

# Spelthorne Council update



Friday, 18 July, 2014

- The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester visited Surrey on Tuesday 8 July to hear about the devastating floods which affected the County earlier in the year and to meet the staff, agencies, and volunteers who helped residents. The couple visited the Hythe Centre in Runnymede before visiting some of the worst hit flood areas in Runnymede and Spelthorne and then moving onto Spelthorne's Council Offices. There the couple met local councillors and staff who provided essential support such as taking calls from residents and providing emergency accommodation and sandbags. They also spent time with the volunteers who helped their communities during the critical phase and subsequent clean-up efforts.
- The Communications team is increasing the resource dedicated to social media such as Twitter and Facebook for a trial period of six months. It is hoped the trial will improve awareness of Council news and events and help residents to feel more closely involved with the Council.
- Communications is continuing to work with Brooklands Radio to arrange interviews with Cabinet Members. Interviews with Cllrs Watts, Forbes-Forsyth, Evans and Sexton have already been aired and the next interview, with Cllr Nick Gething, can be heard at 1pm on Wednesday 16 July.
- Team Spelthorne celebrated a successful weekend at the 18th annual P&G Surrey Youth Games. Young people from across the Borough represented Team Spelthorne in 28 teams at the weekend event at Surrey Sports Park in Guildford. The team won the Surrey County Playing Fields Fair Play Award as well as silver medals in girls' tag rugby and under nine girls' football. Bronze medals were won in tennis, Boccia and lacrosse. Nine judo competitors also picked up individual medals.
- The Independent Living team recently held a vote to choose a name for the recently formed high needs group at the Greeno Centre in Shepperton. The chosen name, OPAL (older people actively living), was the clear winner. The group now has approximately 50 members attending each week and a number of successful trips and BBQs have already been held. The team is looking at the possibility of introducing a similar group at the Fordbridge Centre in Ashford.

- As part of a community safety initiative, the Council has funded a replacement for the radio system which links retailers, pubs and restaurants with Police and the town's CCTV. The new digital radio link will enable shop staff to warn each other about suspicious behaviour and the presence of known shoplifters in the town centre. Around 75 shops pubs and restaurants have already signed up to the scheme.
- Two tennis courts at Stanwell Recreation Ground have undergone refurbishment thanks to a grant of £21,000 given to Spelthorne Council by the SITA Trust. The work has included a new tarmac surface being laid, the courts being painted and remarked, new posts, sockets and nets and a new chain-link fence around the perimeter of the courts. By way of celebration, free coaching sessions for adults, juniors and wheelchair users will be provided by Tennis Focus Academy on Saturday 19 July.
- Staines Cemetery, Sunbury Cemetery and Sunbury Walled Garden have been entered into South & South East in Bloom for the third year in a row; the judging took place this week and the initial feedback has been very positive. The judge was very pleased with the hard work carried out at all sites and was impressed by the close working relationship between Spelthorne Council, Lotus Landscapes and the Friends of Sunbury Park. Last year Sunbury Cemetery and the Sunbury Walled Garden were awarded first place in their respective categories; we will find out in the autumn how well our entries did this year.
- Customer Services is introducing some improvements to the telephony system at the end of July which will provide customers with more functionality including the option to request a call back when phone lines are busy.
- The Council is in discussions with the Surrey Social Services team to see if they are interested in renting more space on the ground floor to provide a hub of services for residents.
- The Council has secured the conviction of an Ashford woman for fraudulently claiming Housing and Council Tax Benefit and Income Support. Joanne Hodgson of Metcalf Road in Ashford was convicted at Guildford Crown Court on 27 June and given a 26 week prison sentence which has been suspended for two years. Ms Hodgson had claimed she was a lone parent but in reality was living with her partner. The fraud, committed over a six year period, resulted in an overpayment to her of £48,717.
- The Council also secured the conviction of Mrs Aysoo Ruhomaun of Staines-upon-Thames who failed to declare a change in her circumstances (receiving an occupational pension). This affected her Benefit claim and resulted in her being overpaid approximately £5,800 in Housing and Council Tax Benefit over a 33 month period. She was given a conditional discharge for 12 months and has already repaid most of the money.
- All of the last 10 appeals against decisions made regarding planning applications have been dismissed - an indication of the quality of the original decision making.
- All caravans and vehicles on land adjoining Sheep Walk in Shepperton have now been removed following extensive enforcement action by the Council.
- Sir Bob Kerslake, the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) visited Spelthorne Council at the end of June to see the benefits of the Government's Troubled Families Programme in supporting Spelthorne families. During his visit Sir Bob met with the Supporting Families team and heard about their work and success in helping families control their debts and return to work and school.

- All office moves at Knowle Green are now completed.