

# 2008 Annual Report

ENHANCING  
THE QUALITY  
OF LIFE FOR ALL



# ANNUAL REPORT

A look back over our performance and finances over the year April 2007 – March 2008

**A** look back over the past year brings us to one conclusion – this Council performs so much better than it did four years ago!

In 2004 the Council was given a Weak CPA rating by the Audit Commission – a body of inspectors appointed by the Government to assess the performance of all councils.

Share with us our successes over the past year and you will understand why we have invited them back to re-inspect us so that



we can rid ourselves of this inaccurate label. We are no longer

a weak council. We have made many improvements and are performing better than many other Councils. We are working much better with other organisations to bring better results – and sharing costs so that we can provide them to you for less.

We remain committed to providing the best services we can at the best cost.

**We always welcome feedback, please continue to tell us what you like and where we could improve.**

## OUR NEW SERVICES

### Scrutiny

**2007-08** saw a step change in the way the scrutiny function is carried out within Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

A three select committee system was introduced to enable a more focused and timely scrutiny function to operate both pre & post decision. This approach has been successful largely due to the Councillors' willingness to challenge & enquire, the officers and cabinet members openness and the support of a very active & capable scrutiny team. Overall the profile of scrutiny has improved and is now very much a part of the organisation.



*“ to help people in making healthier choices”*

## Health

**T**he Council has taken huge strides in its drive to address health inequalities within the borough.

A Healthier Communities Co-ordinator has been recruited to help co-ordinate health promotion within the Council. Work is ongoing to develop the Council's contribution to making Tunbridge Wells a healthier place to live, for all residents, young and old. Activities have been set up by the Council's Healthy Lifestyle Co-ordinator to help people in making healthier choices, such as basketball clubs, healthy eating groups, health walks and smoking cessation services, and it is hoped this programme will continue to grow with the support of our partners at West Kent PCT.

## OUR PERFORMANCE

**The Council is now performing highly and is still improving - according to a recent review of the Council's services from an independent body. We are measured against other councils against a set of targets called performance indicators. Over 68% of these indicators are now among the best in the Country.**

**Y**our waste and recycling services are among the most cost - effective in England. Recycling and composting rates are continuing to improve through the actions of local residents and we are performing better than most other areas in

**Kent. Rates have almost doubled from 25% in 2003/04 to 46% in 2007/08. Of course, we couldn't achieve these figures without your commitment to recycling and we're really grateful for the public support.**

We're committed to our priorities - one of these is caring for our environment, the hard work of our graffiti removal teams, street cleaners, and civil enforcement officers, who are now able to issue penalty charge notices for environmental offences, has led to 77% of the public being satisfied with cleanliness of the streets. While most of the country has seen a marked decline in these figures, more residents in Tunbridge Wells are satisfied with street cleanliness than in 2002/03 when the figure was 72%.

Despite the credit crunch, more

businesses are being established in the Borough, contributing to the overall health of the local economy. There were 125 new business start-ups per 10,000 population in 2007/08 – far more than our expected target of 40. We have helped this by providing new business advice and links to other people that can help new ventures.

The rate of visitors to Tunbridge Wells is increasing. Tourism is now worth £195 million per year to the Tunbridge Wells Borough economy, an increase of 3% since it was last measured three years ago.



Crime rates are reducing and in two of our wards, Showfields and Ramslye, recorded crime fell by over 51% between 2006 and 2007. Since 2004 borough-wide criminal damage has reduced by 5.8%, theft from motor vehicles was down 4.4%, vehicle interference was down 17.8% and theft from the person was down 15.5%. We will continue to work with the Police, Kent County Council, Town and Country Housing and other organisations as the Community Safety Partnership to continue to bring these rates, and the fear of crime down further.

# OUR FEEDBACK

What you have said about your borough...

In February 2008, we undertook our eighth residents survey to find out how you rate your local area and the services provided. 1,011 interviews were completed with a representative sample of residents across the borough.

Residents were asked questions about access to services, community safety, community involvement, the image of local government and much more and on the whole the survey received positive feedback.

The survey recorded high levels of satisfaction from residents with their local area.

- 92% of you were happy with your local area as a place to live with more than a quarter of you referring to the 'attractive countryside' as one of the best things about the area.
- Over 90% of you felt you belonged to your immediate neighbourhood and also felt that your local area was a place where different people could get on well together.
- A quarter of you thought traffic congestion was the worst thing about the area. A programme of work has begun in addition to the strategic work of Kent Highways that will look specifically at the current congestion issues in the urban area of Tunbridge Wells. Emphasis will be placed on accessibility to key areas such as the town centre, employment/retail and hospitals, so progress is being made in this area.

Some services in particular saw exceptional levels of satisfaction.

- Over 90% of you were satisfied with the Assembly Hall and 68% of were happy with the Parks.



"we improve the quality of life in your area"



- Nearly two thirds of you were satisfied that the Police and local Council were dealing with anti-social behaviour in your area.
- Nine in ten residents were satisfied with the state of repair in their home

and just over a third of you showed an interest in having energy-saving devices installed in your home.

You thought the three most important community priorities for the borough were Community Safety and Policing (55%), Education (43%) and Health & Well-being (36%). In fact Community Safety and Education were found to be increasing in importance over time.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council itself also received encouraging feedback:

- 68% of you were satisfied with the way the Council runs things and two thirds of you thought that the Council was working to make the local area a better place to live.
- 60% of you thought the Council keeps you informed about the services and benefits it provides.

So we've learned that the majority of you like living in the borough and enjoy the beautiful environment and heritage that surrounds you. However through this consultation, we have also been made aware of particular areas and services where improvements need to be made. We work very closely with other organisations such as Kent County Council, Kent Police and West Kent Primary Care Trust that also deliver services in the borough and will continue to concentrate on the issues you have raised to ensure we improve the quality of life in your area.

# WHAT HAS THE COUNCIL EVER DONE FOR US?

Here are the things we did well in 2007-08

- **Fought crime** - Tunbridge Wells Borough crime figures are consistently amongst the lowest in the county.
- **Recycling** - We are in the top 10% of councils in the country for recycling - last year our residents recycled and composted 46% of all their household waste using the services provided by the council, amounting to 22,821 tonnes.
- **Saved energy** - In 2007/08 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council helped 158 households to get subsidies to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and reduce fuel bills.
- **Our Parks** - Dunorlan Park and the Grove were awarded Green Flags – awards made by the Civic Trust to reward the best parks in the country. Dunorlan also received a Green heritage Award – one of only 31 in the country and the only one in Kent. The awards followed survey results that showed borough residents' satisfaction

rates with their local parks to be amongst the highest in the country, and the overall highest in Kent.



- **Boosted the local economy** – Tourism to the borough generated £195 million a year to the local economy (source: Tourism South East: Value and Volume of Tourism 2003)
- **Prevented homelessness** - As a result of our work to prevent homelessness, the number of homeless households approaching the Council for help in the year to April 2008 was down by 33% compared to the previous year.
- **Raised standards** - In the year 2007/08, we assisted 103 people

with disabled adaptations to their homes.

- **Provided value for money** - Tunbridge Wells Borough Council takes about 12% of your council tax – just 45p a day on average – that's less than the price of a daily newspaper
- **Provided affordable homes** - we have worked with our Housing Association partners to provide 54 affordable homes in the borough (in 2007/08).
- **Offered improved mobility for the Aged** – 11,984 concessionary bus passes were issued.
- **Cared for the bereaved** - We achieved the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management's Charter for the Bereaved status for the Kent And Sussex Crematorium and Tunbridge Wells cemetery.
- **Promoted healthy lifestyles** - we continued support of the Exercise Referral Scheme (102 referrals made during 2007).

## Meeting your priorities

In 2005/06 we developed a vision and a set of corporate priorities to ensure that we focused on the things that matter to you.

You told us that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council needed to help to **enhance the quality of life for all**. This is our vision. To achieve that, we have four priorities that we try to achieve year-on-year:

- Promote and maintain a thriving and diverse local economy
- Care of our environment
- Have housing suitable for local people
- Develop safer and stronger communities



# OUR GREEN CREDENTIALS

## Environmental Footprint

**You've been recycling more than ever before. We, as a Council, have taken your lead, and are doing our part.**

Since 2005 we've have more than trebled recycling at our offices. New plans are being developed to help protect the environment, including a Local Biodiversity Action Plan and an Air Quality Management Area on the A26 through St Johns and Southborough.

Reviews of existing policies, including Environment Strategy and Carbon Management Action Plan, will contribute to ensuring we are prepared to address the challenges faced by climate change.

For more information on how we are helping to reduce the impact on the environment in our Borough, please visit our website.

**The Council is always trying to improve its environmental credibility by reducing the impact of our work and the work and lives of people within the borough.**



# INVESTMENT/FINANCING

## Capital Investment and Financing

The table below shows that the council invested almost £10m in the year in capital equipment, purchasing new assets, including land and buildings, plant, equipment and software and in enhancing existing assets. The main items of capital expenditure during 2007/08 were £4.2 million for the New Medway Depot and £2.6 million for 8 Grosvenor Road, which will be the Gateway.

	<b>£000</b>
Capital Receipts	4,841
Government Grants and other contributions	822
Revenue Financing	3,910
<b>Total Capital Investment</b>	<b>9,573</b>



## Our budget

### Income and Expenditure Account, and Movement on the General Fund Balance

The table below summarises the Council's net expenditure for the year 2007/08.

	£000		£000
Central services to the public	564	Demand on Collection Fund (Council Tax)	(6,949)
Cultural, environmental and planning services	13,573	General government grants	(1,015)
Highways, roads and transport services	485	Non-domestic rate distribution	(5,824)
Housing Services	2,010	(Surplus) / Deficit for the year	6,462
Exceptional items	1,786	Net additional amounts debited or credited to balance	(6,462)
Corporate and democratic core	2,346	<b>(Increase) / Decrease in General Fund Balance</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Net Cost of Services</b>	<b>20,764</b>	General Fund Balance at 1 April 2007	(18,400)
(Gain)/ Loss on the disposal of fixed assets	(181)	<b>General Fund balance at 31 March 2008</b>	<b>(18,400)</b>
Parish Council precepts	1,295		
Interest and Investment Income	(2,288)		
Pensions interest cost and net return on assets	660		
<b>Net Operating Expenditure</b>	<b>20,250</b>		

## Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates

The council acts as the billing authority for the collection of council tax and non-domestic rates – put simply,

that means we take the money from you and then immediately give most of it away.

Most of the council tax is passed on to the County Council and the Police and Fire

Authorities, while non-domestic rates are passed to central government for redistribution to local authorities throughout the country. We keep just 12% - less than £170 of each bill each year.

	£000		£000
Council Tax		Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	6,925
Billed to Council Tax payers	53,027	Non-Domestic Rates	£000
Council Tax benefits	4,990	Payments to National Pool	44,203
Non Domestic Rates	44,385	Provisions and adjustments	574
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>102,402</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>102,047</b>
Precepts and Demands		(Increase) / Reduction in fund balance	(355)
Kent County Council	42,283	Balance brought forward 1 April 2007	1
Kent Police Authority	5,358		
Kent Fire & Rescue Service	2,704	<b>Carried forward 31 March 2008</b>	<b>(354)</b>

# OUR COUNCILLORS

We have 48 Councillors, 44 are Conservative and 4 LibDems.

This year we welcomed seven new Councillors:



**Cllr Robert Atwood** has been elected to represent the Rusthall Ward. He lives in Langton Green. He is a Chartered Accountant and spent the majority of his career working in finance.

He hopes to help the Council continue to improve and deliver value for money and will contribute towards this by injecting his knowledge and enthusiasm for the local environment.



**Cllr Julian Stanyer** is a Chartered Surveyor and represents the Speldhurst and Bidborough Ward. He is married with three grown-up daughters and lives in Langton Green. He is keen for

the Borough Council to receive national recognition for the improvements it is making.



**Cllr Dr Ranendra Basu** is a retired Consultant Pathologist and represents the Culverden Ward. It is his first time as a local councillor and he is keen to actively participate in Council business.

Using his skills and experience he hopes to help develop youth, health and leisure activities and be involved in planning and strengthening Tunbridge Wells and its heritage.



**Cllr Sean Holden** was elected for Benenden and Cranbrook Ward and before that he served as a Conservative Councillor for Hart District Council in Hampshire from 2002-2006. He was a TV

reporter and presenter for TVam and Meridian before setting up his own property business. One of his aims in his role as a Tunbridge Wells Borough Councillor is to get back to giving a straightforward, no nonsense service with low taxes.



**Cllr Tracy Moore** is also embarking on her first term as a Councillor and represents the St John's Ward. She is a stay at home mum. Prior to having children she worked in investment

banking and fund management in the City of London. She hopes that her role as a mother of young children will enable her to offer an insight into the needs of young families.



**Cllr Marcella Callow** represents Horsmonden, Brenchley and Matfield. She is also new to the Council. She is married and is a mother to two young boys. She is currently heavily involved

in The Locket Green Regeneration project which aims to rebuild Horsmonden Kindergarten (with a completion date of December 2008) and provide a play area for all the children of the village. She is also campaigning locally to keep public toilets open, address refuse facilities throughout rural areas and is keen to provide recreational opportunities for the young and elderly.



**Cllr Brian Ransley** was a Councillor from 2005-2007 and has now been re-elected to represent a different Ward, this time Capel. He is particularly interested in improving the roads and promoting

dedicated cycle lanes.

## OVER TO YOU!

Did you find the format of this annual report useful? Is there anything else you would like us to have included?

We will shortly be starting the budget setting process for 2009/10, if you have suggestions as to which services should receive further investment and those which you feel could be reduced then please let us know.

To comment, become involved or for further information please contact Lee Colyer, Financial Service Manager e-mail: [lee.colyer@tunbridgewells.gov.uk](mailto:lee.colyer@tunbridgewells.gov.uk).

If you wish to view the Council's full Statement of Accounts please visit our website.