

How are we doing?



Renfrewshire
Council



Councillor Jim Harkins
Leader of the Council

Tom Scholes
Chief Executive



Welcome to 'How are we doing?'

What's new?

Training for your benefit

We developed a training programme for 12 new benefits assessors which was so successful that the Institute of Rating, Revenues and Valuation gave it a 'commended' award. The assessors received training on all aspects of the job, including:

- our values and aims;
- how to use the benefits computer system; and
- good office practice.

Revenues succeed

Our revenues services have once again proved the quality of their service by keeping their Charter Mark award. Charter Mark assessors spent one and a half days examining how well our revenues services, who deal with Council Tax, business rates and other types of income, work.

Elaine McCue, Revenues Manager, commented: "It's great to see the efforts of all of our employees have been recognised. We'll continue to make every effort to keep up these standards and to improve them whenever we have an opportunity".

Prison project nominated

Our Rough Sleepers' Initiative has been nominated for the prestigious UK Housing Awards for their work with offenders. We have formed a partnership with the Scottish Prison Service which aims to prevent offenders from having nowhere to stay or moving from place to place when released from prison, and so helps reduce the number of people who return to crime. The team visit prisons to speak to offenders from the Renfrewshire area before they are released.

The prison project has been nominated for the 'Good practice in housing management and maintenance' category. The winner will be announced soon at an awards ceremony in London.

Controlling spending

A recent report by the Accounts Commission praised us, along with three other councils, for our high audit standards. For information on how we spend our budget, see the section of the magazine about our annual report.

Finance

Revenues and benefits

Our revenues and benefits services are responsible for making sure that we collect Council Tax in a way that is easy for you to access and help you make payments on time. They also make sure that as many people on lower incomes as possible receive Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit.

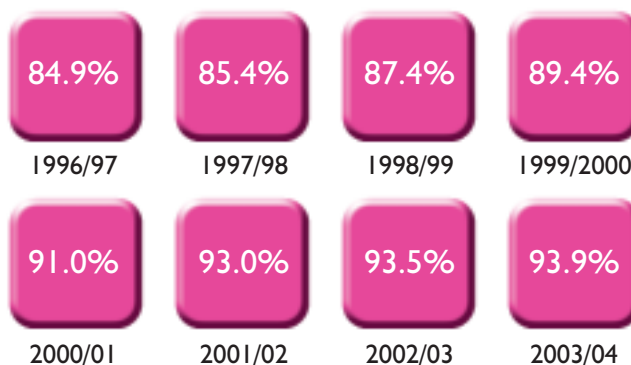
We need Council Tax to provide funds for the wide range of services that we are responsible for across Renfrewshire. It will make up 20.6% of the budget for day-to-day services that is available to us during 2004/2005.

Over the last year, we have improved our Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Service. The time we take to process benefit claims is now in line with the target time we have set ourselves. We work more closely with all of the outside agencies who help us to provide our benefits services, and we have made firm agreements with them on the best way for us to work together.

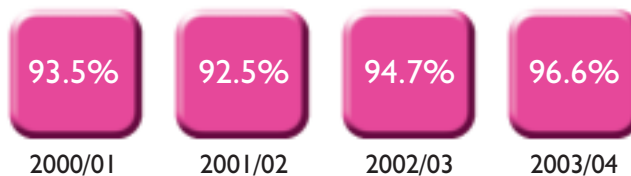
Did you know that?

- During 2003/2004, we collected 93.9% of the Council Tax due within the year (we have improved every year since 1996/1997) and 96.6% of business rates due within the year.
- We have continued to improve our range of payment options to make it as easy as possible to pay. We accept credit and debit card payments by phone, in person or by post. We accept payment through our website, at the post office, at paypoint outlets in local shops and at our cash-collection halls. Direct debit is the cheapest and easiest way for us to collect payments from you. We have made it even easier by introducing a facility to set up a direct debit over the phone and for the whole process to be dealt with electronically using the latest banking technology.
- We have plans to continue to improve the information and forms we provide on our website - www.renfrewshire.gov.uk - particularly in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Percentage of council tax collected



Percentage of business rates collected



Financial services

Our financial services staff help to make sure that the money we have available is managed in the best way possible. They help departments set budgets, and monitor their spending. At the end of each year, our finance staff prepare our annual accounts, which are inspected by an independent auditor.

Did you know?

- We successfully managed our resources in line with our budget.
- We have maintained our working balances (money we have saved in previous years) at acceptable levels. This helps us to have stable tax levels in future years.
- Our trading operations, which provide services like council housing repairs and school catering, met all of their legal financial targets and made a small contribution to our working balances.
- Audit Scotland, the local government watchdog, has approved our annual accounts.
- Councils borrow money to help fund capital projects like school buildings, new vehicles and road improvements. Through good financial management, we have managed to reduce our yearly cost of borrowing by almost £1 million.
- During 2003/2004, we paid 88% of our suppliers' invoices within 30 days, a 7% improvement on the previous year.

For more information on our financial performance, please phone Richard Conway on 0141 842 5363 or e-mail him at richard.conway@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Information Technology Services

Our information technology services staff help us make the best use of new technology, and of the technology we already have. We have a strategy called 'Reaching Renfrewshire' which outlines how we aim to use technology to improve our services to you.

By introducing an improved range of options for you to ask for our services or contact us for information on-line, we give you a greater choice and wider access.

Did you know?

- We developed our award-winning customer relationship management (CRM) system which holds details of what happens each time you contact us. This was launched in our customer contact centre in October 2000, and is now used by departments across the council. Over 150,000 customers have asked for services which are handled by the system. This makes sure that we can deal with any future requests as quickly as possible.
- We are currently working to expand our CRM system. This will make the system able to support our new customer service centre when it opens in 2006.
- We have improved customer choice by using the CRM system to support the range of options now available for

asking for services and receiving information. These include phone, website and e-mail, face to face, paper mail and even text messaging. We are also investigating the possibility of using citizens' account facilities. These allow you to register with us to have access to secure on-line services such as checking your Council Tax balance or looking at details each time you have asked for a service.

- We have started work to combine our current website www.renfrewshire.gov.uk and our pilot community website www.at-renfrewshire.org into a new community website. This will let you get information about our services and those of other public-sector organisations in Renfrewshire. Services such as health, community safety and further education will be included, along with plenty of local community information letting you know what's going on in your own area.
- We are improving on-line forms so you can ask for more services directly through the internet, rather than having to print off a form and send it in by post. This will mean that more of our services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Our information technology services staff are working with other departments to investigate and try out technologies which will give you more choice. For example, text messaging was recently introduced as a trial as a way of providing information to young carers and deaf people. We will use this more in the future.

For more information on information technology performance, please phone Tom Burns on 0141 842 5240 or e-mail him at tom.burns@renfrewshire.gov.uk.

Where else can you find out about how well we perform?

'How are we doing?' is just one way in which we report our performance. Here are some of the other ways.

- You can find copies of 'How are we doing?' on our website (www.renfrewshire.gov.uk).
- You can see our statutory performance indicators and targets on our website (www.renfrewshire.gov.uk).
- Our larger departments produce their own public performance reports each year. You can get current issues from the relevant department's reception area and Renfrewshire libraries. Or, you can phone David McCormick on 0141 840 3505 or e-mail him at chiefexec@renfrewshire.gov.uk
- Many of our reception areas display performance levels and targets for our main services.

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