

Message from Chief Executive

Welcome to issue 4 of Parish Talk and we have some welcome news following the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in June. We are now officially 'GOOD'.

The key to this improvement is down to partnership working and the valuable feedback through our consultation with residents, parishes and partners that have helped shape our improvement.

I am really proud of this accomplishment, but we will not be complacent and will continue to work hard to improve and strive to serve the people of Stratford District on our journey for a Cleaner, Greener, Safer Road to Excellence.

The report from the Audit Commission has been embargoed until today but we wanted you to hear this great news direct from us.

As well as our CPA news we've got an update on Parish websites and an article on Health and Safety courtesy of Karen Parnell and the Autumn issue of Your Review will be hitting residents doormats from this week.

Until next time.

Regards

Paul Lankester
Chief Executive



Officially GOOD

Stratford-on-Avon District Council is now 'good' according to a new report released today, 9 October, by the independent Audit Commission.

"Stratford District Council has made significant strides in the past two years. It has improved its own organisation and this supports better services for the community. Most services have improved and this has been acknowledged by residents. The Council is progressing well with its plans for a 'World Class Stratford' and for widening/increasing public access to services and information using modern technology. However, it needs to ensure that all its communities benefit from its ambitious plans,"

says David Rigg, Audit Commission Senior Manager.

The Corporate assessment in June looked at the Council's ambitions, its ability to improve services and what it has achieved since the last assessment.

The District Council will now plan what it needs to do to further improve its services to meet the changing needs of its residents as it prepares the next Corporate Strategy for 2008/2012.

In the meantime for the targets in the 2005/2008 Corporate Strategy that have already been achieved a new target has been set.

Copies of the report are available from the Audit Commission website – www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports.

CPA provides a simple report in a straightforward way about how well each Council is performing. It encourages Councils to focus on continuous improvement and provides a robust independent challenge to stimulate positive change. Ultimately it is about working to improve the quality of services Councils provide to local people.

Strengths

- A clear and ambitious vision for Stratford-upon-Avon (World Class Stratford).
- A broad understanding of the needs and aspirations of local communities.
- A robust approach to managing performance.
- A track record of service delivery and improvement, reflected in growing levels of public satisfaction.

Improvements

- Developing clear strategies for improvements across the whole of the District.
- Ensuring it consults effectively with marginalised communities that are at risk of social exclusion.
- Better target setting.

Parish Talk is produced by Corporate Communications.

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Deadline for articles is 29 October 2007 for the next issue is due in November 2007.

Designed by Design & Print tel 01789 260740 e-mail design@stratford-dc.gov.uk

The next step

The Council has agreed to set new targets in four areas where it has achieved its Corporate Strategy ambitions ahead of the planned delivery date of April 2008.

We are really pleased to have realised the ambitions set in 2005 for these areas. However, our commitment to continuous improvement has led us both to push on a little further in each area and to review what lessons we might learn from having reached these targets more quickly than was expected.

New targets for:



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

New target to provide an additional 100 units by April 2008, making the cumulative total 350 over the 3 years.



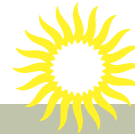
MEANS TESTED BENEFITS

New target to help 310 residents.



RECYCLING

Target achieved in April, new target of 41% by April 2008.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

New target for April 2008 has been revised to 31%.

Any lessons learnt will help us to set stretching but realistic targets in our new Corporate Strategy. This will come into force in April next year.

Work has been progressing on a draft document and public consultation has been carried out.

Parish Websites

The District Council is progressing with its parish website initiative and hopes to have the first websites available over the coming months. The project, funded by lottery grants under the Awards for All scheme, is entering its final phases. The system currently used by District Council staff, to add and amend content on the Council's own website, is being extended to allow each parish to have their own web presence; this work should be complete by the end of October. Once in place the Council will work closely with each parish to create a tailored website that meets the needs of each local community. The design work will be carried out in-house by the Council's own web development team, but will allow nominated members of each parish to add their own content and pages through an easy to use computer application.

By working in partnership with the District Council, each parish will benefit from the facilities offered by the Council's own website. The data and content will be secure and will also meet the required accessibility standards. Each parish will also have its own integrated planning page that will list planning applications specifically for that parish, and will also link into the Council's new in-house developed planning system, available from the Council's website.

Currently the Council is working with an initial 14 parishes but is looking forward to extending the scheme further over the coming months.

If you would like your Parish to be involved please contact E-Government on 01789 260479 or email egovernment@stratford-dc.gov.uk.

A Bit More Health and Safety in the Parishes With thanks to Karen Parnell, Wixford Parish Clerk.

Following on from my last jottings on this subject and the HSEs stance on 'Saving lives – Not stopping people living', we have established many parishes will not need to produce formal risk assessments. However, if required these should be renewed every two years at the outset. The reality being they should be reviewed and acted upon whenever necessary according to the level of risk, and this should be done by a **competent** person.

The definition of a 'competent' person was considered by Mr Justice Winn in *Brazier v Skipton Rock Co Ltd (1962)*:

He said that academic training and qualifications were not the only criteria in assessing competence, since experience may be an equally valid factor.

He considered the person should have

- 1) Such practical and theoretical knowledge and
- 2) Such actual experience of the type of machinery or plant which they are working on

As will enable them

- 1) To detect defects or weaknesses
- 2) To assess their importance in relation to the strength and functions of the particular machinery or plant

The overall intention must be to attain a **safe system of work**:

The integration of men, machinery and materials in the correct environment to produce the safest possible conditions in a safe work area.

And instill a **safety culture**:

By creating a positive climate, suitable policies and systems, commitment, demonstration and leadership.

Risk assessment and health and safety in general should not:

- Curtail freedoms
- Damage organisational efficiency and innovation
- Denigrate the work of public servants
- Damage reputations
- Distract from genuine health and safety issues

We Must:

- Ensure workers and the public are properly protected
- Provide overall benefit to society, by balancing risks and benefits
- Enable innovation and learning
- Manage risks responsibly
- Protect against risks that cause harm and suffering

The above should be done through information and instruction.

Since many Parish Councils will meet in Parish Halls, the minimum fire safety check must be considered:

- Doors
- Escape Routes
- Alarms
- Extinguishers

To summarise, the arrangements that need addressing are:

- Safe systems of work
- Safe procedures
- Joint consultations
- Reporting procedures
- Methods for increasing awareness

Monitoring of the above is also a key issue, as would be falling standards and addressing training needs.

Further information on the above can easily be obtained through the Health and Safety Executive, National Association of Local Councils and the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils.

Did you know Santa's not allowed to go down chimneys this year?
It was declared unsafe by the Elf and Safety Commission.

