

How are we doing?



Renfrewshire
Council



The Crystal Mark applies to pages 27 to 29.

'How are we doing?' Winter 2005

This section of the 'Renfrewshire' magazine keeps you up to date with the latest developments in our performance. Each edition of the magazine includes details about one or two of our departments' performance.

In this issue we will give you some information on how we are doing with our Charter Mark programme, the Government's award for customer service, other awards and new developments in our customer services centre, and how our Finance and Information Technology Department is performing. We hope that 'How are we doing?' helps you keep up with how we are performing.

What's new?

Awards

COSLA (the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) organises a competition each year to recognise outstanding quality of service to the public. Councils across Scotland can enter projects that show high levels of customer service. We entered 10 projects - the most that any council can enter - and six of our projects won a bronze award.

We were also well represented at the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) Awards which were announced on 8 September. Our Tenant Participation Team was shortlisted in the Housing Management Internal Service Team of the Year category, and our Reparation and Mediation Parental Support project (RAMPS) was shortlisted in the Social care Services Internal Service Team of the Year category. The "Estate Management Performance Guide" produced by the Housing and Property Services Department was shortlisted for the Employee Involvement in Best Value category.

Our IT Services Division was also shortlisted in the "IT Department of the Year" category by Computing magazine, the IT industry's leading trade magazine. This is a significant achievement as they were the only public sector organisation of the six nominees.

Charter Mark

One of the ways we improve our service is by working to achieve quality standards.

The Government awards a Charter Mark to public services which can show that they provide excellent service for their service. Each Charter Mark last for three years and then each service must demonstrate that they have set higher targets and standards for their Charter Mark to be renewed.

Since the last edition of "How are we doing?", our Benefits Service and our Planning Division achieved a Charter Mark for the first time and the staff and pupils at Ralston Primary School were successful in renewing their Charter Mark. In July 2005, our IT Services Division became only the second council IT service in Scotland to achieve Charter Mark status.

The Public Services Panel

It is important that we consult you to find out what you think about the services and facilities that we provide in order to improve them and make sure that they meet your needs. One of the most important ways we do this is through the Public Services Panel which was set up in 1998. The Public Services Panel is a group of Renfrewshire residents who we consult regularly on a variety of matters in surveys sent out four times a year.

Over 2000 local residents are currently members of the panel after being randomly selected from the electoral register and we replace around one third of the members each year. The surveys cover a wide range of topics from general levels of satisfaction with our services to issues about particular services such as roads and libraries. Panel members then receive a newsletter letting them know the results of the survey and how we will use these results

Panel results can and do make a difference to the way we plan and deliver services. We will soon be updating our website to make information about the Public Services Panel, including the surveys and newsletters, available to all our customers.

If you would like more information about the panel, please contact Laura McIntyre on 0141 840 3530.

Text messaging

Our text-messaging service, Rentext, received a Bronze Award at the 2004/2005 COSLA Excellence Awards for using technology creatively. We used text messaging to:

- communicate with customers who are deaf or hard of hearing;
- send information to young carers;
- promote events at the Arts Centre;
- contact members of our Young Persons' Housing Forum; and
- arrange council housing inspections.

Rentext also meant that some of our services could send information to their customers in short text messages.

We assessed Rentext in 2004 by consulting people taking part in the project and our departments. This gave us some really positive results.

- 78% of customers agreed that text messaging was a convenient way of receiving information.
- 86% wanted to continue receiving text messages.
- 86% thought Rentext was a good service.

Although our text-messaging service was a trial, we received funding from the Scottish Executive's 'Modernising Government Fund 3', which could be used to develop our text-messaging facility. We are currently looking at ways of having a permanent text-messaging service.

Finance and Information Technology Department

Council Tax

Our Council Tax service is responsible for making sure we collect Council Tax in a way that is convenient for you and for helping you pay promptly.

We need Council Tax to fund the wide range of services we are responsible for across Renfrewshire. During 2005/2006, it will make up 20% (£69 million) of the budget for day-to-day services available to us.

Since renewing our Charter Mark award in 2004/2005 we are still dedicated to improving our service. We are focusing particularly on helping the community. Recently we ran a stall at the Reid Kerr College freshers' fayre to give information about not having to pay any Council Tax, and about student discounts. We are working closely with benefit officers – going with them on visits to older people who have just moved into sheltered homes – to make sure that they apply for the benefits that they are entitled to.

Did you know?

During 2004/2005 we collected 94.2% of the Council Tax due within the year. This is an improvement on the previous year (93.9%), and means we have collected a higher percentage of Council Tax every year since 1996/1997.

Percentage of Council Tax collected since 2000/2001



- Direct debit is the cheapest and easiest way for us to collect Council Tax payments from you. It is so simple to set up that we can do it for you over the phone. If you pay by direct debit, we will enter you into a prize draw each month to win £50 in Marks & Spencer vouchers.
- You can find performance information for our Revenues Service and Benefit Service on our website www.renfrewshire.gov.uk.

For questions about Council Tax, phone 0141 842 4422.

Non-Domestic Rates (NDR)

Non-Domestic Rates are sometimes called business rates. Local businesses pay non-domestic rates to contribute to the cost of our services.

Our Non-Domestic Rates service is responsible for making sure we collect non-domestic rates in a way that is convenient for businesses and helps them pay promptly.

During 2005/2006, Non-Domestic Rates will make up 19% (£64 million) of the budget for day-to-day services available to us.

During 2004/2005 we collected 96.7% of the Non-Domestic Rates due within the year. This is an improvement on the previous year (96.6%), and means we have continued to improve the percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected every year since 2000/2001.

Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected



From December 2005 we will be responsible for sending out and collecting Non-Domestic Rates for East Renfrewshire Council.

For questions about Non-Domestic Rates, phone 0141 842 5211.

The Benefits Service

Our Benefits Service makes sure that as many people as possible who are on a low income claim Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit. Over the past few years, we have placed more importance on improving the services we provide to customers and the other organisations we deal with.

We have:

- recruited a number of new employees;
- increased the number of people getting benefits;
- improved the time taken to process a claim; and
- improved our relationship with the outside agencies who help us to provide our service.

Our efforts to improve the service for our customers have been recognised when we were recently awarded a Charter Mark and an Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation award for benefit team of the year.

Each year, the Department for Work and Pensions sets us targets for important areas of our performance. Between January and March of 2004/2005, we were one of the best-performing councils for:

- the time taken to process new claims - we now take 23 days to process a new claim;
- the time taken to process changes in circumstances - we now take five days to process a change in circumstances; and
- the percentage of benefits we work out correctly. 99.2% of our customers' benefits are being correctly worked out.

We have improved the range of information available on our website, particularly information about Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

We can also visit you at home if you have difficulty reaching the Benefits Service, and we hold surgeries in sheltered-housing schemes where you can get advice about benefits.

Information Technology Services Division (IT Services)

Our Information Technology Services Division (part of our Finance and Information Technology Services Department) help us make the best use of technology to help us deliver modern, efficient services.

IT Services is heavily involved in putting into place our modernising government strategy 'Reaching Renfrewshire' and the Scottish Executive's strategy 'Customer First'. Both these strategies are focused on giving you a range of ways to contact us and get information on our services.

Did you know?

- Our award-winning Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is continually improving to support more public services being delivered through our customer contact centre and through our departments.
- Our customer services centre uses technology including our CRM system, queue management system and technology to help people access our electronic services. This should help provide a single point of contact for you to ask us about Council Tax, housing and benefits.
- Our IT Services Division has played an important part in developing the Scottish Executive's 'Customer First' strategy. This includes developing 'Citizen's Account' facilities nationally and locally. In time, this will allow you to register with us so we can set up a citizen's account for you. A citizen's account will give you secure, personalised access to on-line services such as your Council Tax balance, rent

Our performance

Time taken to process new applications for benefit



The target set by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for 2005/2006 is 36 days.

Time taken to process changes in circumstances



The target set by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for 2005/2006 is eight days.

Percentage of cases worked out correctly



The target set by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for 2005/2006 is 93%.

payments and so on. It will also allow us to share information with other departments and organisations so you only need to tell us something once, for example if you change your address.

- Our website has been upgraded to provide information and transactional services (such as facilities to pay your Council Tax on-line) that are not only more convenient to use but give more comprehensive, joined-up information across public-sector agencies serving Renfrewshire. The new website was launched in Autumn 2005.
- IT Services is working with Learning and Teaching Scotland and the Scottish Executive to make the Scottish Schools Digital Network available to all our schools. The Scottish Executive has already recognised installing computer hardware in each of our schools as a model project. Local schools will be able to download teaching materials from the internet from early 2006. This is a major, exciting national initiative and full services including e-mail, on-line worksheets and possibly some access for parents will start to become available in 2007.
- We are now beginning to use 'mobile technology' (mobile phones, laptop computers and so on) to help deliver more efficient services. For example, our housing repairs inspectors are already using hand-held technology to collect details of repairs needed when they visit homes. Also, our mobile libraries connect to our main library system through the mobile phone network. In the future we could use this technology to provide support for care workers carrying out home visits.