

OUR SERVICES

How is the service information organised?

Service – this is the name for the overall service unit.

What we do – an explanation of what the service unit does.

We have – a brief explanation of what we did last year.

We have not – if necessary, a brief explanation of what we planned to do last year but did not complete.

We will – a brief explanation of the main activity over the next year – detailed information can be found in Technical Annex E: Service Action Plans

Accountancy & Audit**What we do**

The section provides a financial service to the Council.

A main responsibility is to produce and monitor the Council's budgets and to close the annual accounts in line with proper accounting practice. Another important area is the production and reporting of medium term financial projections. Other financial services provided include paying invoices, dealing with insurance claims and premiums, treasury management, banking, VAT and giving financial advice. The section also pays employees and members expenses. Internal audit undertakes a planned programme of work to evaluate the adequacy of internal control and to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

We have

Met last year's targets. Obtained a satisfactory report from the District Auditor on the Council's final accounts. There was also a satisfactory District Audit report on their review of Internal Audit.

We will

- Prepare revenue budgets for each service
- Prepare capital budget and monitoring information
- Produce information to allow the Council Tax to be set for 2004/05
- Complete the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2003/04
- Produce management information on the 2004/05 outturn
- Prepare an annual Audit Review Statement
- Implement an Audit Plan
- Produce a Pension Fund Annual Statement
- Work on the introduction of a Risk Management Strategy for the Council
- Start work on planning for the introduction of new financial systems
- Take on responsibility for the issue of Concessionary Fares

Building Control

What we do

The parent legislation is The Building Act 1984 which allows Building Regulations to be made to secure public health and safety in and around buildings, the conservation of fuel and power and to provide for access to and facilities within buildings for disabled people. The section is also responsible for securing dangerous buildings and discharging the Council's street naming and numbering functions.

We have

Targets were generally attained. It was not always possible to have a professional officer in Ebley Mill during all working hours. Attendance at dangerous structures, usually associated with a fire service request meant that on a limited number of occasions, the section was staffed by administrative team members only. However, the introduction of mobile phones by all visiting Building Control Officers means that, if necessary, a request for technical advice can be answered even if the officer is not in Ebley Mill. The disadvantage of this method is that the advice is not given to the customer face to face.

We have installed new computer systems.

We have equipped travelling Building Control Officers with portable computers to take advantage of new methods of working that will become available when our new computer systems go live.

We have coped with a 400% increase in search enquiries. We have handled over 1600 FENSA notifications. In the previous year we had none.

We have handled a workload that has increased by an average of 8% over the previous year.

We have held our prices for the forthcoming year.

We have assimilated a change in 4 parts of the Building Regulations.

We have developed recent recruits to successful completion of part of their professional qualifications.

We will

Go live on our new computer systems

Review administrative support functions to complement new systems

Seek to appoint staff to replace Building Control Officers who have taken up posts elsewhere

- Continue to target our resources towards the prime purpose of the section, delivering a Building Control Service.
- Continue to develop our staff.

Community Safety

What we do

Under the remit of the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, the Community Safety Department at Stroud District Council works in partnership with over 100 organisations and agency departments under the banner of the '*The Stroud Area Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership*'.

Its role is:

- To devise a three yearly Crime & Disorder Partnership Strategy and Action Plan & be instrumental in its delivery.
- To do all that can be reasonably done to reduce crime and disorder under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act.
- To bid for and distribute funds to prime schemes, which are geared to reduce crime and the fear of crime as a major part of their outcomes.

Our objectives are:

1. To reduce incidents of disorder
2. To reduce the number of offences relating to acquisitive crime
3. To reduce the availability and use of illegal drugs and the misuse of alcohol
4. To reduce the impact of crime & disorder on young people in the district
5. To reduce the incidents of violent crime within the district
6. To further develop the procedures to respond robustly and positively to racist incidents.
7. To ensure that all organisations involved in the crime and disorder partnership collates information in a compatible format.

We have

- Introduced and developed a Crime and Disorder Strategic Group
- Introduced three Tactical Groups based on the geographical areas of the three Inspector Neighbourhood areas of Stroud, Stonehouse and Dursley.

- Incorporated the subject-based groups of Substance Action, Safer Estates, Racial Incident, CCTV user groups and Anti-Social Behaviour for the Stroud District.
- Attained the prestigious Beacon accolade for Crime Reduction in Rural Areas.
- Introduced neighbourhood Wardens as a pilot scheme to the areas of Cam & Dursley and as a result of the schemes success, working with the Parish & Town Councils a further three wardens will be introduced in the coming year.
- The development and introduction of the Parish Council Cluster Group meetings to improve communication between Town and Parish Council with the Community Safety Partnership.
- Obtained funding from the Home Office for the further development of Stroud CCTV. This project was completed in the last year. In addition, we have secured Communities against Drugs and Partnership Development funding from the Government to fund community safety initiatives throughout the year.
- We have publicly launched the Cotswolds and Stroud Racist Incident Group
- We have taken every opportunity to raise awareness of issues pertaining to Community Safety by visiting groups ranging from Rotary through to older & young peoples groups to the churches of England.

We will

- Strive to maintain a standard which will place us in a good position to bid for the Crime Reduction Beacon award in round 5.
- Recruit and train a further three Neighbourhood Wardens for the Berkeley / Sharpness,
- Wotton Under Edge and Stonehouse areas.
- Expand and improve the CCTV programme in the district.
- Improve the reporting of racial incidents by playing a leading role in the Cotswold and Stroud Racial Incidents Group
- Improve the collation process of issues to be targeted by the Partnership
- Increase the number of local Parish & Town Council's participating in action delivery.
- Pump-prime new initiatives raised by the partnership.
- To be actively engaged in developing a merged process of working between the Crime and Disorder Partnerships for both districts.

Culture, Sport and Tourism

What we do

The Culture, Sport and Tourism service was created in June 2002 as a result of a Best Value Review. The purpose of the section is clearly linked to a number of the corporate aims but in particular the desire to create and expand recreational and cultural opportunities. In order to plan a clear way forward for the work of this section a strategy is currently being prepared within a regeneration and culture context. This will result in a series of action plans, which will be developed and delivered in partnership with a range of community organisations and key stakeholders. These include action plans for;

- Arts and Heritage
- Sport and Physical Activity
- Tourism
- Green Spaces

Each of these action plans will result in a community partnership being created, which will cumulatively link into regional and sub- regional structures to attract resources, coordinate and improve service delivery and raise the profile of the district.

The other services covered by the section are:- Leisure Services; Museum; Subscription Rooms; Regeneration Through Sport; Tourism; Green Spaces: and Facilities Management.

We have

- Carried out a scoping exercise for the Green Spaces Strategy which attracted a response rate of 25%
- Formulated a draft action plan for green Spaces based on the above which will be included in a consultation event in June
- Begun the process of consulting on the cultural strategy in terms of content and definitions

We will

- Produce a Cultural Strategy linked to the regeneration agenda
- Develop the four action plans that are listed above
- Facilitate four community partnership-working arrangements around these action plans
- Monitor and evaluate the success or otherwise of these plans

Democratic Services

What we do

Democratic Services hold a statutory duty to administer the constitution of the Council, Members, Directorates and the public. The officers of the service provide a vital link between central and local government and between the authority and elected members.

The section is responsible for:

Committee administration particularly with the preparation of agendas, reports and minutes for Council, Cabinet, Policy Panels and various Committees. All documents must comply with the specified corporate format and must be available for distribution within strict timetables. The team acts as a Hub for the Council by means of archiving all agendas, documents and minutes.

We attend about 120 meetings each year to provide an accurate report of discussions and decisions made. The Democratic Services team must also provide an efficient service of dissemination of decisions arising from these meetings to facilitate prompt implementation and progress chasing.

The development and enhancement of working relationships between the 51 Members, officers, external individuals and organisations. There is continual clerical support for elected members with the need to further develop member training.

We also monitor and review of the Members Code of Conduct as well as administer the reprographics for the authority.

We have

- All agendas, reports and minutes are available on the Internet.
- Initiated a member development and training programme.
- Provide internal and external research facilities for Scrutiny
- Produced a prospective candidate programme using video, poster and leaflet campaign
- Our video "A councillor – who me" is now a recommended for use in Citizenship classes as part of the National curriculum

We will

- Work with Members to produce a pocket guide for new councillors
- Disseminate documents via information technology to encourage a more self-sufficient elected member
- Create a prospective candidate pack for all Political parties
- Produce a Youth Council pack for schools in the district

Electoral Services

What we do

The Electoral Registration Service is responsible for the compilation of the electoral register used to enable the people of the Stroud District to cast their vote. Over 46,000 properties are recorded on our database registering over 87,000 electors. This includes the management of a rolling registration programme.

The administration of all elections held within the Stroud District or Parliamentary Constituency, forms the second main function of the section. District Council elections are held by thirds, concurrently with a third of the parish council elections for the area. There are 51 District Councillors, 49 parishes and 3 parish meetings. County Council elections are held once in every four year period electing 12 Councillors and European Parliamentary elections occur every five years electing Members under the system of proportional representation. Stroud is responsible for 1 Parliamentary Constituency whereby elections have no fixed timetable but are generally run every four to five years.

We have

In May 2002 we held a full District Council Election following the Periodic Electoral Review. This necessitated a polling station review to provide polling places for the newly created areas. The inclusion of maps on our poll cards proved very successful and with the creation of a *Walksort* database the postage was more cost effective. We introduced a new method of postal voting, using a one piece mailer, which was not only a more efficient way of issuing the postal votes but easier for the absent voter to use. Our turnout figure at this election, of 38.7%, was higher than usual, still keeping us as one of the highest in the South West. A Parish Review has also been carried out during 2002/2003.

The annual canvass in 2002 saw the introduction of an opt-out facility, whereby electors could choose whether their name appeared on either a full Register of Electors or an edited version. A leaflet, to explain the changes to the register, accompanied the registration form.

A roadshow was set up to coincide with Local Democracy Week, to encourage electors to register to vote.

Electoral Services retained their Charter Mark Award in December 2002.

We will

- Apply for pilot scheme status in order to offer extra voting facilities for the next election.
- Extensive advertising of the pilot scheme.
- Revise annual canvass form – to improve on returns statistics.
- Local Democracy Week - to encourage young voters and improve voter turnout.
- Assess our polling stations for disabled access.
- Work closely with minority groups.
- Prepare for the European Election – considering a further pilot scheme, if available.

Environmental Services**What we do**

The overriding aim of the Environmental Health Service is to safeguard and improve public health and the environment within the District by delivering the Council's Environmental Health responsibilities, which are predominantly statutory in nature. The service is managed by the Head of Environmental Health and the service is divided into 4 principal sections namely Food & Health and Safety, Environmental Protection, Housing Improvement and Environmental Contracts. An administration section provides administrative support to the unit.

We have

The section had successfully met its performance targets for food safety and health and safety inspection during 2002-2003. On 1 April 2002 the section had programmed 808 food premises inspections for the year and 257 health and safety inspections. Nevertheless, a large backlog of health and safety inspections exists as a result of reallocation of resources to other priority areas in previous years. Officers undertook to spend more time on health and safety enforcement activities during the year and adopted an alternative enforcement strategy in respect of low-risk premises – approximately 350 self-assessment questionnaires were sent to local businesses resulting in a 50% response rate. The survey revealed that the current database on commercial premises is out of date and further work is required to fully evaluate the resource implications for health and safety enforcement.

The service also met management targets in respect of food sampling activity, provision of training courses, accident and complaint investigation, provision of a reception for food safety award winners and the promotion of food safety and health and safety messages. However, due to pressures from other work areas officers did not carry out the prescribed number of peer-reviews. This will be corrected in 2003-04.

A new hazard pack for catering business proprietors has been delivered to over 200 caterers in the District. The pack is designed to enable proprietors to manage food hazards effectively and keep appropriate records of the controls they have implemented.

An inter-authority audit of the food safety enforcement function was carried out by officers from Cheltenham Borough Council and Cotswold District Council. The audit focused on food sampling procedures and on documentation and record keeping. A number of

recommendations were made which are being implemented.

A second survey of business proprietor's impressions of the service was undertaken in April-Sept 2002. 88% [107 of 122] of business proprietors thought the overall service provided was either good or excellent.

Staffing problems delayed the implementation of the contaminated land strategy. However with the appointment of a new contaminated land officer the identification of relevant sites and remediation work where necessary is now progressing well.

Participation in the DEFRA sponsored radon roll-out programme was commenced and visits to advise residents of properties where high radon levels have been detected on remediation measures are taking place.

With a full complement of staff all targets required of the Dog Warden Service were attained.

We will

- Implement the Environmental Health Best Value review improvement plan to meet the aim of continuous service improvement.
- Implement the new licensing regime following transfer of responsibilities from Magistrates courts to local authorities
- Adopt a new private sector housing renewal policy to help vulnerable householders in poor condition property
- Take part in a pilot project with the Environment agency involving recycling from farm plastics.
- Provide a paper and can recycling service for participating schools in the district.
- Encourage greater public participation in the kerbside recycling scheme.
- Implement the contaminated land strategy so as to identify and record contaminated land sites in the District and ensure remediation works are carried out when necessary.
- Help reduce the risk of flooding in the District through enforcement of the land drainage byelaws and prioritise resources for flood alleviation measures highlighted by the critical watercourse survey.
- Promote the bringing back into use of empty properties through a combination of targeted promotion, advice grant aid and enforcement as appropriate.
- Build on partnerships already established to deliver the affordable warm the strategy and actively seek to lever in external resources to help fund energy efficiency and awareness projects.
- Ensure food safety and hygiene standards are maintained in the District's food premises through inspection, education and enforcement as appropriate.
- Facilitate health and safety training opportunities for local businesses and inspect workplaces in line with the national strategy.
- Investigate complaints of nuisances arising from domestic and commercial premises and use the statutory powers available to remedy nuisances where appropriate.

Facilities Management

What we do

Facilities Management is both a support and a frontline service. It covers both day to day and strategic management of the council's operational buildings.

We have

- Throughout the year undertaken various functions as published in 2002. These being we have;
- Undertaken the Regeneration and Culture Health and Safety Audit
- Implemented and monitored Energy Consumption
- Developed Corporate Facilities Management
- Undertaken review and trial of new Caretaking Arrangements at Ebley Mill
- Co-ordinated Review and Relocation of Staff within Ebley Mill
- Co-ordinated Disposal and Relocation of Storage from Ebley Mill
- Continued to improve Mailroom Service
- Continued to manage the on site Catering Services

We will

- Undertake the 2003 Regeneration and Culture Health and Safety Audit and follow up its findings
- Continue to monitor the council's Energy Consumptions
- Expand on the development of Corporate Facilities Management
- Review the Caretaking Service at Ebley Mill
- Continue to improve Mailroom Services
- Investigate the possible impact of the LSVT of housing on Facilities Management Services within Ebley Mill.
- Oversee the changes following development of the Ebley Wharf
- Co-ordinate the council's Business Continuity and Emergency Plans
- Review and relet the on-site catering contract

Housing Management

What we do

To provide a high quality housing management and repairs service for Council tenants. To achieve this through trained staff committed to delivering a range of services to meet the needs of individuals and estates. Also to ensure the genuine opportunity for tenant involvement and to work in partnership with other agencies in seeking to improve these services.

We have

- Published a brand new version of the Stroud District Housing Partnership(Tenant Compact) for 2002/03.
- Worked with Hampton Waves Residents Association and several other agencies to produce the first Neighbourhood Agreement (Compact) in the District.
- Awarded a new communal Television Relay contract to embrace all the changes in future digital TV technology.
- Reduced total housing arrears for the fourth successive year.
- Empty property turnaround times surpassed target for the year.
- Reviewed and updated our compliance with the CRE Code of Practice in Rented Housing
- Reviewed and updated our anti - social behaviour procedures to embrace for example the use of anti-social behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts.
- Agreed and implemented a new 5 year Sheltered Housing Capital Improvements Programme.
- Completed installation of all but two of the all modules of the new Housing Integrated Computer system.
- Worked throughout the year with the Primary Care Trust to develop the Intermediate Care Initiative in selective sheltered schemes to provide accommodation between 'hospital and home ' for those with such needs.
- Installed pc's in all our sheltered schemes for the use of our Resident Scheme Managers and access for residents too; IT training has been provided to support this process.
- Established a Bogus Callers Initiative which has seen all 29 Sheltered Schemes have installed during the year a range of home safety kits.

We will

- Launch a second Neighbourhood Agreement (Compact) in Stroud in the early part of the year
- Complete the installation of the Housing Integrated Computer system
- Put into use the first Intermediate Care Initiative properties up to a maximum of 8 during the year
- Seek to expand the Bogus Callers Initiative work to general needs accommodation

Housing Strategy

What we do

In 2002/03 the Division was upper quartile performer for all but one of its Best Value Performance Indicators where comparative figures exist. For BVPI 63 (energy Efficiency rating of Council homes) the target for improvement was surpassed in 2002/03 and the Council's performance is now only just below the threshold of upper quartile.

For BVPI 184 (Decent Homes Target) the Council remains on course for achieving the national target of a 33% reduction in the number of non-decent local authority owned homes between April 2002 and March 2003.

We have

- Implemented the Government's rent restructuring requirements.
- Revised our programme of work to Council dwellings to achieve the Government's Decent Homes Standard and address all Catch-up repairs.
- Completed a Housing Options Appraisal following which Council decided to consult tenants on Transfer.
- Recruited a team to pursue the Council's selected option of Housing Transfer including Lead consultant; Legal advisors; Communications consultant; Independent Tenants' Advisor; Stock Condition surveyors to pursue the Council's selected option.
- Undertaken a Roadshow of information giving to tenants on Housing Transfer.
- Staff and Tenants' communication activity has been pursued through an adopted Communications Strategy.
- Undertaken a new Stock Condition Survey.
- Consulted Tenants and Councillors on Housing Transfer issues through Housing Consultative Working Group.
- Supported a Tenants' conference on form of new Landlord and Cabinet recommendation made to Council.
- Deferred Best Value reviews as a consequence of staff resources being diverted to Housing Transfer.
- Agreed and implemented a protocol agreed for dealing with domestic violence cases.
- Submitted a revised Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to GoSW by July 2003 deadline. "Above Average" rating achieved.
- Extended our Gas and Electrical responsive maintenance contracts following a benchmarking exercise.

- Introduced an addition to E-News to update Parish and Town Councils on Enabling initiatives and how to pursue them.
- Achieved implementation of the new Supporting People regime for April 2003.
- Developed, adopted and published a New Housing Allocations Policy.
- Completed the refurbishment of the Council's BL8 Aluminium Bungalows subject to snagging. Investigations ongoing into concerns over tenant liaison/satisfaction; contract management and contractor performance. Item scheduled on Forward Plan for future report to Cabinet.
- Re-launched Ark House in Stroud as an Assessment Centre for Young Single (and often Homeless) people.
- Completed an update of the Housing Needs Survey.
- Introduced a new staffing structure to address the Council's new statutory homelessness duties, including development of a homelessness Strategy.
- Prepare, publish and submit a revised Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- Prepare, publish and submit a Homelessness Strategy
- Review our Financial support to Registered Social Landlords following Government's confirmation of which Council prioritised projects will attract Transitional Local Authority Social Housing Grant in 2003/04.

We have not

- Prepared for Best Value reviews of Housing as a consequence of staff resources being diverted to Housing Transfer.

We will

- Finalise the Stock Condition Survey report
- Undertake a specialist survey of PRC homes
- Submit our annual report on Decent Homes to ODPM.
- Revise/Review our contract Management procedures
- Set up Shadow Board of new RSL
- Set up the New Landlord's legal entity
- Establish New Landlord key policies
- Continue Tenant consultation on Housing Transfer
- Develop Energy Efficiency Proposals.
- Develop Transfer proposal to tenants
- Organise a 'Tenants' Ballot on the Transfer proposal
- Reappoint consultants post-ballot
- Negotiate and determine the value of the Councils' housing stock for Transfer.
- Develop the New Landlord's Business Plan.
- Statistical appendices submission to GoSW
- Prepare, publish and submit a revised Housing Strategy

Human Resources

What we do

The Human Resource Service Unit provides the Council with the professional expertise to manage its business effectively through its investment in people.

The responsibilities of the Service include: advice on HR matters and employment law, corporate training, recruitment of staff and contracts of employment, human resource planning, job evaluation, welfare and counselling.

Legal duties include issuing a written contract of employment to all staff, job evaluation to aid equal pay considerations, criminal record and other reference checks, and completing various statistical returns for central government. Corporate responsibilities include maintaining the Council's Investor in People status, overseeing appraisals and production of the Corporate Training Plan, providing central training on personal and management skills, advice on terms and conditions of service, monitoring of sickness absence, development of HR policies and advice to Council, Cabinet and committees.

Services and individual responsibilities cover provision of central training events, recruitment and selection, advice and assistance in grievance and disciplinary cases, operation of maternity leave provisions, determining regrading applications, welfare advice, counselling and restructuring.

We have

- Been involved in the recruitment of 80 staff (between April 2002 and March 2003) including casual and temporary staff.
- Been re-accredited as an Investor in People organisation following an annual assessment.
- Produced and delivered an annual Corporate Training & Development Plan
- Implemented the Organisational Development programme.
- Introduced a Stress Policy and Action Plan
- Reviewed Short & Long Term Absence Policies

We will

- Seek re-accreditation as an Investor in People
- Produce a Corporate Training & Development Plan

- Produce a Corporate HR strategy as part of Best Value Review
- Assist in the production of an Equalities Scheme to meet the Council's duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act.
- Produce a recruitment policy and new guidelines and templates to streamline the recruitment process.
- Produce guidelines for managers on the new legislation for maternity leave and flexible working for parents.
- Continue to implement the Organisational Development programme.
- Carry out Working Life Survey in line with Stress Policy Action Plan.

Information Services

What we do

The information technology service exists to provide a range of information technology services. There are four principle divisions; customer engineering handling day to day needs of 420 users including training. System engineering which manages major application and helps implement new package systems with a focus on integration. The PC Development team provides technical PC based programming, internet and GIS services. The Network engineers manage the servers, security and networks.

- complete best value review
- extend remote support
- complete government funded projects
- complete planning GIS data capture
- procure new financial system
- improve on-line access to leisure facilities
- review backup and recovery strategy

We have

- maintained high availability of core systems
- implemented housing allocations system
- completed new housing system interfaces
- fully implemented IT help desk
- launched acclaimed Stroud Direct web site
- completed best value final report
- helped launch Wotton-under-Edge, Chalford access points
- worked with county partners to win additional government funding for improved access
- joined NLPG, NLIS, and LR Direct
- launch members portal
- launched new staff intranet
- installed PCs in 29 sheltered schemes
- upgrade internet access
- supported live web-cast
- installed high speed link to Sub Rooms

We have not

- implemented new housing rents system
- implemented new council tax / benefits system
- upgraded email system
- procured new financial management system

We will

- help with citizen access strategy
- work with supplier to implement new planning system
- implement new housing rents system
- implement new council tax / benefits system
- implement ICT asset management

Land Charges

What we do

The Land Charges section processes applications for local searches for prospective purchasers of property and land at the request of solicitors. This service is for people buying and remortgaging property or land in the Stroud District. An increasing number of enquiries are now being received via the Internet, rather than solely by post as used to be the case. Information is collated for the Local Search from the County Council, Building Control, Environmental Health and Planning. Their answers are then gathered, the Land Charge Register is searched and the answers are forwarded on the appropriate form and dispatched to the solicitor. There is a statutory national deadline of 10 working days for standard searches.

The Local Land Charges Register is regularly maintained in order to dispatch accurate searches.

We have

- Been preparing for applying for a Chartermark
- We have reached level 2 of the implementation of NLIS

We Will

- Work on achieving level 3 of NLIS
- By the summer implement a computer system to improve the land charges service and maintain the National Land and Property Gazetteer.
- Work on the continual and sustainable reduction in search turn around times

Legal Services

What we do

The Legal section provides legal advice and representation to all service units of the Council in a wide range of Council activity. Advice is also provided to elected members on request and at Council and Cabinet and Committee meetings. The section plays an important role in advising on the new political structures and in advising officers on new legislative changes in their areas of responsibility.

The Council's Legal Section, comprising 13 staff, has three main roles:

- a) to advise the Council, its Members and officers on the statutory framework regulating the role and work of the Council, (including the role of the Head of Legal Services as the Council's Monitoring Officer).
- b) to contribute to the sound management and administration of the Council (for example attending at Council, Cabinet and other meetings to ensure prompt procedural and legal advice is available on all matters).
- c) to assist in the Council's law enforcement role and generally to act as in-house lawyers for the wide range of activities undertaken by the Council. This includes such areas of work as conveyancing and general property development; litigation including criminal and civil actions, enforcement, prosecutions and general advocacy; planning and environmental law, contracts, procurement and anti-social behaviour orders
- d) The Head of Legal Services holds the post of the Council's monitoring officer.

We have

- Completed several large commercial transactions on behalf of the Council
- Appointed a Legal Services Manager to modernise our practice management standards.
- Began the work towards LEXCEL accreditation
- Carried out a Best Value Review of the service
- Produced a 'who does what' guide for the intranet

We will

- Gain the Law Society's Lexcel award
- Send out regular legal briefings
- Improve our client focus
- Provide more legal training
- Develop more effective working with outside organisations and solicitors

Leisure Services

What we do

The delivery of leisure service is a discretionary service, however the benefits the service brings contributes to a number of the Council core objectives.

The service exists to enable the people of the District to partake in leisure activities of their choice. In doing so not only do they improve their physical well being, they improve their confidence and self esteem.

The current service is primarily 'facility based' represented by the two principle sites of Stratford Park Leisure Centre and Dursley Pool . These two sites are supported by a network of Joint Use Sports Centres which provide limited facilities to the various small communities located in the District. These centres are based in Dursley, Wotton, Stonehouse, Nailsworth, Berkeley and Eastcombe.

The management of the service is separated into 3 main trading areas. Stratford Park Leisure Centre, Dursley Pool and Sports Centre, and Joint Use Sports Centres. A private company CCL Leisure manages Stratford Park, whilst the Council manages both Dursley Pool and Sports Centre and the Joint Use Sports Centres 'in house'.

The section also manages and owns several areas of Commons and Woodlands, some of which are managed by agencies on behalf of the Council.

We have

- Organised a team to represent Stroud in the Western County Youth Games held at Millfield School.
- Undertaken a 2-week Health and Fitness tour across the District between 10th –21st June 2002.
- Completed some improvements at our Joint-Use Sports Centre including a new boiler at Wotton Sports Centre and new car park at Thomas Keble Leisure Centre.
- We have recruited a new 'Regeneration through Sport Manager'.
- Completed a £1 million investment programme at Stratford Park Leisure Centre that included refurbishment of the centre's changing accommodation and a series of improvements to make the centre fully accessible by disabled people.
- Organised the annual Stroud District Primary School Soccer Tournament culminating in the final at Stratford Park Leisure Centre
- Undertaken 3 fitness testing days at 3 local companies in the District.
- Provided new fencing at Wotton Outdoor Pool
- Worked in partnership with Maidenhill School to secure New Opportunities funding for investment in the facilities at Maidenhill Recreation Centre.
- Provided new skating facilities in Stratford Park in a joint partnership with Stroud Town Council and the District Councils' Youth Council.

We have not

- Made any progress in working in partnership with Dursley Town Council to provide an ATP (Artificial Turf Pitch) on the Dursley Recreation Field - Delayed by Tesco development.
- Provided improved IT communication at Joint Use Sports Centre – Funding not available
- Carried out plans to provide a new pool surround at Wotton Pool – Works deferred to 2003 close season.

We will

- Improve CCTV coverage and security across a number of our Joint-Use Sports Centre sites.
- Continue negotiations with Maidenhill School to provide a new sports hall for community use.
- Undertake research at Leisure facilities in the Berkeley area with a view to identifying shortfall in service provision.
- Undertake a Best Value review of leisure services.
- Seek to obtain accreditation for Aqua Mark for swimming tuition at Dursley Swimming Pool
- Actively seek to undertake more corporate fitness testing days
- Develop a Web Site specifically for Stratford Park
- Continue working in partnership with Wotton Community Sports Foundation to create additional sports facilities at New Road, Wotton.

Museum Service

What we do

The museum service is a discretionary public service provided by means of a partnership between Stroud District Council and the Cowle Trust (a registered charity). The Council provide the management and funding for the service and the Cowle Trust are the legal guardians of the collections.

In 2000 a new corporate mission and aims were developed.

Mission – inspiring people to explore the past, understand the present and imagine the future.

Aims

The service delivers its mission by:

- 1 Encouraging people to find out about the people and place of Stroud district through our Collections and services.
- 2 Collecting and recording evidence of the lives and achievements of the people of this area, its special identity and environment in a time of constant change.
- 3 Managing the Collections to the recognised national standards to ensure their preservation for future generations.
- 4 Basing all our services on developing knowledge and expertise.
- 5 Providing:
 - a) A place to which people will want to return
 - b) A place from which people will want to explore the local environment and the world beyond
 - c) Cultural opportunities which act as a catalyst for learning and enjoyment

We have

- Led the development of a multi-agency lifelong learning partnership called Digital Stroud and successful funding bids to the Learning & Skills Council and the South West Museums, Libraries & Archives Council.
- Developed targeted, repeatable activities based on the Collections.
- Established the Museum as a venue for adult learners by developing partnerships with ACET consortia.

- Established partnerships with other providers to market and deliver public programmes.
- Exceeded user satisfaction targets and improved on last year's ratings.
- Exceeded usage and visitor targets as a result of the Council's investment in extended opening hours and free admission.

We will

- Continue to develop the collections and record evidence of the lives and achievements of the people of this area, its special identity and environment (eg by implementing and publishing an adult education/ oral reminiscence project based on World War II)
- Create and deliver new digital learning resources (Digital Stroud website and downloadable resources and a series of short courses) for learners of all ages and abilities.
- Develop skills within the Digital Stroud partnership to ensure that the approach is sustainable.
- Devise learner-centred marketing and delivery strategies to ensure that Digital Stroud reaches basic skills learners within deprived wards (eg by consulting client groups and providing childcare and transport solutions).
- Host this year's Stroud Valleys Arts Festival exhibition.
- Work in partnership with other stakeholders to market and develop the Museum & Stratford Park as an attraction (eg by improving signage).
- Initiate feasibility studies on a package of capital proposals to house the museum's collections and facilities on one site a Stratford Park. These proposals are likely to release significant levels of revenue funding (currently associated with fixed premises costs) which could be reinvested in major improvements in service delivery (education, outreach, marketing, customer care, public access, provision of refreshment facilities and standards of collections care & management) and the Museum's ability to generate income.

Planning

What we do

We provide a full statutory planning service for the District. This includes all aspects of Development Control, Planning Strategy, Trees and Landscape and Conservation.

We have

- Achieved the construction of 67% of houses in the last year on brownfield land. This is impressively high. The national target is 60% countrywide. It is recognised that rural areas do not have the same ability as urban areas to meet this target and therefore the performance in 2002/03 of 67% is testimony to the effectiveness of the emerging Local Plan allocations and phasing policies.
- Determined 71% of planning applications within 8 weeks. This is impressive given the increasing levels of applications received during the year especially in the last quarter. However, government amended this indicator, and have now set a series of more complex, but no less challenging, targets. Measures have been taken internally to move towards these targets, the biggest push in this direction has come from the increase in delegated powers. Unfortunately, the last quarter of 2002/03, saw a significant drop off in performance, this was due to several factors including a significant workload increase including more major applications. The service is also currently commissioning a new computer system which has committed a great deal of staff time to training, but in the long term is set to make significant performance improvements. Staff turnover and recruitment problems have been as challenging locally as they have been nationally, but a period of stability will contribute greatly to future performance.
- Defended planning appeals successfully - the percentage of appeals dismissed in 02/03 has dropped to 55% from a last year high of 77%. The current figure is 9% below the national average. Appeal decisions totalled 82 in the year. Most authorities expect to experience an improvement at appeal once a Local Plan is adopted. Given the total numbers of appeal decisions it only takes a relatively modest number to be allowed and the percentage figure drops significantly. It is anticipated that performance in this area will improve substantially in the following year.
- Adopted Interim Planning guidance on affordable

housing that has been supported by a revised Housing Needs Assessment. Both are key elements in order that the District Council can contribute towards balancing housing markets within the district.

- Commenced the Local Plan Inquiry in January 2002 – this is now estimated to formally close in June 2003, and continues the important process of moving Stroud towards having an adopted Local Plan.

We will

- Adopt the Local Plan
- Publish a Local Development Scheme in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill
- Go live with the new computer system and integrate its operation with the NLPG
- Secure high quality designed development
- Maximise the provision of affordable housing
- Maintain the level of delegated planning decisions at 90%
- Meet govt targets for determining planning applications
- Contribute to AONB management
- Prepare development briefs for major sites.
- Monitor housing and employment
- Update the Interim Planning Statement on affordable housing
- Produce new guidance notes on the historic environment
- Produce new guidance notes on tree protection
- Continue to review area TPO'S
- Develop the information contained on the Website and move towards online planning applications
- Contribute to the development of a Green Spaces Strategy for the District
- Work with partners to develop an interim planning statement on canal restoration
- Contribute to the ongoing development of the Community Strategy
- Provide assistance to Town and Parish Councils when preparing Parish Plans
- Formalise procedures for offering a development team approach for major applications
- Publish a Development Control Charter
- Review the Urban Capacity Study
- Present the case for the District Council at the Glos Structure Plan 3rd Alteration examination in public

Policy & Review

What we do

The overriding aim of Policy & Review is to provide leadership and project management for a number of corporate strategies including the undertaking of Best Value reviews. Policy & Review is essentially a delivery mechanism for the Government's Modernisation Agenda. The overall objective of the Policy & Review team is to ensure that Stroud District Council is turning its corporate objectives and priorities into action. The key tasks are

- Policy Research
- Community Strategy
- Consultation
- Best Value advice and BVPP production
- Scrutiny Inquiries and development
- Business Planning and Performance Management
- Monitoring the Public Service Agreement
- Eco-Management and Audit Scheme
- Equalities

We have

- Coordinated and provided advice for Best Value Reviews in Professional Support Services, Protecting Stroud's Environment, Member and Democratic Services.
- Produced a Best Value toolkit for use in Best Value Reviews in 2003/4.
- Carried out a feasibility study into a hydro scheme.
- Worked with the Local Strategic Partnership to produce a Community Strategy.
- Worked with the County and District Council's in Gloucestershire to put a successful Public Service Agreement bid to the Government.
- Published an Equality Scheme that ensures that we do not discriminate in our services or practices.
- Worked with the Scrutiny Committees to undertake 6 inquiries into issues chosen by the committees.
- Provided training on performance assessment to members of scrutiny committees.
- Produced guidance on consultation.
- Carried out research into policy issues such as GATS, and Voluntary Sector Compacts.

- Carried out a top management review of the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme.
- Produced a socio-economic profile of the district.
- Reported on Council performance throughout the year.

We have not

- Conducted an initial self-assessment as part of a Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- Implemented the Consultation Strategy

We will

- Coordinate and provide advice for Best Value Reviews in Community Services, Corporate Governance, Active Leisure, and Building Control.
- Review and update the Community Strategy.
- Continue work on the Equality Standard.
- Coordinate a diversity training programme for all staff and Councillors.
- Coordinate the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process.
- Coordinate the Best Value Satisfaction Surveys.
- Review and update the EMAS manual.
- Review and update the performance management framework.
- Implement a corporate approach to consultation.
- Provide induction training to scrutiny members.
- Provide training to Cabinet on performance assessment.
- Complete a Compact with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Public Relations

What we do

- Ensure a corporate approach to public relations and marketing
- Provide advice and practical assistance on PR as requested
- Manage and edit the contents of the Council website, intranet and members' intranet
- Provide a graphic design service to all service units
- Operate the Stroud District Youth Council
- Civic Twinning with Landkreis Gottingen
- Emergency Management – provision of assistance to the emergency services in the event of a civil emergency

We have

- Developed a corporate marketing plan
- Had our website independently assessed as the best local authority website in the country
- Relaunched the staff Intranet as “The Hub”
- Managed the Jubilee Grant Scheme
- Managed Party in the Park - attended by 10000 people
- Arranged a Civic visit to Germany
- Organised Emergency Management exercises
- Published the BVPP summary version
- Employed a part-time youth worker to facilitate the Youth Council

We will

- Implement the corporate marketing plan, specifically:-
- Launching a Welcome Pack for new residents
- Launching a regular residents' newsletter
- Launching a new staff induction pack
- Aiming to introduce permanent webcasting of meetings
- Producing a corporate video for schools and community
- Aim to maintain the status of our website
- Produce a design guide for our corporate identity

Regeneration

The regeneration service was formed in 2002 to provide a new focus for the Council in terms of the use of its resources for implementing and facilitating regeneration schemes and community partnerships for the whole District. It comprises two main areas, regeneration and estate management.

The main purpose of the **regeneration team** is to increase the vitality and viability of market towns and rural areas within the district by improving retail competitiveness, creating new business and employment opportunities, encouraging new services and facilities. Making links between towns and the countryside is an integral part of this activity. **Estate management** is both a support and a front-line service. Through both the day to day and strategic management of the Council's property the team enables other services in achieving their objectives. The service also contributes to the Council's corporate objectives through the direct management of its 'commercial' property portfolio e.g. off-street car parks.

The work of the service falls into 7 main areas of responsibility:

1. market towns
2. rural communities
3. infrastructure/transport
4. business and the local economy
5. property management
6. car parks and markets
7. building maintenance

The aim of the team is to provide an economic and community development service for the district and to manage the Council's property in the most effective and efficient manner to enable it to meet its corporate objectives. It endeavours to achieve this by:

- developing and delivering the authority's regeneration strategy in consultation with key internal and external stakeholders
- developing and supporting new partnerships particularly around market towns and the business community
- providing a high quality, efficient asset management service for the Council's land and property

- providing an effective building maintenance and architectural service for the Council's non-housing property
- effective monitoring and control of off-street parking on Council owned car parks

In addition it is essential that stakeholders, including members of the community become more involved in regeneration projects in their widest sense. New projects and priorities will be developed in conjunction with community partnerships, which consider how the towns and rural areas function and are changing. These new partnerships will be expected to develop a detailed understanding of community needs in their area(s) and produce plans which help tackle key issues and provide clear direction and focus for activity.

We have:

- produced a draft regeneration strategy for consultation and established a new regeneration team which has been organised to respond to the strategic objectives in a consistent and co-ordinated way.
- both Stroud and Cam/Dursley have achieved MCTi status and we have worked alongside Glos. Market Towns Forum to assist the development of these new community partnerships
- made significant progress on delivering key regeneration proposals namely Dursley Supermarket The Weaver's House, Dursley and Stroud Cinema.
- worked with the relevant Parishes and County Council to submit Rural Transport bids for two clusters within the District and supported the 'Wotton hopper' bus
- developed a healthcheck system for Towns (expansion of current footfall counts) and programme of implementation.
- started supporting the development of town appraisals/health checks in Stonehouse, Nailsworth and Wotton-Under-Edge
- relaunched the existing shop front improvement scheme to allow all market towns in the District to benefit.
- submitted a bid to the South West Regional Development Agency's rural renaissance fund

- undertaken condition surveys of the Council's property portfolio and gained additional funding to expand the planned maintenance programme
- obtained a 'good' rating (the highest achievable) for our asset management plan from the Government Office
- completed capital projects to Church Street Car Park, Stroud and Market Street Improvements, Nailsworth
- progressed the Council's property disposals programme

We have not

- assisted in the development of a regeneration strategy for Berkeley and Sharpness, this will be picked up later this year
- developed a town centre management strategy for the District, but we have started to assist and support towns to develop individual strategies appropriate to their circumstances
- investigated and reported on the externalisation of the car park service, this has been delayed but an initial report went to June Cabinet this year and a further report will be considered in 2004

Revenue & Benefits

What we do

The Revenue and Benefit Service provides a front line customer service for Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefits. We aim to maximise income collection; correctly and promptly award Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to those in need; and prevent and detect Housing Benefit fraud. We also provide a corporate reception, cashier and switchboard service.

We have

Performance

Achieved excellent collection rates and improved the turnaround of benefit cases.

Introduced the facility to pay by debit and credit cards either by telephone or by internet.

Exceeded the fraud detection target set by Government.

Increased direct debit take and now over 62% of our Council Tax payers use this method of payment.

Produced a new countywide Council Tax and Business Rates leaflets combined with best value in partnership with the other Gloucestershire Districts, the County and the Police, giving more interesting and relevant information to our customers.

Staff issues

Joined with other Gloucestershire districts to provide a partnership for revenue and benefits training.

Appointed a Customer Services Officer to supervise the staff issues on the Citizens First project Access to Services.

Recruited and trained new Benefit staff to deal with the additional workload created by Tax and Pension credits

Service delivery

Opened a Contact Centre in Wotton Under Edge every Tuesday morning to improve access to our services.

Installed an interactive kiosk facility suitable for wheelchair users in Chalford giving customers access to the Internet.

Sponsored a member of staff to learn sign language to help customers with hearing difficulties.

Worked in partnership with the other Gloucestershire districts to promote the take up of housing benefits.

We will

- Improve our service by implementing new computer systems including document image processing and workflow for council tax and housing benefits in July 2003.
- Maintain collection rates for council tax, business rates and housing benefit overpayments.
- Continue to develop our service delivery to our customers through the front line Citizen's First project.
- Continue to promote housing benefit to increase take up.
- Introduce the new housing benefit Performance Framework principles to improve standards for CPA
- Increase direct debits to keep collection costs down
- Implement the action plan on Equality Issues for the service.
- Ensure that all staff are fully trained in Fraud awareness.

Subscription Rooms

What we do

Present the widest range of arts and entertainment, both participatory and non-participatory, for the people within the Stroud District, taking into consideration the social and geographical make-up of the area

The service will concentrate on working with local professional and community groups to promote arts and entertainment at the Subscription Rooms. The events will be focussed around use of the Ballroom – the foremost performing space in the district – with complementary use of the George Room for exhibitions and workshops and the second floor studio rooms for workshops.

The Subscription contributes to the evening economy of the town and enhances the quality of life in the area.

The Subscription Rooms has an important role as a meeting place for the local community, for talks, community meetings and fundraising events.

We have

- Increased the use of the venue hosting 510 events during the year, including arts, business and community events. 325 of these were performances and arts workshops and there were 56 exhibition days.
- Developed the performance programme, working with professional and non-professional promoters:
- Introduced a new chamber music series for Sunday afternoons in association with Stroud & District Arts Festival
- Promoted a week-long songwriting and performance course for young people in the summer
- Expanded the workshop programme to include life drawing and yoga
- Promoted world music and folk, jazz, community based theatre, contemporary dance, a major New Year's Eve dance and a series of afternoon tea dances.
- Hosted Saturday street entertainment on the Forecourt
- Fitted out the ground floor café bar and appointed a bar manager to run the bars in-house.

We have not

- Improved the seating, sound and lighting facilities in the Ballroom
- Developed a workshop or performance programme for children

We will

- Work with local promoters who hire the Subscription Rooms to ensure that all public performances are presented (i.e. marketed, staged and staffed) to the highest possible quality and with a consistently high standard of customer care.
- Work with local artists who hire the George Room to ensure that all public exhibitions are presented (i.e. marketed and displayed) to the highest possible quality and with a consistently high standard of customer care.
- Promote up to 30 professional performing arts events/workshops per year to enhance the programme and reputation of the Subscription Rooms
- Develop café service to provide Saturday morning refreshments during the summer months
- Work on improving and expanding performance facilities and in the Ballroom.