

How are we doing?



Councillor Jim Harkins
Leader of the Council

Tom Scholes
Chief Executive



Welcome to 'How are we doing?'

In this edition, we focus on the performance and achievements of our education, leisure and finance services. We highlight our performance in educational achievement for five to fourteen year olds, national exams and collecting council tax, because you have told us these are important to you. We are pleased to be able to report that on most occasions we have a record of making good progress over time.

We also bring you up to date with our efforts to build on our impressive record of recognition for delivering high quality services.

We hope you find the information in 'How are we doing?' useful and interesting. If you have any comments please contact David McCormick on 0141 840 3505 or e-mail him at chiefexec@renfrewshire.gov.uk

What's new?

The Carbon Trust

Sustainability is one of our guiding principles and we are delighted to be one of only 16 councils in Britain chosen to take part in a new programme, funded by the Carbon Trust, to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions. We will receive consultancy support worth £30,000 to £50,000 to help us achieve carbon emissions savings from our estates and vehicle fleets. See page 24 for more information.

Green Apple Awards

The achievements of our Sustainable Communities Team were recognised in the Green Apple Awards at the House of Commons. The awards are sponsored by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Municipal Journal, the Environment Agency and the Chartered Institute of Waste Management. You can read more about the Awards on page 23.

Charter Mark

Charter Mark is the government's award scheme for recognising and encouraging excellence in the public sector. Renfrewshire has Charter Marks covering 25% of its services. The Cabinet Office recognised our impressive track record for achieving Charter Marks when it selected us to pilot their new way of judging whether services meet their standards. Our housing advice and homelessness service and our estates service submitted pilot applications and independent assessors have recommended that both are awarded Charter Mark. Confirmation has recently been received that both applications were successful increasing our total number of Charter Mark's to 32.

Health and safety

The British Standards Institute auditors recently recommended that our Chief Executive's Department are recognised as having met the rigorous standards required by their Occupational Health and Safety inspection (OHSAS 18001). It is a remarkable achievement to succeed at the first attempt. Our Chief Executive's Department joins our Corporate Services Department who were recognised as meeting the standard last year. Our aim is to be the first Scottish council to have all our services recognised in this way.

Inspecting our education service

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) are currently carrying out an inspection of our education service as part of a five year programme which covers every Scottish Council. The inspection assesses how effective we are at planning, supporting and monitoring how we provide our education service. We will report back to you on how well we performed in a future edition of this newsletter. We will receive the final report from the inspectors in late spring of next year.

Education and leisure services

Our Education and Leisure Services Department provides a wide range of different services from early education to museums and arts. We highlight the achievements of some of these services below.

Educational achievement

Did you know that?

Pupil achievement continues to increase steadily in our primary schools in reading, writing and mathematics. We have already achieved the target figures which were agreed for 2005 with the Scottish Executive and so have set new targets for 2005. For pupils in secondary schools, improvements also continue to be achieved in reading, writing and mathematics.

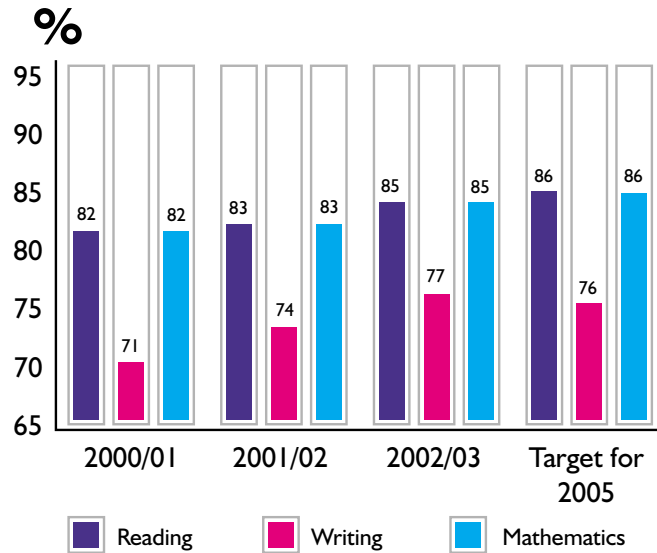
Our performance in national examinations at S4, S5 and S6 set by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Did you know that?

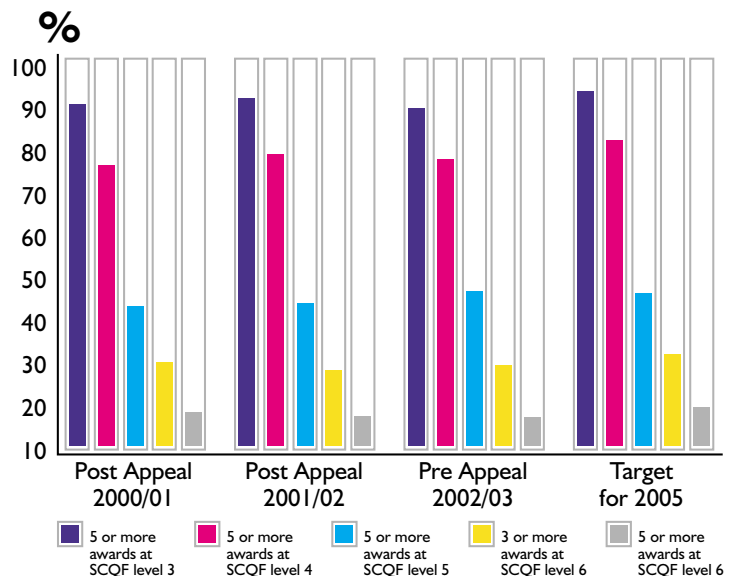
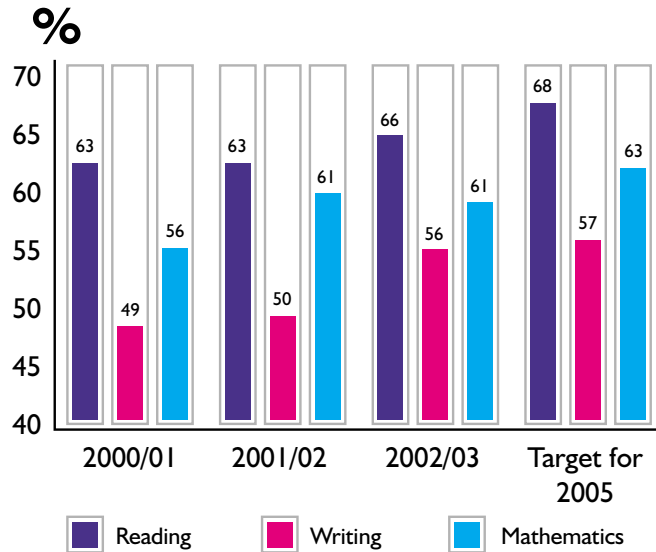
Over the last two years we have made progress towards some of our targets, but for others we have not yet been able to make the impact we would like. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more Standard grades at levels 1 and 2 has risen. The percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more Highers at levels A to C slipped, while the percentage of pupils achieving 3 or more Highers at level A to C rose in the last year.

We review subject results for each school and meet with staff to discuss how they can further improve, particularly in converting good passes at Standard grade to good Highers.

Percentage of primary school pupils reaching the level of achievement expected by the Scottish Executive



Percentage of secondary schools up to age 14 reaching the level of achievement expected by the Scottish Executive



SCQF stands for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5 are at Standard grade. SCQF level 6 is Higher grades at grades A to C.

How are we doing?

Additional funding

Did you know that?

We received extra funding from the Scottish Executive earlier this year. All of the services proved to be of great benefit and whenever needed we have found resources to continue providing these services. We used the extra funding to:

- give schools more money for staff training;
- extend the school day in special schools;
- provide more classroom assistants in primary and secondary schools to help children's learning;
- give all five to fifteen year olds free access to swimming pools (children under the age of eight must be accompanied by a parent). We continue to provide this service;
- provide free swimming lessons to many five to fifteen year olds;
- hold youth sports festivals in four different locations;
- offer sports activities to all primary schools;
- improve playground facilities at 16 primary schools;
- train 184 classroom assistants to help organise sports activities;
- give sports clubs equipment and offer free activities at Clyde Muirshiel Park;
- permanently install fresh, cold drinking water in 40 primary schools and 34 pre-5 establishments and we gave every child in those schools a water bottle to use;
- provide a piece of free fresh fruit daily for children in schools. We supplied fresh fruit daily to all primary and nursery pupils in Social Inclusion Partnership areas. It has been so successful, we have been able to extend it to other primary and special schools;
- improved footpaths adjacent to schools and safety barriers at school entrances.

Improving our buildings

Did you know that?

Paisley Grammar School

At Paisley Grammar School we made major improvements to the main building and added a new extension to help deliver a modern education for the school's 1,200 pupils.

The work on the main building created better facilities for the art & design, home economics and technical departments. There is also an improved environment for teaching and support staff.

The new extension provides extra information communications technology (ICT) rooms, science labs, classrooms and a base for religious education. It also contains two behaviour support rooms - to provide extra support for individual pupils, a special educational needs base and offices for visiting services like social work and health.

There is also a new sports hall, a larger library and social accommodation for pupils. A new, landscaped car park was built and campus security received improvements.

Kersland School

At Kersland School, improvements resulted in additional classroom space for senior pupils to help them practice life skills in an educational setting and give them better facilities to learn computing and home economics skills.

Arts for all

Did you know that?

We launched a new kind of arts festival which used "street" arts to engage with teenagers in their local communities and encouraged them to get involved in creative activities. These included break-dancing, digital imaging, web-design, deejaying and graf art. The highlight of the festival was a large-scale outdoor performance.

Our arts service focuses its resources on promoting social inclusion - involving all members of society so they can take advantage of learning, working and leisure opportunities - and raising achievement, with particular emphasis on working with boys. The results were very positive, with many more people participating than expected. Because of this, the project - "street-life" activities - is now open all year.

Better behaviour and learning in Renfrewshire

Did you know that?

During 2002/03 we developed a strategy to promote better behaviour and learning in Renfrewshire and last September we held a conference to raise awareness. We followed this up with training, and made resources available to promote inclusion and working together for young people.

What did we do?

We

- set up family support teams;
- improved in-school support facilities;
- increased classroom assistant support;
- increased numbers of specialist teachers for looked-after children;
- piloted 'Framework for Intervention'; and
- extended our range of alternative educational approaches.

For more information on education and leisure performance please phone Gordon Morton on 0141 842 5882, or e-mail him at Gordon.Morton@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Finance

Revenues and benefits

Our revenues and benefits services are responsible for ensuring we collect council tax in a way that is easy for you to access and to help you make payments promptly. Revenue and benefits services also make sure that the take up of council tax benefits for people who have lower incomes is as high as possible.

Council tax is needed to provide funds for the wide range of services that we are responsible for across Renfrewshire and will make up 20.3% of the budget for day-to-day services available to us during 2003/04.

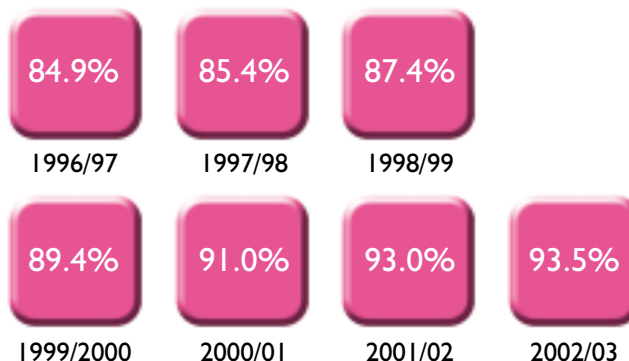
During 2002/03, we introduced a new computer system for the processing of benefits. As a result, our performance in processing new claims was slower than the national standards expected by the Department of Works and Pensions.

We are not happy with our performance in this service and have taken several steps to address this. We have employed additional benefits assessors who are currently being trained to improve our processing times. We expect that the new staff will ensure that our future processing times are better than the standards expected by the Department of Works and Pensions. In addition, we have employed temporary staff to assist with the current processing of our current backlog of claims which will reduce the impact on claimants. We expect to see clear improvements in our performance in the near future and will continue to monitor performance year on year reporting our improved performance to you.

Did you know that?

- During 2002/03 the Council collected 93.5% of the tax due within the year. This is an improvement on the previous year (93.0%) and means that the Council has been able to improve the percentage of council tax collected each year since 1996/97 when Audit Scotland introduced this performance indicator. Only four other councils in Scotland have been able to improve in this way each year.
- To make payments as convenient as possible, we accept payments by a range of different methods, for example, direct debit, credit and debit cards, telephone, website, post office and at our cash collection halls. Whenever possible we prefer people to pay by direct debit as it is the cheapest and easiest way for us to collect regular payments and provides our customers with a guarantee. We have successfully increased the use of direct debits.
- On our website (www.renfrewshire.gov.uk) we now provide a wide range of information and forms relating to council tax and council tax benefit entitlement. Our website also has a secure site through which payments for council tax can be made.

Percentage of council tax collected



Financial Services

Our professional services employees help to manage the money we have available in the best way possible. Professional services help departments set budgets and monitor their spending and at the end of each year they prepare our annual accounts.

Did you know that?

- We managed spending on our services within budget and contained capital spending - money we spend on projects that will last for a number of years, for example, school buildings, vehicles or road improvements - within the limits set by the Scottish Executive.
- Our working balances - money saved in previous years - have been maintained at acceptable levels. This helps us to have stable tax and rent levels in future years.

- Our commercial trading operations - who provide services like council housing, repairs and school catering - met all their statutory financial targets and made a contribution to our working balances.
- We were the first council in Scotland to complete our annual accounts. Audit Scotland approved the accounts as accurate.
- We continued to be one of the councils in Scotland to pay the lowest debt charges on the borrowing we use to finance capital projects. The average interest rate we pay is now 6.2% on our loans which total £282 million.
- We are making steady improvements in the time we take to process insurance claims. The average time to process insurance claims was 22 days which is 10 days less than last year.

For more information on finance services performance, please phone Richard Conway on 0141 842 5381 or e-mail him at finit@renfrewshire.gov.uk

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