

Erewash report for the Annual Parish Meeting 2010

As in previous years, let's begin with the subject that concerns all Council Tax payers. Council tax surprisingly is virtually unchanged this year. A band D rated house now pays £1474.04:

- £165.91 to Erewash (zero increase)
- £1077 to Derbyshire CC (1.5% increase)
- £163.74 to the Police (1.5% increase)
- £67 to the Fire Service (2.5% increase)

I know that it looks as if the Fire Service are the bad boys with a rise of 2.5% but it is only a £2 increase for the year

Erewash Borough Council's share of the total tax collected is still only 11% which works out to be less than 50 pence a day for the services that we provide.

To put this into perspective my electric bill alone is equivalent to about 50% of my Council tax bill.

The latest annual audit inspection shows that we are still improving but I note that they "have moved the goalposts". It is, therefore, difficult to make a direct comparison with the previous year. There is a new inspection regime called the "Comprehensive Area Assessment" (CAA) which tends to reflect Government opinion on what we should be doing rather than local realities.

The auditors note that the economic climate has changed over the last year (in case anyone has not noticed – we are in a recession!). They listed the risks that we can expect as being a lowered income, increased costs and higher demand for support services.

The auditor's report shows that Erewash is rated:

- The same as 75% of our peer group for Use of Resources
- The same or better than 50% of our peer group for Managing Performance

The recession has had a big impact on the income we receive on our investments as we are only offered 0.3% to 0.5% interest. The efficiency savings made by all the Council departments, along with enforced budget limits, have enabled us reduce this gap in finances and allow us to maintain 2010/11 Council tax at the same rate as the previous year.

During the year the Community Governance Review for possible Town Councils in Ilkeston and Long Eaton has progressed with the first consultation period having just ended. We will need to review this in the summer and decide if there is sufficient support to progress further. It will require research on costs and procedures before it can be presented to residents for their vote. Although historically our group has favoured the extension of parish councils, we are unsure of the reaction of the urban residents to start paying a precept.

The refurbishment of the Town Hall reception areas noted in last year's report, have proved to be an excellent improvement to those facilities. This is particularly relevant in respect of additional interview rooms created as the Housing and Benefits team have had to handle a much increased number of vulnerable families seeking assistance.

The Council's IT department has now completed the best practice implementation of backup and disaster recovery processes, guaranteeing that all priority services can be maintained in the event of a failure at either Ilkeston or Long Eaton.

The Youth Forum funded by Erewash and the Derbyshire County Council has progressed well. All secondary schools now participate and they are capable of setting their own agendas for projects that they see as important and beneficial. All decisions are vetted by officers to ensure compliance with budgets and guidelines.

Community Forums unfortunately continue to be troublesome. They suffer from erratic public attendance numbers and occasional 'hijacking' by a vocal minority. A new officer has been given the role of resolving these issues.

The Neighbourhood Warden team has been expanded and has seen a number of successes. It is worth noting that litter and dog 'muck' offenders have generally done the 'right thing' and cleaned up when seen and challenged by the Wardens. Twenty nine offenders refused to clean up and were given £60 fixed penalty notices. I also understand that one offender ignored this and was taken to court - which then cost him £290 and gave him a **free** criminal record.

The Stanton regeneration project is still progressing albeit rather slowly. Stanton Bonner is planning to hold a public debate and we expect to see an approach to our Planning Department this year. The major problem with this development is still a reasonable access route as road building through the green belt is vigorously opposed.

There is a core strategy for the Greater Nottingham area which includes Erewash, Ashfield, Broxtowe, DCC, Gedling, Nottingham City, Nottingham County and Rushcliffe. Our main interest in this has been an allocation of £25,000 per annum for two years to Erewash towards the planning of a Railway station in Ilkeston. This also explains why Nottingham has been mentioned in a number of local planning applications.

A number of sports pavilions around the Borough are in a poor state of repair and are not DDA compliant. Some minimal funding was allocated for essential work on these assets.

West Park Leisure Centre has had the changing rooms modernised and the boilers for the pool have been replaced with more efficient ones which will result in reduced running costs for the Council.

Victoria Park Baths will be re-furbished in order to extend the usable life for a further 15 years. This will be significantly cheaper than re-building this facility

On a sad note there was the resignation of one of our Councillors due to ill health and the unexpected death of another Councillor resulting in the need for two by-elections in the Borough. The controlling Party were able to retain these seats and their majority in the Council.

Councillors Alan Summerfield and Eileen Knight
11th April 2010