

Community & Customer Services - Information Sheet

Strategic Head of Customer Services – Joanne Jordan

Contact: 01453 754005 or joanne.jordan@stroud.gov.uk

Joanne manages Community and Facilities, Cultural Services, Customer Services and Public Spaces.

These services are wide and varied public facing services.

Community and Facilities

Community and Facilities Manager – Mike Hammond

Contact: 01453 754447 or mike.hammond@stroud.gov.uk

Mike manages the Community and Facilities Service the work of the service contributes toward ensuring that the national crime and disorder agenda is delivered throughout the work of the authority. The facilities side of Mike's role manages the council's properties such as Ebley Mill, council car parks and the markets.

Principle Community & Facilities Officer – Mike Towson

Contact: 01453 754336 or michael.towson@stroud.gov.uk

Mike is a deputy for the service in Mike Hammonds absence, his primary role is the line management of the Senior Community & Facilities Officer, the Senior Careline Officer and the Senior Neighbourhood Wardens.

Facilities

- Leisure facilities – Stratford Park Leisure Centre (externally managed) and 2 Joint Use Sites.
- Cornhill and Shambles Markets (with Asset Management)
- Ebley Mill including catering, car parks, caretaking and mail room. (Maintenance with Asset Management).
- In 2016/17 joint lead with Asset Management on the next stage of the office accommodation review

Community Safety

The Council is represented on the following groups by different Officers from Community and Facilities depending on their specialist role

- Stroud Community Safety Partnership
- Cotswold and Stroud Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Hate Crime Group
- Joint Cluster Group

- Community Safety Officers
- Safer Estates and Anti-social Behaviour
- CCTV (Dursley & Stroud)

Mike deals/responds to policy issues on Community Safety and Crime and Disorder throughout the district.

He manages

- The budget for the Police Crime Commissioners grant to the Community Safety Partnership with a working group of senior police, health and county officers.
- Youth funding allocation with Steve Miles

Senior Careline Officer – Mike Godwin

Contact: 01453 754149 or mike.godwin@stroud.gov.uk

Careline is a personal alarm and monitoring service that can help people in older age to live a more independent life for as long as possible. We currently have 1674 Careline Units in the district these support 2076 residents; Careline can be bought for £160.00 + £1.60 per week or rented for £3.32 per week.

Last year we installed 368 Careline units within the Stroud district and in the South Cotswolds.

One of the key rolls of the Careline Service is to work as sign-posters to other services consisting of Crime Prevention, home security checks by the Neighbourhood Wardens, referring people for Attendance Allowance via the Department for Work and Pensions, and advising customers about aids for their home i.e. handrails, raisers on chairs and handrails on stairs, and also making sure they are adequately supported.

Neighbourhood Wardens

The Neighbourhood Warden Service operates across the district with the overall aim of maintaining and improving the safety of our communities; as well as supporting our more vulnerable members and improving the quality of life for those living in the Stroud district.

The team of 8 focuses on helping to reduce crime, assist anyone who feels vulnerable including older people and young people, as well as responding to low level anti-social behaviour issues. The team work closely in partnership with many other agencies ranging from the police to village agents.

Senior Community & Facilities Officer

Ashley Nicholson

Contact: 01453 754522 or ashley.nicholson@stroud.gov.uk

Ashley coordinates the delivery of parking Services on behalf of the Council for all off-street car parks. He leads a team of 3 Civil Enforcement Officer's who are responsible for parking enforcement.

Ashley also has responsibility for dealing with all reports of Abandoned Vehicles in the district. Ashley is supported by the Neighbourhood Warden service that helps with inspections on the status of vehicles, and if required, he works with vehicle owners/contractors to arrange their removal.

Senior Emergency Planning Officer – Nikki Humphries

Contact: 01453 754455 or nikki.humphries@stroud.gov.uk

- Responsible for ensuring the Council complies with its duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Responsible for maintaining the councils business continuity plan
- Coordinate the councils response to bad weather
- Link in with multi agency partners via the Local Resilience Forum
- Provide advice and assistance to the councils controller and response teams
- Manages the Community and Facilities business support team

Senior Youth Officer (Hear by Right) – Steve Miles

Contact: 01453 754504 / 07896 690140 or steve.miles@stroud.gov.uk

Responsible for

- Community based youth programmes that enable young people to have a voice and be heard on issues affecting them, delivering Hear by Right standards for youth participation.
- The strategic and operational development of Stroud District Youth Council and the Local Youth Forum groups.
- The co-ordination of the district youth grant funding programme.
- The overall facilitation of the Council's Youth Work Strategy.
- Delivering professional advice on youth and community work issues for the Council's services and also through local youth partnerships, Parish and Town Councils and youth project management committees.
- Representing the Council on the Gloucestershire Children and Young People's District Network Group.

Cultural Services

General Manager of Dursley Pool and Sports Centre – Angela Gillingham

Contact: 01453 540995 or angela.gillingham@stroud.gov.uk

- Manages Dursley Pool
- Manages Dursley Sports Centre

Angela is managing the development of the fitness extension which has been renamed as the Pulse Dursley from July 2016.

Priorities for 2016/2017

- Opening of the new centre on time and budget (July 2016)
- Organisation of official launch in October 2016
- Development of the centre programme
- Development of the team

- Increasing income in order to work towards becoming self sufficient as a business
- Introduction of the continuous learn to swim programme
- Renegotiation of the Joint Use contract

General Manager of Subscription Rooms and TIC – Paul McLaughlin
Contact: 01453 760991 or paul.mclaughlin@stroud.gov.uk

- Manages Subscription Rooms
- Manages TIC
- Manages Old Town Hall (with Asset Management).

The Subscription Rooms is the main artistic venue in the heart of Stroud. We present a varied programme of performances, classes and events. Mr Twitchett's Coffee House and Bar, tucked in at the back of the building, is growing in reputation and becoming an important part of our business.

2015/16 Highlights

3rd Theatre Festival was a great success with audience numbers up by 535 to 1989, an increase of 37%. This event is held at Sub Rooms and a number of smaller venues around the town.

The number of shows/events in the programme, not including classes and workshops, has increased by 34 to 180, fulfilling our desire to present as broad a programme as possible.

Tourist Information Centre continue to deal with an average of approx 5150 customers visiting in person per month as well as over 570 phone calls.

Priorities for 2016/17

Continue to develop the Subscription Rooms 'offer' including but not solely by:

- using the venue and Old Town Hall to help local professional and community organisations present a rich and varied programme of work, develop their audiences and increase the cultural output of the town and the district.
- providing box office services to more external venues and organisations to not only increase our income streams but also to build the connections between local companies and venues, allowing us to work better together to increase the cultural offer of Stroud and the district
- increasing the amount and diversity of work offered by local companies/individuals at the venue to help develop local audiences to the overall benefit of the night time economy.
- continue to improve the business in Mr Twitchett's Coffee House and Bar, making it a destination for non-performance customers through interesting menu options, great service and a series of live, free events
- building strong relationships with nationally recognised ensembles, e.g. Orchestra of St John's, European Union Chamber Orchestra and major brass bands to bring world class music to the venue.
- Make full use of the recently installed soft proscenium on the ballroom stage to further develop the theatre strand of our programme

Museum Development Manager – Kevin Ward

Contact: 01453 763394 or kevin.ward@stroud.gov.uk

- Manages Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Service
- Museum in the Park
- Collection Stores

15/16 Headlines

- Visitors: 50,000 visits to the Museum, including 2,000 on the learning programme.
- Walled Garden: Completion of the new Entranceway from the Museum to the Garden. Planting phase has begun.
- The Walled Garden Project has attracted some £450,000 in external funding.

Major projects for 2016/17

- Complete other works and open the Walled Garden to the general public. Currently used by those booking learning programme.
- Maintain monitoring of tenancy at the School of Science and Art, Lansdown (one of the collection stores) with support from Asset Management.
- Continue to raise awareness, access and use of stored collections by the public, other staff and volunteers.
- Complete Accreditation (national standards for museums) return.
- With other Glos. District partners deliver outputs from Gloucestershire Archaeological Archives Working Party (including funding application for external support).

www.museuminthepark.org.uk

www.twitter.com/museuminthepark

www.facebook.com/themuseuminthepark

www.instagram.com/museuminthepark

Public Spaces

Public Spaces Manager – Carlos Novoth

Contact: 01453 754406 or carlos.novoth@stroud.gov.uk

- Manages the Public Space Service – this includes refuse, recycling, street cleaning, building cleaning, provision of public conveniences, grounds maintenance, Stratford Park, open and closed cemeteries, woodland and commons and management of trees, play areas. These services fall, mainly, under the remit of the Environment Committee.
- Public Space Services has during the past 18 months undertaken a review of all the services covered by the current Multi Service contract with a 'Task and Finish' group consisting of cross party Members and Officers. Whilst the review has now been completed, the working group has continued to oversee service implementation.
- Two of the five planned service changes have now been introduced – these include charging for bulky waste and the introduction of a new charged for garden waste service.

Major projects for 2016/17

- Three further service changes are planned within the Multi Service Contract; these include a restructuring of the collection rounds involving collection day changes and a move to two weekly landfill collections and weekly food waste collections – all are due to be implemented later in 2016. A move into the council's new depot is anticipated early in 2017.
- Review the council's public convenience service with a view to reducing costs without a reduction in service standards.
- Having formally adopted a tree policy, we are due to develop and subject to a tender process, tree management and maintenance contracts that will enable all service areas within the council to use. For the first time, Parish and Town councils will also have access to the favourable contract rates which will help reduce overall tree management and maintenance costs.
- A sponsored roundabout scheme is also planned to improve the visual aspects of the route from the M5 Motorway to Stroud. Costs for introducing the improvements to the roundabouts and surrounding areas will be financed through business sponsors.

Customer Services

Customer Services Manager - Shobhan Sen

Contact: 01453 754700 or shobhan.sen@stroud.gov.uk

For our customers the Customer Service Centre is the face of the Council whether they visit Ebley Mill or phone/text/email/write to/tweet us.

We receive an average of 12,000 calls a month, deal with 1,700 visitors and 1500 emails. This equates to 600 calls, 85 visitors and 75 emails per day. We aim to answer 95%+ of calls received within 30 seconds.

The Customer Service Centre team is generically trained covering the services below:

Ebley Mill Reception	Abandoned vehicles
Cashiers	Car parks
Switchboard	Main Council email inbox
Refuse & Recycling	Complaints line
Council Tax	Freedom of Information requests
Environmental Health	Electronic notice boards
Housing Advice	Tell us Once
Elections	Council's Twitter account
Electoral Roll viewing	Proof of Life certification

- We are actively supporting the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) Corporate Professional Qualifications programme and the Investors in People (IiP) Health checks.
- We are also involved in various cross-service systems thinking projects with the Public Space Team looking at Refuse & Recycling and Tenant Services.
- Feedback from our customers has been consistently favourable, but we aim to continuously improve our service to better meet their needs.

Revenue and Benefits Manager – Simon Killen
Contact: 01453 754013 or simon.killen@stroud.gov.uk

We award Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support to 7,334 customers, with around 47% being of pensionable age. The case count has reduced in the last 12 months, although the movement of people in and out of benefit has increased.

Performance 2015/16

Systems Thinking continues to operate with the team looking at better and more efficient ways of dealing with the work and increasing areas of automation. A number of our processes are now done automatically without any staff intervention. Customer contact by e-mail and text message continues to grow. We also now have most of our landlords receiving their payment schedules electronically as well as their notifications and we are now regularly sending over 100 notifications a week by email.

- NI 181 - 9.06 days was the average time taken to process all new claims and change of circumstances
- We paid £11,835,950 in Housing Benefit to tenants of SDC. This accounts for 52% of the rent to be collected by the Council;
- We paid £13,019,705 in Housing Benefit to tenants of privately rented accommodation; and
- We paid £5,855,370 in Council Tax Support to persons who either own or rent their own homes and are liable to pay Council Tax.

Welfare Reform

We held a Members Information Evening last year with colleagues in Tenant Services to raise awareness of the Welfare Reform changes. The evening was well received and attended by over 30 members. Links below to the presentation and members briefing notes.

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<\\filesrv2\public\Welfare Reform Presentation\Members briefing on welfare reform.doc>

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

In March, we reported to the Community Services and Licensing Committee and adopted a new policy for dealing with DHPs - <http://www.stroud.gov.uk/benefits-money-advice/housing-benefit/discretionary-housing-payment-dhp>

Our DHP scheme is operated within Benefits, and used to assist Housing Benefit claimants who may need further financial help with their housing costs, during periods of short term need. Housing costs can include help towards rent, tenancy start up costs and moving costs.

We receive limited funds each year for the DHP scheme. Because the amount that can be spent on the scheme each year is restricted, not everyone who claims a DHP may be awarded one. Who receives DHP is entirely at the discretion of the Council.

In the last 12 months we awarded over £59,000 in DHPs helping 138 households.

Reason for Award	Number of claims
Benefit Cap	4
Social Sector Size Criteria (bedroom tax)	85
Local Housing Allowance	10
Combination of welfare reforms	25
Rent in advance	2
Removal Expenses	1
Award not for welfare reforms (risk of violence, non-dependant deduction)	11

Claims received: 173

Claims refused: 35

Amount spent: £59, 403.14

What's Around the Corner?

The future of the Benefit Service is uncertain as we move towards Universal Credit. We will need to manage the changes and will be challenged to maintain performance and efficiency as our caseload and staffing levels reduce.

- DWP DHP funding for 2016/17 increased to £117,558 to help support households affected by welfare reforms
- Summer budget statement announced the benefit cap will be lowered from Autumn 2016
- Maximum amount of out of work benefits working age families can receive will be £20,000 (from £26,000) or £384.62 per week from £500
- Maximum £13,400 (from £18,200) for single adults with no children, or £257.69 per week from £350
- Affected households will be notified in the spring and advised of support available to help them adjust their circumstances, including providing assistance to secure employment. This will give households several months to take up any support they might need and to prepare for the new cap.
- Estimated up to 200 households will be affected in the Stroud District based on data analysis by DWP

Universal Credit

The Government are committed to the National expansion of Universal Credit and the roll out has been accelerated affecting a limited eligible customer base in Stroud: single Job Seekers.

Moving forward the original pilot sites have moved on to households, which includes couples and families, but for Stroud this is not likely to be until 2017.

Fraud

Under Welfare Reform the DWP created a national fraud investigation team, the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) which investigate all cases of welfare benefit fraud. This

includes the fraud investigation work of Housing Benefit which had been carried out locally by each Council.

Our 3 Fraud investigators, together with any outstanding investigations, transferred to the DWP last year.

Revenue

The Revenue Team is responsible for the billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates.

We have 52,051 Council Tax properties and 4,045 business rate properties. In addition to annual billing around 35,000 bills are sent through the year. Over 70% of our Council Tax payers are on direct debit.

As part of a systems thinking review some time ago, we looked at the way we deal with customers in the area who are moving. The outcome of this was that when we have a telephone call from someone who is moving, we try and deal with everything the council may be involved in around that move, including advising on refuse collection and recycling arrangements and sending the relevant leaflet with their new Council Tax bill. We also use the opportunity to check on the number of adults in the property, so that we can send the forms to register with elections. This results in an overall saving in postage and the customer doesn't need to call other services for the information.

We are using texting and email to promote direct debit and bills by email, along with other initiatives. This has resulted in over 10% of our bills sent electronically.

Recovery

The Recovery Team are responsible for the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates, Car Parking, Housing Benefit Overpayment and Corporate Sundry Debts, collecting over £90 million a year.

Collection of Council Tax

99.16% or over £65 million of Council Tax was collected during 2015/16.

The net collectable debit is now nearly £66 million, an increase of £6 million in the last 5 years.

A typical year would see us issue 13,000 reminders and take over 2,000 cases to court. Over 600 cases are referred to Enforcement Agents (bailiffs), 1,000 cases subject to an attachment of income or benefits and 1 person is sent to Prison.

Collection of Business Rates

98.84% or £26.5 million of Business Rates was collected during 2015/16. This was an increase of whole percent over last years performance.

We are battling constantly with companies using empty rates avoidance tactics. Around 12% of premises in the district are empty which account for charges of over £1.5 million.

The team are very proactive with new businesses at the first point of contact to secure realistic payment plans and take up of small business rate relief. This relief provides a huge lifeline for small businesses with 37% our businesses benefiting from a reduction in their bills. Most contact with businesses is done by phone, text and email rather than the 'standard letter'.

Housing Benefit Overpayment

Annually, we collect around £600,000 in debt.

We have seen an increase in new debt identified following a pilot scheme called Real Time Information with HMRC. We are receiving data from them of claimant's actual wages/pensions which often differs from what has been declared.

Sundry Debtors

A system thinking project lead by Revenues and Finance has raised the importance of debt collection with other services. We have changed the way we deal with invoices and reminders corporately and also introduced a recovery protocol which is used across the authority.

We now deal with a whole range of corporate debt including licenses, commercial rent, fixed penalty notices, deposit bonds and rent in advance.

Projects

We are bringing enforcement agents (bailiff) back in-house from April 2016. This function has been carried out by a third party for a number of years in a county wide contract which came to an end during 2015/16.

Bringing enforcement agents in house will allow debtors to engage with the Council rather than a third party giving us more ownership. We will be able to take a corporate approach to multiple debts as well as provide debt and welfare benefit advice for the vulnerable. All fees will be retained allowing the service to be self financing and generate a potential income stream. The function would sit within the existing Council Tax Recovery Team.

Housing Advice Manager – Phillip Bishop

Contact: 01453 754063 or phillip.bishop@stroud.gov.uk

The Housing Advice Team provides a broad range of services for tenants, landlords, organisations and partners across the Stroud District. Within the team we cover the following:

- Housing advice to tenants (both private and social housing), landlords, support providers, letting agents and other organisations
- Administration and management of GlosHomeSeeker, the council's housing register (a partnership with the local authorities in Gloucestershire) and applications for the register
- Support to landlord services to manage decants and transfers, minimise voids and enable best use of stock

- Preventing homelessness and illegal evictions
- Taking homeless applications and discharging the Council's statutory duties under current legislation

Demand for services has increased significantly over the last year in homelessness prevention, housing advice interviews and applications for social and private rented housing combined. Coupled with the increasing demand, there has been a large decrease in social housing lettings in 2015/16 with 471 lettings compared to 648 in 2014/15, a decrease of around 30%. This means more families living in difficult situations for longer.

Homelessness

During 2015/16 we took 67 homeless applications and accepted the full duty to 16 of those households, an acceptance rate of 24%. This is a 16% increase in homeless applications compared to 2014/15 and a 45% increase in homeless acceptances. There has also been a 30% increase in the use of temporary accommodation (mostly bed and breakfast) for families. These figures have increased despite our focus on preventing homelessness wherever possible which has resulted in more homeless preventions than in any previous year.

Homelessness Prevention and Advice

The homelessness prevention fund is used in a number of ways to help prevent households from becoming homeless. One of the main uses of the HPF is to help people set up private sector tenancies by paying deposits and agency fees. Following a significant decrease last year from 96 in 2013/14 to 56 in 2014/15, extra efforts have been made in this area and the number has increased slightly. Landlords have always been reluctant to take on tenants claiming benefits and this reluctance is increasing as the introduction of Universal Credit draws nearer and other changes in welfare benefits. This along with high demand for private rented properties and the widening gap between rents and Housing Benefit levels leads to increasing difficulty in accessing the private sector. By prioritising homeless prevention, 2015/16 has seen the highest number of preventions ever. Set within the context of the whole range of services to prevent homelessness, the total number of prevention cases for 2015/16 is summarised in the following table:

(N.B. as not all figures for the fourth quarter are finalised, the figures for 2015/16 are extrapolated from the first three quarters).

Outcome	2010 / 11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Moved to Youth Projects or other supported housing	51	75	64	52	45	78
Set up in the private sector	57	70	96	96	56	58
Offered a social housing tenancy (prevention cases only)	151	150	159	194	199	202
Mediation resolved situation (inc.Llord)	7	6	1	6	2	5
Mortgage Arrears Intervention	2	1	8	15	16	3
Discretionary Housing Payments (HB)	53	62	73	77	77	39
Resolving rent/service charge arrears in social/private sector		New service in 2012	14	40	56	48
Negotiation or legal advocacy to enable someone to remain in private sector		New service in 2012	2	6	9	5
Debt advice		New service in 2012	4	8	12	4
Financial support including arrears payment		New service in 2012	4	8	3	1
Other	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	7	17
Crisis Intervention – providing emergency support.					New service 2015/16	67
Total	351	381	431	506	482	527

In addition, the fund is used to renegotiate existing private tenancies to prevent eviction, to pay for insurance in lieu of a guarantor to secure a tenancy, as a transfer of existing grant or other exceptional circumstances as needed in order to prevent homelessness.

Housing Register/Gloshomeseeker

As at the end of March 2016 there were 3392 households on the register, the majority in Bronze band.

Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
75 (2%)	214(6%)	1091(32%)	2018(63%)	3392

Over the course of the year, 471 social housing lettings were made across the District with 54% going to applicants in Gold band.

Emergency	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
38 (8%)	256 (54%)	138 (29%)	39 (8%)	471