

Managing Directors Column November 2009

The Borough Council recently held a 'Your Borough – Your Say' event in a marquee on the Market Place to showcase some of the ways that residents can get involved in shaping Council services and policies. The marquee included a 'graffiti wall' where people could write their comments and suggestions. This provided us with a wealth of useful information about what works well and what could work better.

Now I wouldn't compare the Great Yarmouth Mercury to graffiti for one moment, but in some ways the letters page of this paper serve a similar purpose to our graffiti wall – it tells us what people think and what matters to them. As a general rule the Council does not get into public exchanges of letters about individual cases – these are better dealt with on a one-to-one basis. But we do take careful note of the issues that particularly concern the Mercury's correspondents.

We understand that people want to see us cracking down on fly tipping, on irresponsible dog owners and on anti-social behaviour. I believe that we already do a good job in these areas, but we could always do better – provided members of the public are prepared to come forward and give evidence to support a prosecution. Without the eyes of local residents we will always be fighting a losing battle but with their help we can get tough on the few who spoil things for the many.

We also recognize that many people are confused about what services sit with the Borough Council and what sit with the County Council. Street and footway lighting is a good example and the cutting of highway verges is another. We have put a lot of effort into making sure that enquiries are redirected quickly and accurately but we know that sometimes it can seem like buck-passing.

Sometimes we get mixed messages. On the one hand, our Cabinet members may get criticized for indecisiveness or ducking their responsibilities. On the other, there may be grumbles that they have not listened to local opinion when they do stand up to be counted. All the more reason, therefore, for us to do things like our graffiti wall and to take careful note of the Mercury's letters page.

Finally, on a positive note, there is one thing about which most people are agreed. Great Yarmouth is now very good at preserving and celebrating its civic traditions. Nothing illustrates this better than the various events on and around Remembrance Sunday. The Council plays its part but so do many other organizations and individuals – all helping to build and sustain pride in their Borough.