

Stafford Borough Council

ANNUAL REPORT

2009 / 2010



Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL

www.staffordbc.gov.uk

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“*This Annual Report demonstrates how, in the face of adversity, we have delivered some notable successes. It shows how keeping our eye on the ball with our key priorities of ‘Prosperity for All’ ‘Cleaner, Greener, Safer,’ ‘Health and Wellbeing’ and ‘Leading and Delivering’ has improved the quality of life for local people and boosted the economy of our community.*”

Councillor Mike Heenan,
Leader of Stafford Borough Council

Foreword



Mike Heenan

**Councillor Mike Heenan,
Leader of Stafford Borough Council**

I am very pleased to be introducing our Annual Report which is in a different format to those we have previously produced. I hope you will find it interesting as well as informative.

When you look back on the last financial year what will be your overriding memory?

If you have only read national newspapers, watched national television or listened to national radio it must surely be one of doom and gloom. Let us be in no doubt these have been, and still are, difficult economic times for us all.

This Annual Report demonstrates how, in the face of adversity, we have delivered some notable successes. It shows how keeping our eye on the ball with our key priorities of 'Prosperity for All' 'Cleaner, Greener, Safer,' 'Health and Wellbeing' and 'Leading and Delivering' has improved the quality of life for local people and boosted the economy of our community.

The huge increase in membership at Stafford Leisure Centre, the practical steps taken to help a victim of domestic abuse turn her life around, and being recognised nationally for our performance in recycling are just a few examples of the good work we as a council have done over the last 12 months. Many more will be highlighted over the next few pages.



Ian Thompson

**Ian Thompson,
Chief Executive, Stafford Borough Council**

Our Annual Report looks back at our achievements in our financial year 2009/10 and if you ask any public sector Chief Executive what last year has been like, most will say "challenging." And it has been no different here at Stafford Borough Council. We know that there is likely to be significantly less money for local services in the future. Equally it is unfair to expect local tax payers to pick up the bill, particularly during a recession. For the past two years we have, therefore, taken every opportunity to reduce our costs and look critically at the way we deliver services. Whilst this has resulted in significant staffing reductions we have been able to maintain our frontline services and in many areas significantly improve our performance.

Last year we were rewarded for our work in promoting the local economy through partnerships and this remains a key focus during the forthcoming year. In particular we need to build on investments which are already underway, such as Tipping Street, to ensure greater access to employment opportunities.

The new coalition Government has signalled its intention to devolve significantly more powers to local councils and to review the way local government is financed. The full implications are unclear at this stage but if it means more decisions affecting Stafford Borough can be made locally, I suspect this is something most people would welcome.



CASE STUDY

Family back from brink of homelessness

A disabled woman and her carer husband faced losing the home they shared with their 15 year old son. Liz and Phil Davies had mounting debts and had fallen behind with mortgage payments while she was in hospital. Liz, 41, is confined to a wheelchair and will never walk again. Husband Phil, 44, gave up work to look after her full time.

They were threatened with repossession until Steve O'Callaghan from our 'Housing Options Team' got involved and helped them apply for the mortgage rescue scheme.

"We can't thank Steven enough. He took it on himself to make sure we got the right help at a time when we were extremely worried," said former machine operator Phil.

He added "As if we were not suffering enough we thought we would lose our house. We have had so much bad luck in the last two years but the mortgage scheme has lifted a tremendous weight from our shoulders."



Prosperity for all

Council leads fight back in recession

At the start of 2009 we were awarded the Government's 'Beacon' status for raising the prosperity of our area through working in partnership. This status recognises excellence in local government. And in November we hosted a 'Beacon' conference for around 100 councils, businesses and organisations to share in the secrets of our success.

So, in a year when the national news yet again focussed on businesses going bust, jobs being axed and, most worrying of all, people losing their homes, this council has not rested on its laurels. Rather than make excuses we forged ahead with initiatives and support that would help residents and businesses fight back in the face of dire financial times.

We played a major role working with businesses and partners to ensure multi-million pound developments such as the new county council headquarters and retail units at Tipping Street and multi-storey car park for the train station in Stafford have got underway.

Many traders in the indoor market saw their costs fall as the result of a rent review - and the minority of stallholders who would have faced paying more had the potential increase frozen. Car parking charges were also reduced to boost our local economy.

Residents in the Barlaston area received visits from council finance advisors to talk about benefits they could be entitled to after national figures suggested many people who could get help with local tax or housing rent were not receiving any.

We hosted a workshop to give small businesses access to experts from a number of organisations, including the Royal Bank of Scotland and Business Link West Midlands, to help with sales and marketing, grant finding and employment skills.

Many people have been prevented from becoming homeless working with our 'Housing Team' to access a range of measures - with eight being successful in getting the council run mortgage rescue package.



The forces will be with us

Around 1,200 soldiers based in Germany will be relocating to Stafford - and the council was praised for its part in making this happen.

Former defence secretary, Bob Ainsworth, met with senior officials from the Borough Council and said he was pleased with the support offered to the military on issues such as housing.

Colonel Charles Turner, from 22 Signal Regiment, said the growing partnership between Stafford Borough Council and MOD Stafford was a 'significant factor' in the announcement.



CASE STUDY

Chance for a fresh start

Mrs Smith*, a local woman in her 40s, feared reprisals from a former partner after reporting numerous incidents of domestic abuse. Her case was passed to the Domestic Abuse Partnership (DAP).

A risk management plan was drawn up, through this multi-agency approach, to increase the support Mrs Smith was getting with the aim of improving her safety and wellbeing.

As a result of the work of the DAP extra security measures were installed at her home so she did not have to leave and she obtained a 'non molestation' order against the former partner to stop him contacting her. The mother of two was also able to get on-going specialist emotional support.

She said: "This has given me a fresh start and the chance of a better life to look forward to and I am very grateful for all the support I have been given."

** The name has been changed to protect her identity.*



Cleaner, greener, safer

We all have a role to play in protecting our community and the planet for now and future generations. This is why our cleaner, greener, safer agenda remains a top priority in everything we deliver. And our new initiatives and ongoing schemes under this priority have had a very successful 2009/10.

Residents praised for top five spot

Half of all rubbish thrown out by householders is now being recycled.

It is an achievement which put the council as the fifth most improved recycler in the country during 2009.

Latest figures show nearly 50% of what residents have put in their household bins has been recycled and composted in the last 12 months. It means we are dumping 9,000 tonnes less waste following the introduction of the new recycling scheme in 2008 - that is the equivalent of 800 full bin lorries.

The cabinet member for Environment and Health, Councillor Stan Highfield, praised the response of residents for the tremendous achievement. He said: "From the start our community responded brilliantly and this is a huge reduction in the amount we are throwing away."

Despite the success the council is not standing still with more products to be recycled and investigations into ways to collect food waste for composting or producing energy.



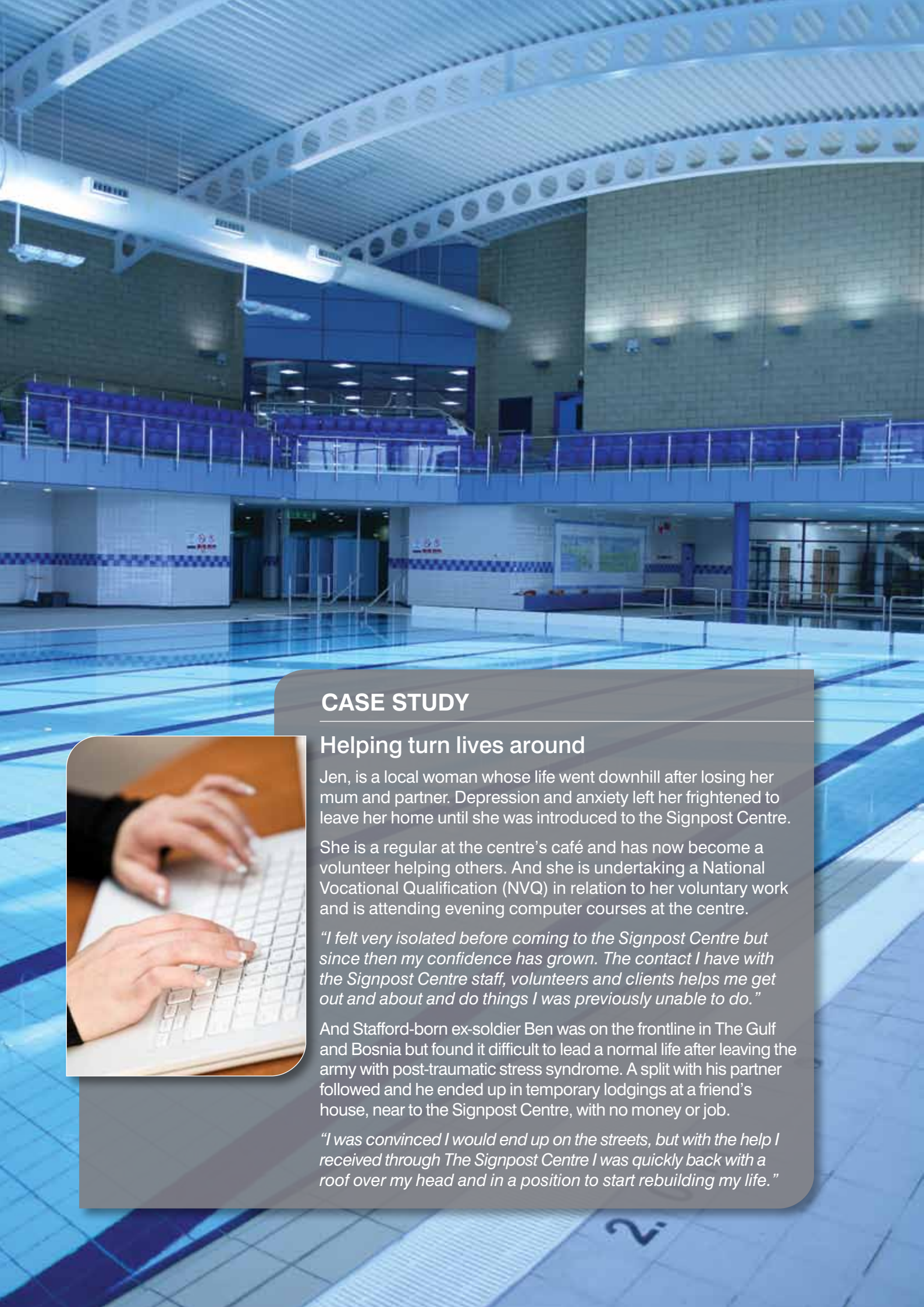
Elizabeth Leese, from Tittensor CE First School, near Stone, won a contest to create a poster to encourage people to recycle more. The design has been adapted into livery for bin lorries.

Taxi!

A successful scheme which helped people get home safely after a night out was extended this year. Taxi marshals were introduced at ranks in Stafford and Stone over the festive period. The stewards were on hand to prevent anti-social behaviour, ensure an orderly queue and that potential passengers knew the cost of their journey home.

Other initiatives to improve safety in our towns include 'Best Bar None' where pubs, clubs and restaurants compete to prove they are a top business and 'Street Pastors' who offer counselling to pub and club goers. They also provided special blankets for those caught out by the cold weather.

And we were not short of awards for our 'Cleaner, Greener, Safer' work - with Victoria Park once again retaining its 'Green Flag' as one of the best parks and open spaces in the UK; the village of Derrington winning a national 'Green Apple' award for its work to become the borough's first low carbon community; and the council-based 'Domestic Abuse Partnership' named as best 'partnership' in Staffordshire by the 'Inside Justice Awards' - and being short-listed for national finals - for tackling domestic crime.



CASE STUDY

Helping turn lives around

Jen, is a local woman whose life went downhill after losing her mum and partner. Depression and anxiety left her frightened to leave her home until she was introduced to the Signpost Centre.

She is a regular at the centre's café and has now become a volunteer helping others. And she is undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in relation to her voluntary work and is attending evening computer courses at the centre.

"I felt very isolated before coming to the Signpost Centre but since then my confidence has grown. The contact I have with the Signpost Centre staff, volunteers and clients helps me get out and about and do things I was previously unable to do."

And Stafford-born ex-soldier Ben was on the frontline in The Gulf and Bosnia but found it difficult to lead a normal life after leaving the army with post-traumatic stress syndrome. A split with his partner followed and he ended up in temporary lodgings at a friend's house, near to the Signpost Centre, with no money or job.

"I was convinced I would end up on the streets, but with the help I received through The Signpost Centre I was quickly back with a roof over my head and in a position to start rebuilding my life."



Health and wellbeing

Whether it is encouraging healthy weight in children or caring for vulnerable residents, 'Health and Wellbeing' is hardly ever out of the news. New projects have addressed the key issues under this priority in 2009/10 and helped provide a platform for a healthier community in future years.

Health at the centre of council policy

Youngsters and older people were able to swim for free in council-run pools.

We signed up to the initiative so that people aged 16 and under and those over 60 years old did not have to pay to use the pools at the Stafford Leisure Centre and Alleyne's Sports centre in Stone.

Not all local authorities took advantage of the scheme because of financial concerns but Mike Smith, the cabinet member for Leisure, said: *"Improving the health and wellbeing of our community is one of our top priorities so we wanted to pull out all the stops to be able to offer this."*

It is another success story from the Stafford Leisure Centre which has seen its membership double since replacing the old Riverside Recreation Centre two years ago.

But leisure centres are not the only way we try to improve the health and wellbeing of our community.

After the success of the 'Signpost' Centre in Highfields, two similar schemes have been rolled out by the council and its partners. The 'David Jones' Centre and 'Bradbury House' in Stafford opened in the last 12 months. They are staffed by voluntary and public sector organisations to give counselling

and advice on a range of issues affecting people in the community.

More than 140 people in the borough have had their homes adapted to help them cope with disabilities. These alterations will allow people to live more comfortably in their own homes.

We have used money secured through developments to improve community play areas like the Jubilee Fields in Little Haywood, and games areas in Weston and Cotes Heath.

And we also made land available so that more than forty affordable homes can be built for people to rent through Stafford and Rural Homes.





CASE STUDY

Council should listen to my views

"This type of event is really important so we are able to give our views on issues that affect us," said local 19 year old Daisy Luker who came to the innovative new 'Your Views' event organised by the council.

The 80 strong audience put their issues, and possible solutions, on to mini flags. They were then asked to plant the flags, in the area they were concerned with, on one of three specially designed maps relating to Stafford, Stone, and the rural part of the borough. The evening also included a presentation on what makes the borough tick by the boss of one of the UK's leading research companies, workshops to discuss key topics, and a question and answer session with the Council Leader and Chief Executive.

Daisy is already a member of the Stafford and Stone Youth Forum and saw the 'Your Views' event as a way to make sure her views and that of her colleagues were put forward. The forum has around 25 members ranging from 13 to 25 years old.

"We wanted to make sure our views on issues such as transport and anti-social behaviour were heard. It is important the council is prepared to listen to its residents and take on board what we say to help in developing plans for the future."



Leading and delivering

In another difficult year financially for residents and businesses, people have looked to the council to take a lead in helping them through the recession. A sample of schemes already highlighted in this 'Annual Report' demonstrate how we have delivered for the community. Here are some of the other ways we have led on to ensure the council is able to face the financial challenges that lie ahead.

The council now has around 11% less full-time equivalent staff than it did at the start of the recession and last year made savings of nearly £850,000 by working more efficiently. Despite the reduction in workforce more of our national indicators - the yardstick for performance in local authorities - are now above the national average. More details on these can be seen in the 'Performance' section of this report. In a nutshell the figures suggest we are doing more for less.

Difficult decisions were made to enable the council to produce a balanced budget. We were given a very low grant settlement from the government. But the excellent performance of Stafford Leisure Centre and the waste collection service, in particular, have helped generate extra council income. This has enabled us to set a council tax rise of only 1.5% for our residents for 2010/11. It is the lowest increase in council tax for 16 years.

Work has been continuing on sharing services - primarily with neighbouring Cannock Chase District Council. We will only enter an agreement to share if it will save local tax payers money and at least maintain, if not improve, the service to our customers. In times of financial uncertainty this is a positive step to protecting jobs locally while making savings.

To be able to lead and deliver we must also listen to, and act on, what our residents and businesses tell us they need.

We signed up to 'Think Local' ensuring the authority will look for firms within our borough when it needs to buy goods or use services. This will help the local economy as well as creating and securing jobs in our area.

Businesses in the town centre joined forces with the council to fight back against the recession.

The new 'Town Centre Partnership' has over 100 members dedicated to promoting the town and what it has to offer.

The number of empty shops in the town centre is now only 8% compared with a national figure of around 12%.

And in March we held our first 'Your Views' event.



This replaced the old 'State of the Borough' debate format and brought together residents, voluntary groups, our partners, businesses and councillors who were able to flag up issues they wanted the council to address.





How have we done?

We made a number of 'priority promises' in 2009/10. These are key targets we expected to meet last year and can be found at www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporateplan under the heading *Council Documents*.

Here are some of our highlights.

We were ranked the 5th most improved Council in the country for doorstep recycling. Nearly 50% of our household waste is now recycled.

We beat our three year target to reduce crime by 15%

Membership at Stafford Leisure Centre went up another 10% to more than 2,800 - almost double the figure since opening in 2008

More than 70% of fly tipping was removed within one working day and over 97% of all litter reports were dealt with in four working days.

Victoria Park was awarded a 'Green Flag' for a third successive year. The award is given to the best parks and open spaces in the country.

Local businesses received our support through the economic downturn. Only 8% of shops were vacant in Stafford Town centre compared with a national figure of around 12%.

We set a below inflation council tax increase and achieved nearly £850,000 of savings by working more efficiently.

In 2009 the government introduced the Comprehensive Area Assessment - a new way of assessing how public services are performing in England. It will find out if we are providing value for money, where we can improve and how well we meet our residents' needs.

"Stafford Borough Council performs adequately. It is making good progress in some of the areas that are important to local people, such as recycling household waste and reducing crime and disorder. Overall, residents are positive about the quality of life in Stafford,"

Audit Commission 2009.

Where can we improve?

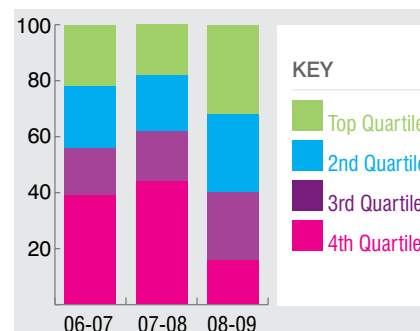
Plans we put in place to speed up the processing of benefit claims are already working. Action plans have also been drawn up to improve our housing service and to deal with planning applications. We expect to show an improved performance in all three areas throughout 2010/11.

How do we compare?

"The Council has improved the way that it manages its performance. Councillors get good and clear reports on how well services are performing and on the Council's finances, "

Organisational Assessment
2009, Audit Commission

During 2009/10 we monitored and managed our performance against a range of local and national indicators. The Government sets the national performance indicators and we have to publish the results - they are known as National Indicators (NIS). The best performing councils will be in the top quartile while those with the weakest are in the bottom quartile. The graph below shows the percentage of national indicators in each quartile for Stafford Borough Council.



The Audit Commission expects the best councils to have the majority of their indicators in quartiles one or two. As the graph demonstrates in 2008/9 we had 56% of our indicators in the top two quartiles.



WELCOME

TO

STONE

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

WWI

JUST A MINUTE WALK TO STONE TOWN CENTER

MINOR MARKET GARDEN

30

30

30

30

Working in partnerships

There have been some real differences made to improve the quality of life for our residents and businesses. But it is obvious from our 'Annual Report' that to achieve this we cannot work in isolation. So much of the work we do is in partnership with other public sector, voluntary, or even private sector, organisations to ensure we get the best results for our people while providing value for money.

Eagle House is a 32-bedroomed supported housing unit to help people get back on their feet. We have worked with the County Council, police and the company running the project - Midland Heart - to make sure we are offering the best possible service to local people who need help getting their foot back on the employment or education ladder.

We have already mentioned the work to make our community safer with taxi marshals, street pastors and the 'best bar none' scheme. The night time economy is important to the success of our area and these schemes have been organised in conjunction with public sector bodies - including the emergency services and Primary Care Trust - as well as agencies from the voluntary sector - for example Adsis - the alcohol and drug dependency group.

And then there is the work we do with our community. Without the help of the people from the village of Derrington we would not have been able to launch our first low carbon community. The village has its own steering group which takes forward environmentally-friendly initiatives to make Derrington our premier 'Green Village.' Without this involvement we would not be able to bid for grants to help introduce some of the green measures. And it is unlikely we would have received a prized 'Green Apple' award for being at "the forefront of community activity on tackling climate change" without their wholehearted support.



Our partners also look to us for support in areas they are working in. A good example is the work of the Children's Trust Board. We have been instrumental in helping develop plans to protect children by addressing issues such as teenage pregnancy, anti-social behaviour and domestic violence.

A 'Governance Board' with Staffordshire County Council was set up to ensure the right infrastructure and facilities are in place to cope with development within the borough. It was this partnership that successfully bid for £3 million from the government to help with this work.

So if we can 'pool' our resources - money and skills - to work more effectively and provide value for money which will benefit our community then we will do.

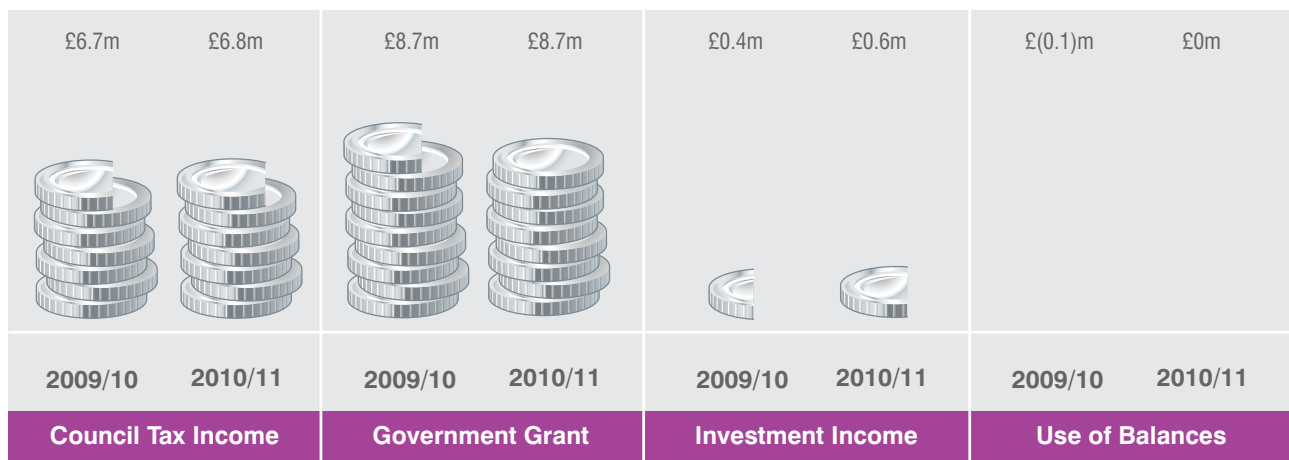


Finances

On these two pages we have summarised our income and expenditure for the last financial year and our money plans for the year ahead.

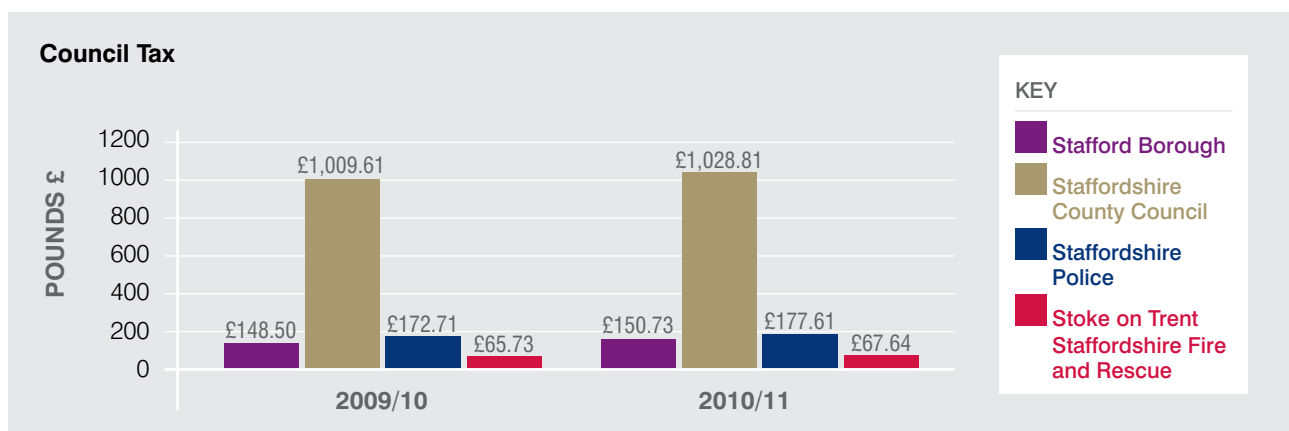
Our Income

Our total income 2009/10 was £15.7m and is an estimated £16.1m in 2010/11. Around a third of our income is collected through the Council Tax: £6.7m in 2009/10 and £6.8m in 2010/11. The rest of our income is from other sources, including a significant proportion from Central Government.



Council Tax

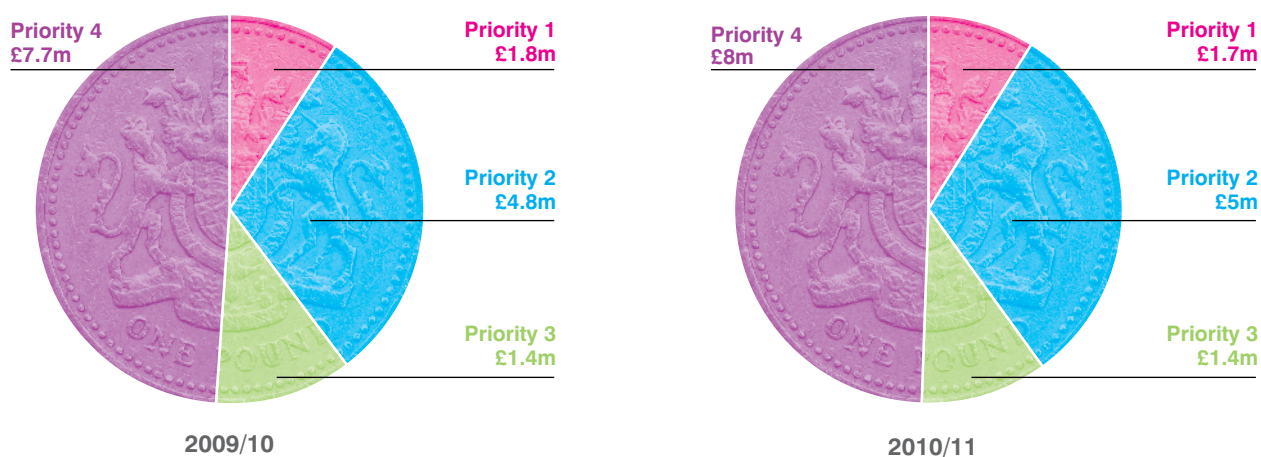
In 2009/10 an average band D Council Tax bill, before parish/town council precepts amounted to £1,396.55. This increased to £1,424.79 for 2010/11. The charts below show the different components of the Council Tax bill for an average band D household.



This Council has pegged annual increases in Council Tax to the rate of inflation or below for the last seven years. This year just 10.6% of residents' Council Tax goes to fund our services. Our portion of the Council Tax for an average band D property is £150.73. This compares to a national average for district councils of £166.

Our Expenditure

We set our budget based on our four corporate priorities. The pie charts below compare our net expenditure on services [after fees, charges and other income] in 2009/10 with our planned expenditure for 2010/11.



PRIORITY 1 Prosperity for All	PRIORITY 2 Cleaner, Greener, Safer	PRIORITY 3 Health and Wellbeing	PRIORITY 4 Leading and Delivering
Planning and Regeneration Housing and Council Tax Benefits Community Support Delivery Through Partnership Working Off Street Parking Enforcement Town Centre Management Tourism	Borough Markets Gatehouse Theatre Refuse and Recycling Services Community Safety Streetscene Parks and Open Spaces CCTV Licensing Powers Climate Change	Swimming Pools and Leisure Complexes Sports Development Health and Enforcement Health Promotions Food Safety Pollution Pest Control Housing Advice Housing Adaptations Affordable Housing Register of Electors	Customer Contact Centre IT Investing in Our Buildings Procurement Council's Website Performance Management Human Resources Local Strategic Partnership Running the Council Communications

We also invest in the Borough, making use of our proceeds from asset sales along with grants and other contributions we receive to fund major projects. The main capital schemes for 2009/10 and 2010/11 are set out below:-

	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000		2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000
Disabled facilities grants	1,018	885	Disabled adaptations to council buildings	63	109
Adoption of Housing Act sewerage works	570	17	Purchase of streetscene equipment	76	80
Private sector housing grants	198	173	Gatehouse Theatre boiler replacement	134	0
Waterscape project	380	40	Car park re-surfacing	0	155
Leisure Centre fitness equipment	0	400	Growth point investment	0	999
Rowley Park improvement	31	285	Replacement of revenues and benefits system	31	410
Victoria Park refurbishment	0	450			



Stafford FINISH

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signal

signal

signal

MEGA

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Outlook

We still face an uncertain economic outlook and tough decisions will have to be made which will affect the way we work. The council approved its six year 'Corporate Plan.' It lays down a vision for the next six years of what we have set out to deliver to achieve our priorities - Prosperity for All; Cleaner, Greener, Safer; Health and Wellbeing; Leading and Delivering.

The plan specifies some key initiatives that we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. Here is a sample of what we can expect in the forthcoming year for each of our four priorities:

Future Growth

As a borough we have weathered the recession fairly well with one of the lowest unemployment rates in Staffordshire. We will promote new employment sites, as well as housing, that will be coming to the area in the coming years. We will be indicating the areas we think are suitable for this growth and asking local people and businesses for their views on our preferred options. As well as new homes we will earmark sites for:

160 hectares of employment land
50,000 square metres of retail space in Stafford Town
45,000 square metres of offices in Stafford Town.

Victoria Park

We will continue to ensure the quality of our parks and open spaces is maintained but have also embarked on an ambitious project to improve the play area in our award winning Victoria Park. The park retained its 'Green Flag' last year with judges 'excited' about the plans for the new play area. A huge consultation is ongoing with schoolchildren, community groups and local people all being asked to have an input in the design of the £450,000 scheme.

Recycling

Our successful waste collection service will be expanding the number of products that residents can recycle in their wheeled bin.

Penkside

Our work with the South Staffs Primary Care Trust will continue to help improve the health and wellbeing of our community. A children's gym will be introduced in the leisure centre in Stafford following on from the successful launch of free holiday swimming for young people - a scheme which had been extended to all year round free access to the council-run pools in Stafford and Stone and included older residents. But national indicators suggest the area of Penkside in Stafford has problems with issues such as teenage pregnancies, obesity and infant mortality rates. The council and its partners will be working with the community to give advice, support and introduce activities to improve the wellbeing of the area - and remove them from the national radar of deprived areas.

Shared Services

Council's across the country have been bracing themselves for more fallout from the economic crisis and we are no different.

Although many difficult decisions have already been taken we will need to continue to find savings without risking the service to our residents. One of the ways we have identified to help us deliver savings with no reduction in service is through sharing services.

This year we will be sharing our 'Building Control' and 'Technology' functions with Cannock Chase District Council. Work is also underway finalising the case for a shared 'Revenues and Benefits' service.

A number of other areas to share - for example community safety, legal services and human resources - are also being investigated. But plans will not go ahead unless they lead to savings or would demonstrate improvements in performance.

There are a considerable number of ongoing schemes which can be seen in the Corporate Plan.

To see the plan go to www.staffordbc.gov.uk/corporateplan

Useful Information

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OPENING HOURS

Monday to Thursday 8.30am - 5.00pm

Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm

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Benefits 01785 619 478

Council Tax 01785 619 279

Environmental Health 01785 619 402

Planning 01785 619 337

Streetscene 01785 619 401

HOW ARE WE DOING?

We would like to hear your views about the Annual Report. Tell us what you found useful, or what you would like to see in future reports, by contacting:

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TEL 01785 619 199

If you need this information in **large print, Braille, other language** or on **audio cassette** please contact:

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TEL 01785 619 000



2006-2007
*Transforming the Delivery of Services
Through Partnerships*

2009-2010
*Raising economic prosperity
through partnership*