



With the election period under way the 'Leader's Blog' for April will be written by council Chief Executive Ian Thompson.

With the General Election looming there is much debate about the extent of cut backs in public spending and the impact this will have on the level of public services and jobs. Here at Stafford I think we have demonstrated that efficiencies can be found without significantly impacting on services. Over the last two years we have made over £2m of savings and efficiencies and our overall staffing numbers have been reduced by around 12%. However, compared to other Councils our performance on services like recycling and street cleaning has improved over this period.

From next year we will have a balanced budget and a Council Tax increase of just 1.5% the lowest in Stafford for 16 years. One of the reasons we have been able to keep the Council Tax increase so low has been the success of the Stafford Leisure Centre. Opened in March 2008 in the teeth of the recession the Centre has gone from strength to strength with membership more than doubling from 1,400 to more than 2,900 as of last month. Members appreciate the quality of the facilities in the Centre and helpfulness of our staff but also recognise that with membership from as little of £25 per month the Centre offers fantastic value for money.

This year the focus will be on Stone with a major replacement programme for equipment at the Westbridge Park gym.

Talking of success what a great weekend we had at the Stafford Half Marathon with record entries in both the main race and the fun run and a course record time of 1 hour 8 minutes and 51 seconds by Ben Gamble from Stone. Our next big event is Shakespeare at the Castle (24 June - 10 July) and this year we are putting on "The Merry Wives of Windsor". Following last year's highly acclaimed production of "Twelfth Night" advanced ticket sales are already ahead for this year so book early to avoid disappointment.

Ian Thompson  
Chief Executive

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