

A town built of sterner stuff

The Government delivered its Comprehensive Spending Review - and all eyes appeared to be on Stafford.

National TV and Radio turned up on the day of the 'Review' to get reactions from shoppers, retailers and business people. They interviewed traders in the indoor market and set up a temporary TV studio in the Swan Hotel.

Why Stafford? Because 40% of workers are employed in the public sector - and the public sector is going to face heavy cuts. In fact we expect to receive up to 16% less from the government next year to run our services than we did this year.

No doubt the national media wanted to get some good 'doom and gloom' sound bites from the town. Unfortunately for them, it seems, that was not the case.

I know producers of BBC2's Daily Politics and 24 hour News Channel spoke to five or six traders in the indoor market and exclaimed 'everyone is very positive.' They mentioned as much in their programmes.

Our own Chief Executive, Ian Thompson, was interviewed and commented on how well the public and private sector worked together and that the town was in a good position to cope with the forthcoming cuts. It was a theme repeated by local businesses throughout the day.

On more than one occasion I have said how tough it is going to be but you won't find this Council wanting when it comes to meeting the challenge to ensure our essential public services are protected.

Finally, amid news of cuts, it was good to have announced Shakespeare at the Castle is to return next year. It was great to hear so much support for this fantastic production from residents, the local press and celebrities, after that announcement. But I hope the vocal support will be backed up by - in the words of that great musical hall tradition - bums on seats. As the newspaper headlines said: 'Use it or lose it.'

If you want to find out more www.staffordgatehousetheatre.co.uk.

Councillor Mike Heenan

Leader of Stafford Borough Council