

# How do we rate?

Taxation Division Annual Report 2009/2010

## Welcome



Welcome to Stockton Taxation Division's annual report; providing you with general advice and information

about the service, a summary of achievements and how we have performed during 2009/2010.

The Taxation Division covers 3 key activities: Council Tax, Business Rates & Cashiers. Each area within the service set themselves ambitious targets and objectives and excellent results were achieved.

Your views are extremely important to us. If you would like to comment on our services, or let us know what you think about this edition of 'How Do We Rate', please contact us by telephone, email or face to face - see the contact us section opposite.

### Debbie Hurwood

Head of Customer Services & Taxation

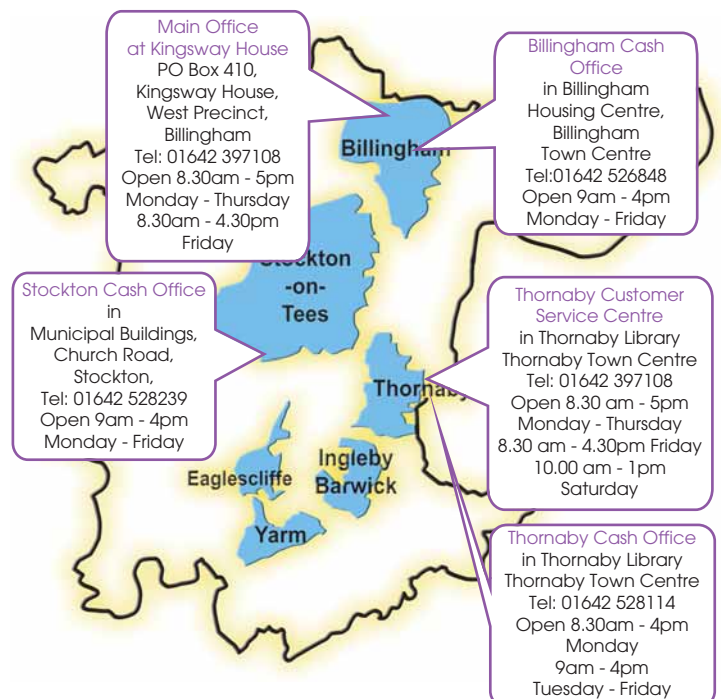
## Contact Us

Telephone us on 01642 397108

or visit us at Kingsway House, West Precinct, Billingham and at the Customer Service Centre, Thornaby Central Library, Thornaby or visit [www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/billsbenefits/counciltax](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/billsbenefits/counciltax)

or [www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/billsbenefits/businessrates](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/citizenservices/billsbenefits/businessrates)

email: [council.tax@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@stockton.gov.uk) & [business.rates@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:business.rates@stockton.gov.uk)



# Who we are and what we do



**Esme Hall**, Taxation Manager is responsible for the day to day management of the service including a cashiering service which offers:

- Collection of all council income including Council Tax and Housing Rent
- Cheque encashment service
- Administering the Councillor's allowances scheme
- Receipt of postal payments



**Richard Holland**, Taxation Officer manages the team responsible for:

- Billing of 82,000 domestic properties (council tax)
- Billing of 4,700 non-domestic properties (business rates)
- Reviewing eligibility for reductions and awarding reliefs, discounts and exemptions
- Processing account amendments for example when someone moves house
- Co-ordinating and collecting payments that fund the Cowpen Industrial Association Business Improvement District project (BID)



**Michelle Connolly**, Collection Officer manages the teams responsible for:

- Providing a customer liaison service responding to letters, emails and personal callers
- Responding to commendations, comments and complaints
- Administration of the combined payment scheme combining all arrears owing to the Council and arranging a realistic payment plan
- Issuing reminder notices, summonses and recovery warning letters and taking recovery action against people who do not pay
- Applications at court for liability orders, commitment to prison orders, warrants of arrest, fines, charging orders and bankruptcy orders



**Sally Harrison**, System & Development Officer manages the team responsible for:

- ICT system administration for the taxation division
- Incoming/outgoing post service for Kingsway House
- Maintaining the division's procedural manuals
- Arranging staff training both for new starters and ongoing development.
- Design of stationery and documentation

## Take Advantage of 'Talking Bill'

We run a free talking bill service. This means that if you give us your telephone number and agreement we will call you before sending out any Council Tax Bills, Reminder Notices or other documentation to explain what you are about to receive. To use this free service call us on 397108.

### Cut Your Council Tax

There are a number of ways to reduce the amount of Council Tax you pay:

**Discounts** – if you live alone your bill can be reduced by 25%. Some adults are disregarded for council tax if they meet certain conditions and a discount may be awarded.

**Exemptions** – can be applied to both occupied and unoccupied properties. Some are for

specific periods of time others are for as long as the conditions are met.

**Reductions for the disabled** – your bill may be reduced if your property has been adapted to meet the needs of a permanently disabled person.

**Council Tax benefit** - If you are on a low income you may qualify for council tax benefit which can reduce your bill by up to 100%

**For further information about discounts, exemptions and reductions call us on 397108, if you would like more information about benefits call the Benefits Service on 393829**



# Improvements & Achievements

## Customer Service Excellence Standard

We were one of the first services in Stockton to be assessed across 5 main criteria for the Government's Customer Service Excellence Standard. We were delighted to achieve full compliance in all areas.



## Catching up with Absconders

Some customers try to avoid paying their council tax and business rates by moving property and not providing us with a new address.

The service is committed to catching up with all non-payers and recovering as much council tax and business rates as possible to keep the amount of council tax you have to pay as low as possible.

The process for tracing absconders has been reviewed and we have managed to reduce such cases by over 30%.



## Service Standards

Target: To collect 97% of Council Tax  
Performance: Collected 97.4% achieving highest ever council tax collection levels for the Borough

Target: To collect 99% of Business Rates  
Performance: Collected 99.0% achieving our target

Target: To ensure all bills issued are accurate  
Performance: 98.42% of the bills we monitored were accurate

## Promotion of E-billing and Access to your account Online

The service has worked hard this year to promote e-billing which is the issue of your council tax or business rate bill by email. We now have 168 council tax customers using this service.

We have also promoted the Open Access facility which allows customers to view their council tax or business rates account online. The numbers signed up for the service have increased from 380 customers to 680.

Both services offer customers a convenient and quicker service. The promotion is ongoing if you would like to sign up just email us at [taxation.services@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:taxation.services@stockton.gov.uk)

## Business Rates Deferral Scheme

The government announced a new scheme in 2009-2010 to allow business rate payers to defer payment of part of their rates until 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

We processed 336 applications and deferred £353,000 for the Borough's ratepayers – a real help for businesses struggling to meet their commitments in the current economic climate

Target: To answer your letters within 5 working days  
Performance: We answered 3,500 letters, 94.5% were within target

Target: To see personal visitors within 4 minutes  
Performance: Dealt with 1500 visitors 96.1% within target

Target: To process an account amendment within 9 days  
Performance: We processed 52,000 amendments, 54% were recorded as processed within 9 days.\*

\* We have not achieved our target and were unable to accurately record the number of account amendments we could process within target as some amendments cannot be processed until further information is received. We are looking at new ways of working and monitoring this target for the new financial year.

# Money Matters

## How we compare with others

The Taxation Division is constantly reviewing its service provision to make improvements whilst trying to get the right balance to achieve

### High Collection levels

We continue to collect high levels of council tax and business rates the tables below show our performance and how we compare with others:

In Year Collection Levels	£ 2007/2008	£ 2008/2009	£ 2009/2010
Council Tax	97.1%	97.0%	97.4%
Business Rates	99.7%	99.0%	99.0%

In Year Council Tax Collection Levels	2009/ 2010	In Year Business Rates Collection Levels	2009/ 2010
Stockton	97.4%	Stockton	99.0%
All England Average	97.1%	All England Average	97.8%
Unitary Council Average	97.0%	Unitary Council Average	97.4%

Collection levels shown are the percentages collected during the financial year in which the amounts were billed. We continue to collect arrears after the end of each year and in the longer term collect in excess of 99% of the amounts billed.

### High Customer Satisfaction & Quality

We record complaints, comments and commendations, we deal with thousands of account amendments and customer enquiries each year and have few justified complaints. In 2009/2010 we recorded:

59 Compliments

3 Comments

14 Complaints

For further information about the commendations, comments and complaints procedure please contact Michelle Connolly on 01642 526827, the Division's commendations, comments and complaints officer.

- High Collection Rates
- Low Costs of Collection
- High Customer Satisfaction and Quality

### Low Cost of collection

How this compares with previous years

Cost of Collection	£ 2007/2008	£ 2008/2009	£ 2009/2010
Council Tax Total Costs	1.04 m	0.95m	1.04m
Council Tax Cost Per Dwelling	12.89	11.68	12.67
Business Rates Total Cost	<b>4,432 cr</b>	<b>15,709 cr</b>	<b>18,000 cr</b>
Business Rates Costs Per Property	<b>0.99 cr</b>	<b>3.36 cr</b>	<b>3.83 cr</b>

In 2009/2010 it cost £1.04m to administer the Council tax system, for the same period for business rates the grant we received from the Government exceeded our actual costs. The table above shows comparisons with previous years.

## Have your say... Please give us your views... ... we welcome your feedback

Any comments that you have about 'HOW DO WE RATE?' or the Taxation Service can be written below and sent back to us.

My Comments are:

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Name .....

Address .....

Postcode .....

Telephone .....

E-mail .....

You are under no obligation to give us your personal details, but if you would like to be kept informed of progress relating to any of your comments or more information about living in Stockton Borough, please fill in this section. We will not use them for any other purpose.