

Waggott, Margaret

From: Dianne Rickaby <dianne@billinghamtowncouncil.co.uk>
Sent: 30 October 2015 16:39
To: Bond, David; Waggott, Margaret
Cc: Colin Pollard; Gina McCall; Atkinson, Helen (Councillor); O'Donnell, Jean; michelle bendelow; Stoker, Mick; Olive Milner; Paul Smith; Peter Clark; Ray McCall; swdparry@hotmail.co.uk
Subject: Billingham Town Council's Governance Review Submission - Private & confidential
Attachments: Governance review submission October 2015 - BTC final submission.pdf

Dear David /Margaret

Please find attached Billingham Town Council's submission for the Governance Review. I will be delivering a hard copy to the council offices today (30th October) ahead of the deadline of 31st October 2015.

If you have any questions regarding the report please feel free to give me a call.

Kind regards,

Dianne

Dianne Rickaby
Executive Officer/ Responsible Finance Officer
to Billingham Town Council
01642 551171
07501460006

We have moved!. Billingham Town Council is now located in Billingham Library & Customer Service Centre, Billingham Town Centre, Billingham, Cleveland, TS23 2LN.



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BILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Governance Review

On Behalf of Billingham Town Council

10/29/2015

Billingham Town Council Mission Statement

“To serve the people of Billingham enhancing services and putting the pride back into our community”



Councillors and 11 Borough Councillors and is divided into 5 wards; North, Central, East, West and South.

The town supports a vast industrial area of which play key roles in supporting community initiatives and bringing employment and economic growth to the area.

About Billingham Town Council (BTC)

Councillors

Our councillors are all elected members (recently in 2015) but the majority have been part of the council since inception (2007). Our members work voluntarily with no remuneration or expenses paid.

Staff

There is currently a team of 6 staff and 1 volunteer. (1 vacancy)

Our Executive Officer is Qualified in Certificate in Local Council Administration and is currently on year two of a five year degree course in Community Governance run through Society of Local Council Clerks and Cheltenham & Gloucester University. Our EO brings in a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise in local council management and administration. Her visions around developing community engagement and cohesion is inspiring and her ability to attract external funding for community projects is proof that we have a strong staff leadership supported by a committed and dedicated team.

The extended team includes;

Office administration - covered by 1 full time member of staff (37 hours)

Events/PR/Youth Council Coordinator – post currently vacant (37 hours)

Community Development Coordinator (based in John Whitehead Park) – 20 hours per week

Facilities Coordinator (based in John Whitehead Park) – 18 hours per week

Cafe Assistants (cafe in the park) – 2 paid staff 30 hours & 20 hours and 1 volunteer

Precept - financial accountability

Budgets of comparable councils

There are currently 31 town councils in England representing populations of between 30,000 and 40,000. Billingham falls almost exactly in the centre with just over 35,000 In the current financial year the average precept of those 31 comes in at rather more than £750,000. Compared with Billingham's £215,000, which includes a government grant of around £24,000. Billingham's charge to Band D properties amounts to £22 per annum, compared with an average of the other 31 of just under £69.

These other councils are spread right around the country, and a striking comparison in the North East is the town of Blyth. Here is a council which started out 2 years later than Billingham with an initial precept of only £40,000. It now has a precept of over £1,000,000

accountability, public bodies and those responsible for their management are required to make proper arrangements for the governance of their affairs and the stewardship of the resources in their care. They are required to report on these arrangements in their published Annual Governance Statement. As a safeguard to the proper discharge of this accountability, external auditors in the public sector give an independent opinion on public bodies' financial statements. They may also review, and report on, aspects of public bodies' arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of their financial affairs, and those to manage their performance and use of resources.

Billingham Town Council is responsible to its residents and Central Government for the ways it conducts its financial affairs. BTC complies with all Government legislation around financial risk management and utilising public money effectively.

BTC has a comprehensive risk management strategy incorporating operational financial procedures within its Financial Regulations. Regular internal controls are in place with internal audits carried out currently on annual basis by an independent auditor.

There is a Finance Policy & Resources Committee who review all financial aspects, processes and legislation on a monthly basis. At this meeting a full Income & expenditure , balance sheets, invoices for payment and salaries are presented by the RFO (Responsible Financial Officer) as laid out in Local Government Act 1972 Section 151 (legislation.gov.uk, n.d.) as a statutory appointment. All documents are recommended to full council if committee are satisfied and the Chairman then signs the accounts.

Once the accounts are signed and approved they are then posted onto the council's website for public inspection. (Schedule of accounts)

Cheques

As per councils Financial Regulations all cheques are signed by two members of the Finance Committee and this includes the Chairman of the committee, countersigned by the RFO.

Salaries

All staff salaries are paid via a Bacs payment procedure carried out by the appointed RFO (Executive Officer). All salary payments are approved by full council and amounts as stated in employee's contract of employment. The Chairman of the council signs the salary payments each month.

Annual Audit & public inspection of accounts

As governed through The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 (legislation.gov.uk, n.d.), BTC's annual return is produced by the RFO and is presented to the council along with supporting documents and reports. Once the annual return is approved it is open for inspection to the public before submitting to the approved auditors (BDP LLP). Information for residents to inspect the accounts is displayed in all public places and on council notice boards and website.

- JWP youth ambassador group (set up with BTC guidance).

This list is an indicator of who the council support and engage with but have also supported many other groups financially through donation/sponsorship. The list is not exhaustive.

The council as a body represents the town as a whole when making decisions and fully complies with all legal powers/legislation, adhering to code of conduct, standing orders, employment law (as employers), health & safety, financial regulations, data protection. The council can support this by implementing and facilitating a comprehensive council policy strategy, all of which are posted on the council's website for residents to view.

Councillors

Their functions consist of;

- Representing the interests of the town, delivering services to meet local needs.
- Encouraging community participation in the democratic process

Working as a team whilst representing the council, adhering to government law that no one councillor can make decisions on behalf of the council, must be majority decision.

Ensuring that as an individual and representing the town that code of conduct is followed at all times.

Be an effective employer respecting the staff team at all times and giving guidance and support when needed.

Respect data protection and confidentiality.

Sustainability accountability and transparency

Sustainability

BTC has proven over the past 8 years that it can sustain growth through having a robust infrastructure in place. Having a cohesive and collaborative council, dedicated and experienced staff and an ever growing vision to give residents a happier and safer town to live in. The council has nurtured and developed fundamental partnerships not only with the community sector but with businesses and investors.

Through the council services/projects and events there has been over £ 100,000 of external funding brought in as investment by BTC for community projects, and very recently an additional £ 35,000 has been awarded to develop new projects in 2016, with more to come!.

BTC has a passion for supporting the youth of Billingham

In 2013 our Youth Council was formed which presently has 8 very dedicated and enthusiastic youngsters, who have also been successful in attracting £ 27,600 from Heritage lottery (young roots) to deliver a restoration project at one of Billingham's former

Governance Review

The Governance review of Billingham Town Council has been called as a result of a petition from 7.5% of the electorate to abolish the town council. Although the council reaches out to residents there are the minority we feel that we may not be able to reach. Billingham hasn't really had its own voice since 1967 when the Urban District Council disbanded. But 40 years later they regained their voice through hard work and determination and a vote to form the Town Council was successful.

We appreciate that not everyone will like various facets of how council makes its decisions as it may not always suit individual preferences; however we encourage residents who feel very strongly on how it should operate, to join us, either as an elected councillor, member of staff or indeed a volunteer.

“Whether the change would reflect the identities and interests of the community in the area”

Yes we believe it would have a fundamental affect on changing the town's identities and interests for the following reasons;

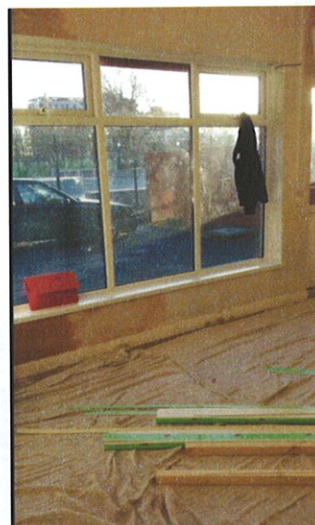
- There will be no democratic voice through an elected body with sustainability and who can work on behalf of the community- taking action when required.
- Unbiased personal views the council represent the community as a whole body not individuals therefore omitting any personal agendas and gain.
- Reduction of grass roots interaction.
- Less support for residents from a body with good governance, transparency and accountability. – *BTC has this structure in place*
- First port of call- who would be available to do this? Who would have the resource to signpost to principal authority and other service providers? *BTC support many residents on a daily basis with an array of diverse queries and if staff/councillors of BTC are unable to resolve they will then direct residents to someone who may be able to do so.*
- Who would raise the precept? BTC are accountable to residents and have always shown best value practices whilst utilising public money.
- External funding – BTC has a proven track record of attracting inward investment into the town for community projects. We do not solely rely on precept demand the council endeavour to compliment this by working on funding applications to hopefully one day match fund the precept.
- Statutory consultee – BTC is the statutory body to be consulted with on matters relating to Billingham.

In appendix 1 you will see a list of the council's achievements since inception but the most fundamental community engagement and participation has been over the past 3 years. Of course the early years saw the Council build up its structure to enable the next phase to be implemented with success. We did deliver our first ever community event in 2008 – Traditional Christmas event which is part of who we are now.

In 2013 BTC was approached by SBC to form a partnership in service delivery and to take a more managerial role on their behalf within John Whitehead Park. This came after BTC successfully ran a 6 week summer project based/delivered from the café at JWP in 2012; in addition to the well establish working partnership between the two authorities.

BTC had a successful funding bid to Landscape (Bradbury Park) funding for the renovations to the cafe in the park and to the disused building behind the cafe into a community hub. £30,000 external funding was invested along with officer time and support by BTC.

Before renovations



Health & Well being – promoting better lifestyles through community participation and cohesive approaches through services.

BTC have worked on tackling worklessness in Billingham and employed an outreach officer through the Governments Community Fund back in 2009/10. This project identified the level of support that many of our residents needed, particularly in the more deprived areas of the town; Billingham Central and Billingham East both of which rank within the top 600 for health deprivation in the UK. Being unemployed and on a low income is a catalyst to many of the social/health problems that we can face in our lives.

Billingham Town Council from inception has identified the need to help tackle Health & wellbeing challenges within our community working with partner groups in various capacities and specified projects.

In 2014 working in partnership with ward councillor Ann McCoy (Central ward) through submitting a proposal to SBC we were awarded £ 5,000 to help promote health & wellbeing through our services in John Whitehead Park.

Some of the measurables identified within this programme is to reduce health issues such as obesity, self harming, poverty, alcoholism and engaging with young women to participate in sport.

Within our services and projects in John Whitehead Park working with partner groups such as SBC Youth services, CFYA, Youth for Christ, New Life Resource Centre and recently introducing our American gap year students we are now delivering on all of these areas. The cafe provides low cost healthy meals for low income families, and promotes through cookery classes social and life skills. There is a comprehensive sporting strategy and happy to say that our aim to encourage young women into sport is now being delivered. This is a breakthrough in community engagement and participation in our town.

Phase three is to increase community ownership/engagement and we plan to do this by developing the vacant bungalow in JWP into another community space by working with a community group called "Together" who petitioned to Stockton Borough Council for space to create a Community garden. BTC have been successful in securing funding for this project and working closely with the representatives of the "Together" group to progress with the garden project. It is envisaged that this will commence in Spring 2016.

The above gives you a brief overview of the services in JWP. The council also delivers 4 major events each year; Easter event (picture on first page), Summer event, Halloween event and Traditional Christmas event (appendix 2) (this is delivered in Billingham Town Centre working with St Modwen's owners). This promotes community engagement, social inclusion and enhances partnership working

The size, population and boundaries of the Town Council"

Billingham is ranked in the top 30 largest out of 10,000 Town & Parish councils in UK. As a council we are recognised as part of the larger council association. The comparable

Bibliography

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legislation.gov.uk, n.d. *Local Government Act 1972*. [Online]

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Nalc, 2014. *Governance & Accountability for local councils*. [Online]

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[Accessed 28 October 2015].

- **Allotments:** working closely with residents and Stockton Borough Council and the allotment association in Billingham to identify viable land that will cater for the needs of 100 potential allotment holders
- **Billingham Train Station:** continue to lobby for improved accessibility to the station
- **Looking to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Billingham:** preparations have commenced to develop a neighbourhood plan and we are looking to develop a Stakeholder Group which will be made up of all groups working collectively within Billingham who carry out fantastic work for our community
- **Achieved Quality Town Council Status** (only second Council in Cleveland to achieve this status)
- Sponsors of Billingham International Folklore Festival & Billingham Carnival and Garden Show
- Assisting Billingham Foodbank with the setting up of the new site in Billingham Town Centre and assisting with funding applications (which have been successful targeting industry in Billingham)
- Assisting St Cuthbert's Church with renovations to the Church Hall looking at potential funding streams and project managing on their behalf. – **Achieved this in 2014**
- Sustainability of cafe opening in spring 2014 in line with the skate park development.
- **Entered into a management agreement with Stockton Borough Council in assisting managing services in John Whitehead Park** such as; new skate park facilities, Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), outdoor exercise equipment and tennis courts.
- Successful in obtaining funding to renovate the rooms adjacent to the cafe to form a youth hub to accompany the multi-wheeled sports area (£ 27,000)
- Working in partnership with Stockton Borough Council we recently installed a suite of outdoor exercise equipment in John Whitehead Park. We run a series of free training sessions and events that will help local residents to learn how to get the most out of this equipment (Billingham Town Council applied for the funding and were awarded £ 16,000 from PCT and £ 500 from Grants 4 Health)
- Assisting residents with the Billingham Time Capsule project
- Representation at Northern Area Partnership Board, Parish Liaison Forum, Safer Billingham Partnership, Billingham Environmental Link Programme, Billingham Legacy Foundation, A19 Noise Action Group, Northern Area Transport Strategy Group and attendance at resident association meetings
- Working with Stockton Borough Council we will be moving into the new service centre in Billingham Town Centre in 2014. This will enable us to be more visible and more available for public to access our office.
- Day to day assistance to residents with queries – sign posting to appropriate services.
- Assisting residents with transport needs and issues (Isolated areas such as Port Clarence and Cowpen Bewley)
- Providing the Management for John Whitehead Park (Tennis Courts, Skate park, Cafe, Youth Hub, Outdoor Exercise Equipment)
- Open the cafe, skate park and Youth Hub in John Whitehead Park
- Develop management of services for the Cafe and Youth Hub
- **Events:** Easter, Summer Halloween and Traditional Christmas Event
- **Sporting Strategy:** bringing sports together in Billingham
- Looking to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Billingham
- Tree planting scheme in Billingham
- Development of new website
- Support the Youth Council to develop their Beautiful Billingham Campaign
- **Events:** Easter, Summer, Halloween, Traditional Christmas event and Carol Service.

What's to come in 2014/15 – lots more to come including a community garden!

The list above is not exhaustive of what the council has delivered and achieved over the past 8 years it give you an outline of how we aim and have succeeded in being a community focused council.

2014/15 has seen the development of the projects in John Whitehead Park expand in to a very successful cohesive service encapsulating the essence of community spirit and participation.

We are excited about 2016 as we have attracted external funding for the next phase of our developments, and have built up further partnerships for linked up working and delivery.

BILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Summary of Precept	2014/15
	£
Management & Support costs	89,131
Running costs	22,900
Recreation & Leisure (events)	10,000
Environmental Projects	20,500
Community Projects (incl. John Whitehead Park)	29,431
Grants	3,000
Election Costs	0
Other	8,760
Total Cost	183,722
Less : Local Council Tax Support Grant	-23,509
Precept	160,213

For further information please contact Billingham Town Council on 01642 551171

Trainer, Judith

From: Kevin Pitt <kevin@belp-enterprise.co.uk>
Sent: 28 October 2015 12:28
To: Bond, David
Cc: Smith, Kelly; Featherstone, Laurayne; Trainer, Judith
Subject: Community Governance Review NLF response
Attachments: Feedback for the Community Governance Review.pdf; NHW response.docx

As the Chair of the Northern Locality Forum please see below and attached the views of the Forum.

Representatives from the Northern Locality Forum who are not Public Sector representatives or are delivering contracts for the public sector were tasked to consult with their representative groups on the Community Governance Review. Feedback had to be agreed by their nominated group in advance and put in writing (see attached). This was then presented at a special meeting on the 22nd October 2015.

There were mixed responses from the eight eligible representatives at the meeting:

- 2 groups noted to keep the Town Council;
- 1 noted to abolish the Town Council;
- 4 noted that they were neutral on the issue; and
- 1 representative had not had consult with their nominated group

Following the meeting another neutral response from a representative group was also submitted electronically.

Please accept this statement and the attached feedback as the view of the Northern Locality Forum.

Kevin Pitt



New Life Family Centre

A SureStart Children's Centre



Low Grange Avenue, Billingham, TS23 3EQ
Tel: Admin 01642 370880, Day Care Nursery 01642 647244, After School Care 01642 647009
e-mail: nlfamilycentre@btconnect.com
www.nlc-teesside.com
"A project of New Life Church, Teesside"

20th October 2015

Dear Chair

I am the manager of New Life Day Care and the above centre has been working in partnership with BTC for several years on various projects that bring benefit to the local community, our partnership has enabled us to give quality service to our town.

We are currently working with them on a project both here at New Life and at John Whitehead Park, we have four young people from America who have raised their own support/ sponsorship to stay here for a year. The young people are working in the park promoting sports and interacting with teenagers who use the park facilities, we have also had groups of American's here at different time over the last 2 years doing camp of champions in the park that has reached both primary and senior age groups. This year a 300 strong choir from America also performed a concert in the park.

Our working relationship with BTC has highlighted to us that BTC have the best interests of our local community at the fore, and therefore we would have no hesitancy in giving them our full support to remain in office to do the job that they are doing so well in the interests of the people of Billingham.

Yours Faithfully

Michele Smith



New Life Church, Teesside is an incorporated company limited by guarantee and registered in England and a registered charity.
Registered Charity Number 1147241 – Registered Company Number 07920190
Registered Office at: Low Grange Avenue, Billingham, TS23 3DP
In Fellowship with Assemblies of God in Great Britain

Billingham Voice

A virtual meeting of the Billingham Voice was held. A total of twelve representatives of the Billingham Voice replied.

The replies were as follows:

2 to keep the Town Council
10 to abolish the Town Council

Jim Scollen

Billingham Town Council

I carried out a limited Face to Face simple survey of 18 businesses situated in Mill Lane, Station Road and the town centre. I selected small to medium businesses where I was most likely to speak to a manager or owner. I explained that I was carrying out a survey regarding the future of the Town Council following a petition presented to Stockton Borough Council to abolish it. I made it clear that I was not seeking views as residents but specifically as business owners/managers. I asked 3 simple questions:

Do you know we have a Town Council?

15 said yes and 3 said no. In percentage terms 83% said yes 17% said no.

Of those who answered yes 6 said they only became aware of the existence of the town council following the recent controversy.

Has having a Town Council had any effect on your business?

18 said no. In percentage terms 100% said no effect

What is your opinion of the future of the Town Council? Retain / abolish / no opinion?

3 said retain it. 8 said abolish it. 7 said they had no opinion on this.

In percentage terms 17% said retain. 44% said abolish it. 39% had no opinion.

I realise that this is just a small sample but given time restraints ^{it} ~~it~~ was the best that I could do,

Gil Smith



Billingham Environmental Link Programme

Thursday 22nd October 2015

**Ref - Stockton Borough Council Request to The Northern Locality Forum
Member Organisations on their view of Billingham Town Council (BTC)**

The Billingham Environmental Link Programme Ltd (BELP) is a not for profit Limited by Guarantee organisation that works for the benefit of people in the area.

It has a Board of Governance that is made up of a number of representatives from the area including the Directors of the BELP.

An elected member of BTC has a seat on the Governance Board who regularly attends meetings and participates in the BELP Governance process.

Apart from the Governance Board representation there has been no partnership involvement / links or engagement with BTC over the past three years.

The BELP are neutral with regards to the question of should BTC remain in existence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Pitt", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kevin Pitt
Strategic Manager
BELP

In response to the purpose of this meeting and on behalf of Neighbourhood Watch in Billingham and Wolviston we would advise that NHW aims are to promote good citizenship and greater public participation in the reduction of crime so that effective liaison between the police and the public can be maintained, helping to publicise the efficiency of the police in the Stockton on Tees District. NHW Associations are non political and non-sectarian. We trust that this brief is sufficient for you requirements. Yours faithfully, F.Gook, Chair of Billingham & Wolviston area NHW Association.

STAKEHOLDER OPINION ON BILLINGHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Stockton Borough Council (SBC) is currently undertaking a Governance Review of Billingham Town Council (BTC) and stakeholders have been asked for an opinion. As one of the local SBC Councillor for Billingham West Ward I support the continued existence of BTC and would be disappointed to see it wound up.

BTC is a recently created Parish Council and has taken a slightly longer period of time, than I might like, to fully understand its role, its operation and how it conducts its business. It has been dogged from the beginning by a small number of very vocal detractors who have expertly used social media to publish a constant stream of biased opinion, conjecture and personal attacks on BTC Members and staff. In particular I have found the many personal attacks on the Town Clerk on social media to be distasteful and unwarranted.

BTC has made a number of well-publicised mistakes in its very early years, but following guidance these have now been eliminated. This does not mean that BTC does not, like every other public body, have its faults and I believe that with further guidance from SBC it could become better at serving the people of Billingham.

BTC has done an excellent job in the John Whitehead Park, making it a central focus for the people of Billingham, introducing the café and other facilities. The production of themed days throughout the year has also been very successful. The work of the Youth Council is to be specially commended in gaining funding to clean up an eyesore and dumping ground at Harrington's Pond.

Cllr Chris Clough
Billingham West

Waggott, Margaret

From: Atkinson, Helen (Councillor)
Sent: 31 October 2015 15:25
To: Waggott, Margaret
Subject: Governance review

As you know I am an elected councillor for SBC and BTC. I have been on Billingham town council from the start in 2007.

In that time I believe that we have made a difference to Billingham for the residents and Billingham itself. Such a lot would be wasted if the town council was abolished

Regards

Councillor Helen Atkinson
BTC and SBC West Ward
m: 07826 903135
Helen.atkinson2@stockton.gov.uk

Waggott, Margaret

From: KEVIN BOWLER <kevin.bowler2@btinternet.com>
Sent: 04 October 2015 20:35
To: Waggott, Margaret
Subject: Re: Community Governance Review - Billingham Town Council
Attachments: 1 Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council Representation from the Association of Billingham residents.docx; 2 Timing Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council Representation from the Association of Billingham residents.docx

Dear Mrs Waggott,

Please find attached 2 documents relating to the BTC Governance review. The first relates to the Governance review itself and the second relates to the proposed timing of the results of the Governance review by SBC.

Regards,
Kevin Bowler.

On Thursday, 24 September 2015, 15:35, "Waggott, Margaret" <Margaret.Waggott@stockton.gov.uk> wrote:

Dear Mr Bowler

Please find attached letter in respect to the above.

Kind regards

Susan Clouston

PA to Director of Law and Democracy and to
Head of Democratic Services, Trading Standards & Licensing

Direct Line: **01642 527061**

Email: susan.clouston@stockton.gov.uk

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Any opinions or statements expressed in this e mail are those of the individual and not necessarily those of Stockton-on-Tees Council/Tees Active Limited.

Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council Representation from the Association of Billingham residents

The Association of Billingham Residents makes the following representation in respect of the Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council

Response to Item 16 - Community Governance Review of the Stockton Council Cabinet Meeting Thursday, 10th September, 2015 Section 6: *"Where a review is considering abolishing a parish, the review would need to consider what arrangements would be in place to engage with the communities in those areas once the parish was abolished."*

1. The actual level of engagement of Billingham Town council (BTC) with communities in the parish currently amounts to little for various reasons that follow. Should BTC be abolished little action if any would therefore be required on the part of Stockton Council to maintain the minimal level of current community engagement.
2. We draw your attention to the fact that both Norton and Stockton are unparished. We are not aware of any perceived issues of community engagement in those localities that are attributable to the lack of a town or parish councils.
3. The services provided by a parish council may to some extent be regarded as forms of community engagement. BTC do not stipulate what services they specifically provide other than by inference on their document entitled "Achievements since inception in May 2007"
4. If the document above is examined, many of the listed items can be regarded as activities that the majority of Town/Parish Councils would simply need to undertake by default as part of their normal duties.
5. Numerous items on the "Achievements since inception in May 2007" list amount to ambiguous interactions with third parties with no meaningful benefit or outcome quoted.
6. The "Achievements" also include requests to third parties to provide items or services where no attempt was made to determine if these were wanted by the parish residents.
7. Most of the initiatives on the "Achievements" list are also those where no evidence of being wanted by residents or measures of success has been provided.
8. Since BTC provide no actual direct services themselves to Billingham residents, the current engagement with the community effectively amounts to:
 - Paying external organizations to host activities in the John Whitehead park "hub".
 - Operating a loss making café in John Whitehead park that is little used by residents
 - Distributing limited and often out of date information on a website, facebook page twitter and occasional newsletters.
9. The activities that take place in the hub building are available in youth clubs, community centres, nurseries, further education complexes, Surestart centres etc throughout other locations in Billingham.
10. Evidence to support the fact that the Town Council do not engage with the Community to any significant extent was provided by an article broadcast by BBC Tees Radio in and June 2015 and later in September 2015.

20 In 2015 there were no contested elections for the town council at all, and BTC had to co opt a Councillor for Billingham North ward, as only two candidates nominated themselves.

Finally *"In addition Council will need to be mindful that abolition may attract challenge by way of a judicial review"*.

21. The only Judicial review we are aware of on a Community Governance Review was initiated by Offerton Park Parish Council over their abolition order from Stockport MBC.

22. Although the order to abolish Offerton Park Parish Council was waived by the High Court via a judicial review, Stockport MBC went to the Court of Appeal (C1/2011/2875) and had the High Court judicial review overturned. Offerton Park Parish Council was abolished.

Other Issues regarding Billingham Town Council that justify consideration

Some of the precept has been spent on items that are wholly inappropriate such as flowers for the clerk, Christmas meals for the staff and members and presents for the members. When ABR brought this to the attention of the public, they were accused of telling lies and making scurrilous remarks by BTC. However, the clerk eventually admitted to the money being spent as indicated in the Northern Echo and on BBC Tees.

Billingham Town Council members have deliberately appeared in public places and attempted to disrupt and prevent people signing the petition calling for this governance review.

Financial scrutiny and control by BTC members is weak and ineffective. They have regularly approved the purchase of equipment and services that are far too expensive and over specified for the purpose required. Purchasing requests are simply approved. There is no evidence that the Clerk is asked to justify or make a case for purchase of equipment or services.

The Town Council website is poorly designed and poorly maintained. It reflects badly on the professionalism and competence of the Clerk, and on the members for either being unaware of, or allowing the website to be in such a bad state.

The Town Council continue to display the Quality status logo on their website and stationery, but NALC (National Association of Local Councils) rescinded the certification in January 2015 and advised Local Councils to consider applying for certification in a replacement scheme.

Expectations of Billingham Town Council

In 2003, Billingham Town Council steering committee circulated a leaflet (1) to every home in Billingham promoting the case for a Billingham Town Council which came into existence in 2007. One of the key messages was that the Town Council would be a low cost operation, not an expensive bureaucracy with the only employee being a clerk. The leaflet was authored by a current BTC councillor. The actual words were:

"A Town Council is a low-budget operation, maintaining a small office and employing only a clerk to carry out its administration. All other activities would be carried out by elected members, or by local volunteers. Its Town Councillors will not receive any expenses or allowances, and all overheads, paperwork and bureaucracy would be kept to a minimum".

Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council Representation from the Association of Billingham residents

The Association of Billingham Residents makes the following additional representation in respect of the Community Governance Review of Billingham Town Council

1. We call on Stockton Borough Council to make every effort possible to reach a decision before April 2016 on the fate of Billingham Town Council so that Council tax bills for 2016-17 can be set in February 2016 and collected as normal.
2. Should an order to abolish the Town Council be produced, we feel that Billingham Town Council's residual financial assets should be used to reimburse Stockton Council for the cost of the community governance review.
3. If abolition is confirmed, we believe that Billingham residents would support a one off precept charge to fund or part fund the cost of the community governance review if Billingham Town Councils residual financial assets were insufficient to pay for it.
4. We suggest that Stockton Borough Council instruct Billingham Town Council to avoid taking on any new projects or commissioning further third party work if their existing assets cannot cover the cost, until the outcome of the Community Governance review is known.
5. If Stockton Borough Council fail to reach a decision before April 2016 on abolition, we advise that monthly direct debit payments for Council tax bills should not include a Billingham Parish monthly charge element until or unless the continued existence of Billingham Town Council is confirmed.