used the website as a means of promoting council services and activities.

After the borough council was dissolved, the council continued to use the website and server for our website but due to technical problems with the server were unable to access the website for maintenance. Unfortunately, the council lost the majority of the data stored on Sedgefield server and we were without a website for approximately 2 months.

The current site was created in March 2010 by Durham county council. The site consists of templates designed specifically for town and parish councils, is very simple for the administrator to use and therefore perfectly suited for small town or parish councils.

Great Aycliffe town council is a large council that provides many services. The website they currently have is not able to provide the level of interaction that they feel

that parishioners expect from a website. Additionally, we would like to move away from the traditional yet unadventurous sites commonly associated with local government. For many people, the first port of call for information is the internet, therefore it is extremely important that the council has a site which encourages participation and inclusion of members of the public and allows them to access current information which is relevant to their needs.

More people are accessing social networking sites and using mobile devices to browse the internet, particularly younger people. We do not currently have the ability to reach this audience other than through our established youth council.

With this in mind, we have embarked upon on a project to provide a website which will allow the council to promote its commercial facilities from customer focussed 'mini sites' while maintaining an innovative and exciting browsing experience for users of the local government side of the site. The council has set aside an appropriate budget to purchase a customised content managed website.

Amongst other functions, the new site will have a forum where people can post comments and a survey area which will allow us to collate and analyse data collected. We also intend to include links to and from some social networking websites.

Community groups who do not have their own website will be offered an area of the site to post their groups' details and contact information. Links for community groups and relevant services who do have their own websites will be available too.

The commercial facilities' pages will be designed with a different style from the main council website, although they will still be managed through the same administration system. They are to be designed with an overall style which creates a feeling of quality with the general look and feel reflecting that of a private facility to appeal to users within the local catchment area and further afield.

Some areas of the site may be high maintenance depending on the level of use, i.e. the forum which will have to be monitored constantly to prevent profanities etc.

In order to increase awareness of the new site, it will be widely promoted and advertised to make the public aware and encourage them to log on to the new site. We also intend to request local media and schools to add our links to their websites.

Finally, the site visit statistics are to be analysed regularly to see where improvement is needed to attract greater numbers of visitors.



Power of Wellbeing

Hatfield Town Council, Hertfordshire

Population: 32,000

Precept: £823,600

Situated in the south of Hertfordshire, Hatfield is 20 miles to the north of London and separated from the city by the Green Belt.

Set up in 2009, the Green Lanes Allotment Association has taken over the day to day management of the council's allotments. This has enabled them to receive grants from other bodies towards a cabin for a shop and a composting toilet which greatly improves facilities for users. This year's project was to create raised plots for less able-bodied allotment holders. The power of well-being was used to grant fund £1,000 towards building materials.

The St John's Youth and Community Centre is used by local organisations and hired out privately. The single glazed, wooden framed windows needed replacing with UPVC double glazed windows and the wooden doors needed replacing. The improvements increased the energy efficiency of the building resulting in reduced heating costs, improved the security of the centre and

decreased noise levels affecting local residents. The council awarded £1,500 towards the work under the power of well-being.

The Welwyn and Hatfield Foyer is a supported housing project based in Hatfield which houses 16 to 25 year olds who have become homeless and need emotional and educational support. The Foyer sought funding to hold a Christmas dinner where a trainer would support residents in cooking their own Christmas dinner as part of life skills training and resident involvement. As all of the residents had been homeless and estranged from their families most were surviving on £50 per week and were unlikely to receive a Christmas gift or have anywhere to go for a Christmas dinner. The council awarded £250 towards the cost of food/ingredients through the power of well-being.

Oswestry Town Council, Shropshire

Population: 15,600

Precept: £355,000

Oswestry is an ancient market town located in the North of Shropshire close by the English - Welsh Border. Shrewsbury lies to the south and Wrexham to the north. Today the town still retains its vital function as a market and shopping centre serving North West Shropshire and Mid Wales. It is a locally important shopping and agricultural centre and still retains the intimacy of a rural town serving local people and home to a number of specialist and independent shops.

Oswestry town council has used the Power of Well Being to fund a number of initiatives, including the provision of up to £35,000 for an Audio logical Suite for the new Town Health Village. The Audio Suite is being formed in the former railway works in the town to avoid patient travel to other areas.

Between April 2010 and April 2011 the Audiology Service in Shropshire saw over 2,700 patients from Oswestry and the surrounding area for a mixture of hearing aid long term support, hearing assessments

and pediatric assessments. The Head of Shropshire Audiology Services confirmed that in an audit of local clinics and within the Oswestry hearing aid wearers there was an overwhelming consensus to keep service provision in the Oswestry area.

The Consultant Audio logical Scientist confirmed: “It is the belief that we should be able to take Audiology into the local setting but want to do this in high quality rooms built for purposes and having an Audio logical booth that meets Audio logical recommended standards means we should no longer have to ask patients to travel to Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals for hearing assessments or indeed for any of their long term support related to hearing aid provision.”

Town Mayor Councillor Mrs Cynthia Hawksley said “We are delighted to use this important power to provide a quality facility for our town that will be much used in our new Health Centre thus avoiding long travel journeys for patients.”

Lanchester Parish Council, Durham

Population: 4,500

Precept: £49,390

Lanchester parish council aims to provide services that enhance life in the parish, from play areas to the upkeep of the historic village green and leading the debate on the area's future.

A key project the council has been working on is the provision of an innovative multi-user health care centre. The council has played a leading role in bringing together partners to negotiate a proposal for the development of a vacant county council owned care home site in Lanchester. The proposal includes the development of a medical centre incorporating the existing GP practice and the Lanchester pharmacy, to provide a range of wellbeing clinics not currently available. The space will also be available for local community groups to use as office space.

In addition, a 20 bed unit run by the charity Mental Health Care will develop on the site, to provide a combination of physical nursing care as well as mental

health rehabilitation to the over sixties. In addition Derwentside Homes, a charitable registered social landlord, will develop 29 two bedroom sheltered apartments for the elderly.

The acquisition of the site is being finalised and the funding package to deliver the scheme is in progress. This is a unique community project bringing together a range of health care providers in an effective and efficient way. The power of well-being has allowed the council to allocate monies towards costs such as initial feasibility studies, community consultation exercise and legal fees. The group has taken legal advice about the most appropriate legal entity from which to deliver its vision and has been advised to create a Community Interest Company (CIC). The formation of this is well underway and partners hope that it will be completed by the end of August 2011.



Halewood Parish Council, Merseyside

Population: 21, 217

Precept: £317,141

Halewood is in Merseyside and is located in the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley. The district lies near Liverpool's southeastern boundary, bordered by the suburbs of Hunts Cross and Woolton.

Halewood town council determined its eligibility to use the Power of Well Being in September 2009, and re-registered their compliance following the last elections in May 2011.

The council have in place a strong criteria for grants from what has been known as the Halewood Community Chest Fund. Prior to successfully achieving the criteria for the Power of Well Being in 2009, grants were made in relation to the old section 137 of the Local Government Act, which were somewhat restrictive and excluded grants where an individual was involved.

Since first using the Act, the town council has awarded over £11,942 in grants to bodies by referencing to the principal authority's Sustainable Community Strategy, and its own Statement of Intent as to Community Engagement, whilst

still meeting the historical criteria set in its own Community Chest Fund.

The grants have benefited not only local organisations, but now have enabled small grants to individuals, such as local Halewood squad members travelling to Dallas, Texas to represent the borough in the Annual International Soccer Tournament, the Dallas Cup. One of the major success stories was the grant assistance to a local martial arts club to attend the world championships, who promptly came home to Halewood with a haul of twenty-two medals, including three world champions with a gold medal each.

As befits such an area with strong sporting activity, we have high expectations that there will be competitor representation from Halewood in the 2012 Olympics to be held in London. The Power of Well Being is available should the town council receive a request, or consider making a financial contribution for assistance to individual competitors.

Little Milton Parish Council, Oxfordshire

Population: 370

Precept: £10,500

Little Milton parish council was the first local council in Oxfordshire to be qualified to exercise the power of well-being in July 2009. The power lapsed in May of this year due to the local council elections but subject to the training of two new council members in October 2011, the council will pass a resolution at the October council meeting to exercise the power until May 2015.

Little Milton has a village school, a pub, a village hall and a church.

The council took a very keen interest in the power of well-being in 2008 when the Post Office/ Shop had to relocate from premises that were on a seven year lease. It was decided that the best option was to create a building linked to the existing village hall. An Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) was set for Little Milton shop and was registered with the FSA. There were a number of options under consideration as to which organisation

should own the building. The parish council owned the land and agreed to allow the building either as an extension to the arrangement with the Village Hall or with the IPS. The Village Hall Committee decided that it did not wish to extend its premises and sub-lease them to the IPS. The parish council were fully supportive of the community shop and post office and were prepared to give it financial support. The power of well-being was identified as the power that would allow the parish council to make a grant to the IPS. In the event the IPS received a number of grants and donations and the parish council did not need to make a grant. However it did use the power to make a payment to the owner of the original building that accommodated the post office and shop as it required to be re-instated as part of an existing property.



Crime & Safety

Watford Rural Parish Council, Hertfordshire

Population: 20,250

Precept: £210,650

The parish council covers the following wards: Carpenders Park; Oxhey Hall; Hayling; Northwick; Ashridge in the Three Rivers District Council. Despite its name, it is largely urbanised.

South Oxhey Police wrote a letter to Watford rural parish council requesting a grant for a gazebo to enable them to continue street meets with the residents. The request came about because the Police had lost the use of the Mobile Police Unit for the street meets. The request was carefully considered at a full council meeting where it was resolved to award a grant of £600 for the gazebo, with the condition that the gazebo is not to be used by Police outside the parish and that the gazebo advertised that it was sponsored by us.

Street meets play a very important role in the parish so that residents can communicate with their local police

on a regular basis and for this reason the parish council felt that it was important to continue the meets and for this therefore the grant was awarded. The £600 enabled the Police to purchase a good size weatherproof gazebo with the Police logo and the sponsorship. The gazebo, which is a portable tent, can be assembled anywhere in the community.

The parish council work very closely with Sgt. Luke Mitchell and his team who have also won awards for the excellent work that the team carry out. Last year they were awarded a grant by us to purchase a video camera which has proved very successful in their evidence collection against crime.

Sgt Mitchell noted that the gazebo is another way for local police to engage with the community, and has the additional benefits of enabling local police to be more reactive when incidents such as anti social behaviour are reported.



Harwicke Parish Council, Gloucestershire

Population: 4,692

Precept: £35,900

Hardwicke is a village south of Gloucester, Gloucestershire. Despite its close proximity to Gloucester, the village comes under Stroud District Council.

Hardwicke parish council in conjunction with PC Fraser Mackie of Gloucestershire Police, have created a Good Drivers Scheme to, amongst other traffic management measures, aims to improve driving and safety within the Parish.

The idea was generated by community members, who were concerned about the number of traffic and speeding incidents within the parish. Local police were also concerned that roads that when they were first built were adequate for the volume of traffic they were going to carry were now too narrow to deal with modern vehicles and increased levels of traffic. Local Policeman, PC Fraser Mackie explained: “There have been occasions where cyclists and pedestrians have had

to make a dash into the hedgerow in order to avoid on-coming traffic”. The pledge asks drivers to stick within designated speed limits and to driver carefully.

The parish council now hosts the Good Drivers Scheme on its website, where it lists the 50 drivers that have signed up to the following pledge:

Hardwicke Good Drivers Pledge

“I will drive within the speed limits for the safety of the residents of Hardwicke”

“I will be a careful and considerate driver.”

When drivers have signed up to the pledge, they receive a ‘good driver’ sticker which they can display in their car. In addition to the pledge, residents have been asked to stick 30MPH speed limit stickers to their recycling bins & wheelie bins. The council has been advised that the stickers have a noticeable impact on drivers, as the signs are only out once a week making them more noticeable as the scenery changes.

Hessle Town Council, Yorkshire

Population: 14,767

Precept: £139,000

Hessle town council is in Yorkshire, situated 5 miles west of Kingston upon Hull city centre. Geographically it is part of a larger urban area which consists of the city of Kingston upon Hull, the town of Hessle and a number of other villages but is not part of the city. It is on the north bank of the Humber Estuary where the Humber Bridge crosses.

Currently Hessle is the only town council in the region to fund a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) from its budget. The council has been funding the extra PCSO since 2006 at an annual cost of £28,000 which is a significant proportion of the town's annual budget. Humberside Police pay additional costs required to employ the PCSO, such as tax and shift allowances.

The town council believes that it is good value for money, providing a sense of safety and security through

an enhanced police presence within the town. The additional PCSO position is responsible for tackling anti-social behavior, monitoring and the councils CCTV, among other duties; and the additional post means more patrols.

The Police Authority is also very supportive of the initiative, which means more coverage of the area and has enhanced their relationship with the local people. In addition, the scheme is reviewed every year in consultation with the community.

One councillor has recommended the initiative to other councils, saying: "I would certainly hope that other parish and town councils will adopt a similar scheme and put some money in the budgets. It's proved to be very successful with community policing and getting to know the local people, issues and helping solve them."



Innovative Practice

Hethersett Parish Council, Norfolk

Population: 5,441

Precept: £82,750

The parish of Hethersett is a large one, covering 2,695 acres; it was the main settlement in the ancient Hundred of Humbleyard; it lies in the Deanery of Humbleyard and in the South Norfolk District. Hethersett stretches three miles from east to west along the line of the B1172 (the old Norwich to London road) and two miles from northwest to southeast.

Hethersett lies so close to Norwich that many think of it as just another of its suburbs. It is, however, a separate community with its own vitality and quite a marked community spirit.

The parish council has set up an Olympic Committee which oversaw the organisation of a special weekend of culture, fun and sport in July 2010 and again this July. The Village organised a Sport in the Park event for families to try over 20 Olympic sports and a two mile fun run was held, attended by former marathon runner

Paul Evans. Over 1,500 people attended the Sport in the Park event, participating in a range of sports including hockey, volley ball, martial arts and rowing.

The village also hosted a swimming event at the local junior school in which participants swam 2,012 lengths.

The council hopes that the success of Hethersett's Olympic weekend will convince organisers of the London 2012 Olympic Torch relay to come through the village on its way from Peterborough to Norwich on July 4 next year. The Chairman of the parish council's Olympic Committee said the village had demonstrated its enthusiasm, "We know the torch is coming from Peterborough to Norwich and we would really like to get on the route. We have proved today that we can organise events and there is a willingness in the village." he said.

Horndean Parish Council, Hampshire

Population: 12,600

Precept: £352,000

Horndean is located in East Hampshire and the parish consists of the villages of Horndean, Blendworth, Catherington and Lovedean. It is one of the largest parishes in the East Hampshire District with a population of approximately 12,6000 residents.

The council owns and maintains over 150 acres of public open space including nature reserves and recreational areas, but with a staff of only six Countryside Team members it has been difficult to make a lasting impression of any of the sites.

Since 2009 Horndean parish council has developed a seasonal work scheme for young people. The scheme was conceived by the Clerk to the council, who suggested a scheme utilising developers funds to employ young people over the summer to improve parish council sites and receive training, employment and gain skills they would otherwise not have had the

opportunity to experience. The Clerk applied to the district council to use developer's contributions, among other small funding grants, to pay for the employment of the young people, safety equipment, uniforms and tools.

Mrs Predeth said "I saw this as an opportunity for the parish council to engage more effectively with young people. In addition, this is a more cost effective way of maintaining our sites than using contractors and it empowered young people to learn new skills and add to their resumes for their future career. The projects run throughout the school summer holiday periods and a database of young people willing to work is kept and a rota system is worked so that they all get 2 or 3 days a week work – still giving them time to enjoy their free time. "

The young people the council employ are aged 15-18, come from a wide-range of backgrounds and all live in the local area.

Last summer's project, which was organised and supervised by the parish councils' Countryside Team, saw young people working at Merchistoun Hall in Horndean.

Merchistoun Hall, although not owned by the parish council, is a high profile site in the local area, with a very large pond that had become overgrown. The project involved clearing the pond and creating footpaths in the grounds of the Hall.

The project proved to be a great success and the work has rejuvenated the spirit of the hall and the grounds.

Brendan Charles, Association Manager for Horndean Community Association was extremely supportive of the initiative:

“The Seasonal Workers programme is a real, tangible outcome and success story for Horndean that has worked on many levels. It is integral in developing a much respected and needed local community facility (Merchistoun Hall). We continue to admire not only the commitment and hard manual work that the young people employed to date, but also by the scale and sheer quality of craftsmanship from them all”

The project is a great example of community organisations working together for the local people.

This year the parish council have carried out more work on the Merchistoun Hall site, planting trees and wildflower seed, as well as several other projects around the Parish This summer the young workers have been trained in boardwalk construction and given an introduction to environmental conservation, among other things, to help with the conservation of one of the parish council's nature reserves, Dell Piece West. They have also built new stock proof fencing and created new footpaths on another parish council nature reserve, Parsonage Field.

Littleport Parish Council, Cams

Population: 7,521

Precept: £117,348

Littleport is approximately 5 miles north of Ely and 6 miles south-east of Welney. It lies on the Bedford Level South section of the River Great Ouse, close to Burnt Fen and Mare Fen. Littleport parish council delivers a range of services to residents, including the provision of bus shelters and cemeteries.

Littleport parish council has reached an agreement with Cambridgeshire county council to buy an old toilet building and a piece of surrounding land in the town. The parish council will pay the market value of £4,000 for the toilet block property, which has been boarded up since the 1990s. It is proposed that the toilet block be used to store grit and gritting equipment for the winter gritting programme.

Parish and county councillor Fred Brown explained that “...all of us that know Littleport are aware of the

old toilets in the town which have stood unused for too long. This is why we are very pleased to have found a solution with the county council to buy assets which will be of great benefit to the town. The parish council will be helping with winter gritting this year, so we need to store bags of grit in a dry and convenient place. The toilet block is just the job.”

County councillor Nick Clarke was also very supportive of the initiative, saying: “...by working with and listening to the needs of the local community we are bringing back into use a building which can be of real benefit to the residents.”

The parish council is set to use the building as the centre of their operations during the winter to ensure that paths in Littleport will be gritted.

Sudbury Town Council, Suffolk

Population: 15,000

Precept: £580,000

Sudbury is a small, ancient market town in the county of Suffolk, England, on the River Stour.

Last year Babergh district council announced its intention to close the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Sudbury due to budget cuts. The TIC shares the same building as the council offices and councillors felt it was important to maintain this essential service in the town. The town council took over the management of the TIC in April this year, thereby keeping the service and safeguarding three jobs. The TIC now promotes and sells tickets for local events, sells local produce and crafts and offers guided walks of the town. By taking over the management, the town council can now offer a much more localised service which is geared to the needs of the town and its visitors.

At the same time, the HMRC tax office announced its decision to vacate its premises in the town, meaning anyone

with tax queries would have to travel at least 15 miles to either Colchester or Ipswich. The town council offered the use of an office in the town hall and tax office staff are now able to hold an open surgery every Wednesday for tax advice.

Another service that faced closure in the town last year was the Registration Office. Plans were announced to close the Registration Office in the town again meaning that residents would need to travel miles to either Colchester or Ipswich for registration services – wedding, birth or death. The Assembly Room upstairs in the town hall was used occasionally for public bookings and for full council meetings. Councillors agreed to refurbish the Assembly Room and hallway, creating three extra offices, a storage room and the main room, which is now used for wedding ceremonies. The Registration officials now use the upstairs of the town hall, but it remains available for monthly council meetings and civic ceremonies. The offices in the town hall are also used by the Probation Service and Housing Advice.



Participatory budgeting

Crowborough Town Council, East Sussex

Population: 25,000

Precept: £1,050,650

Crowborough is a town in the Wealden district of East Sussex.

Young people in Crowborough can apply for a share of £9,000 and their peers will decide how it is spent. The town council has allocated £6,500 of its precept to helping community groups and an additional £2,500 has been contributed by the Wealden Youth Partnerships fund.

The Crowborough youth council (made up of around 15 young people aged between 11 and 19) has been tasked with deciding who gets what, with individual amounts varying from £200 to £1,200. The money may benefit a school, community association, sports teams or a youth club, among other groups. The council explained that the idea was to engage young people in the community by giving them responsibility over how a particular budget is spent and ensuring that the money is used effectively, helping young people to development

financial management skills and become involved in community decision making.

The applications will be processed by YouthBank East Sussex, a county council initiative designed to make sure the process is fair and consistent. Each bid will need to be supported by a recognised body such as a club, council or school and can be made up until June 24 when a shortlist of applicants will be asked to present their case. Applications for a second round were being received until August 22 this year.

Mayor Kay Moss from Crowborough town council said: “This isn’t just about handing out grants for good causes – it’s about making sure that young people are meaningfully involved in our community by giving them responsibility over how a particular budget is spent. Not only will they reap the benefits of the grant but they will learn new skills as well as ensuring that this money will be used much more effectively.”

Dulverton Town Council, Somerset

Population: 4,500

Precept: £42,810

Dulverton is a parish in the heart of West Somerset, near the border with Devon. Participatory budgeting (PB) began with a parish plan and a Total Place calculation showing nine authorities spend £10 million each year on public services.

Dulverton town council worked hard to ensure that the nine public authorities were involved in the PB process, which took considerable negotiation of 18 months. Eventually, four authorities agreed to give a total of £15,000 and four others provided support in kind for local residents to agree how these budgets were to be spent. The aim of the PB exercise was to help create a more effective use of resources available to the town, rather than excess money.

The event, 'Sensible Spending' 60 people prioritised and voted on 18 funding bids. A group voting system was employed which led to the amalgamation of some bids, and gifts to less popular applications.

The council believes that community cohesion was enhanced by a system which avoided 'losers'. Projects funded include road salting in winter, a fortnightly cinema and the refurbishment of local squash courts. At further public events, 430 residents voted to increase their precept by 50 percent to mitigate other authorities cuts, formed four action groups of 70 volunteers and allocated further funding to play equipment, projects aimed at young people and underground cables.

The council believes that this process has also increased the budget literacy of its residents, as well as providing them with the opportunity to engage proactively with community business.

Dulverton town council was chosen to participate in the 'Your Local Budget' programme, sponsored by The Big Society Network and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), with support from the Participatory Budgeting Unit. .

Hampton Bishop Parish Council, Norfolk

Population: 500

Precept: £6,500

Hampton Bishop is a village and civil parish south-east of Hereford, in Herefordshire. The village itself is on a wedge between the River Wye and the River Lugg, and is also not far from where the River Frome meets the Lugg.

The parish council used PB to prioritise between parish precept funded proposals, such as improving local footpaths; the provision of litter bins around the parish and extending the Parish Lengthsman scheme. Hampton-Bishop allocated £500 of its £6,500 precept to the PB process, to enable local people to decide how the money would be spent.

The proposals were announced at parish meetings and were circulated via newsletter (with attached suggestion slips), to ensure that the elderly and housebound could also participate in the process. The Chairman of the council promised to honour the community's decision, as long as it was "...legal and

possible." A one vote per household all inclusive process was used to determine how the money was spent.

The council was very pleased with the results of participatory budgeting. It believes that the process has strengthened the local community by allowing funding to be focused directly on the wishes of residents. Indeed, the council is convinced that using PB has made a positive impact on its role as a group of community leaders and has encouraged a positive attitude toward budgeting and public spending at a time when the country is experiencing economic downturn.

The 134 parish councils in Herefordshire were watching with interest the outcome of the activity in Hampton-Bishop and 10 have already adopted the PB technique. This tiny council has led the way on the PB process, and has even persuaded the unitary authority to consider working through parish councils to gain local views on their draft budget!



Have you been inspired by these good practice case studies?

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In the latest issue of *LCR*, we look at the importance of transport, participatory budgeting including further case studies, cross-local government tier working for local councils; highlight how one town council has taken the bull by the horns by being a frontrunner in neighbourhood planning; how local councils can go about managing and maintaining open spaces. Plus, NALC's chairman, Cllr Michael Chater, explains why it is an important time for localism and very local

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Every week, *LCR*'s website, *LCR Online* (www.lcronline.org.uk) brings you important news, features and events on the major issues affecting local communities via parish, town and community councils. We use good practice here to illustrate these points. To encourage debate and feedback on all things to do with local government, the website also features videos with MPs, blogs and twitter pages.

LCR and *LCR Online* act as the perfect compliment to this *Localism in Practice* guide. Every councillor, MP, officer and researcher interested in very local councils should be getting their own copy. For more information on subscribing to *LCR*, email: lcr@nalc.gov.uk

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