

Informing you, informing us

News about Babergh District Council is easier to access on the internet than ever before! In recent months, the Council has been experimenting with up-to-date ways of getting information to and from residents who previously might have felt left out of the technological revolution.

■ **Talking websites!** Browsealoud is a technology that reads web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online. The software – which is free to download – allows users to control the reading speed, type of voice and pronunciation used that best suits them.

Babergh has a link to Browsealoud on the right hand side of the front page of its website at www.babergh.gov.uk

■ **From the officer's mouth.** Babergh now provides audio clips of interviews with Babergh councillors and staff about important issues such as the 2008/09 budget and holiday waste collection services. These are available alongside some of the text-based media releases posted up on Babergh's website.

To run the clips users will need to have downloaded either RealPlayer or Windows Media Player onto their computers and Babergh has provided

a link to allow them to do this if that is necessary.

■ **Postcode recycling.** Ever wondered where your nearest recycling 'bring site' for bottles or fabrics might be located? Or perhaps you need a reminder as to what can and cannot go into your Blue Bin? Well, Babergh's website now has a link to another website that provides you with those answers. All you need to do is put in your postcode - and the search facility does the rest!

For more information, go to: www.babergh.gov.uk/babergh/RecyclingCentres

■ **Network with Babergh.** Babergh now has a Polish language presence on the popular social networking site, Nasza-Klasa. With increasing numbers of Polish nationals living and working in the district, Babergh felt it vital that the Council had a site offering basic information about its services and links to its own site if more detail was needed.

"What links all of these initiatives is Babergh's belief that the careful and prudent use of new technology can improve how the Council gets the right information to the right people in the right way" explained Morag Embleton, Babergh's Information Officer.



Customer first: Just how well is Babergh doing?

Just over a year ago, Babergh District Council set out to improve how its staff dealt with telephone queries by launching four new customer teams (for details of each, please see page two of this issue of *Babergh Matters!*).

We quizzed Bob Southgate, Babergh's Head of Customer Services, to find out how things have gone – from the customer's perspective.

BM!: Overall, what improvements have been made?

BS: The good news is that over the last year four out of every five callers have had their query dealt with during their first call – and so do not need to be passed onto anyone else! From the feedback we receive that is something most customers really welcome.

BM!: Does this figure vary much?

BS: To an extent. In three of the four teams about 90% of queries are resolved in one go. However, in Planning the figure stands at 60%. That is not unexpected as there will always be occasions



when callers need to speak to the person dealing with their application. Therefore, we cannot deal with that enquiry on the spot but always offer to set up a telephone appointment instead. This does take a day or two longer, but the query can be effectively dealt with when we ring back.

BM!: What has happened to the time it takes to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims?

BS: We're very pleased to say that we have achieved our best figures ever – which means residents on average get the benefits to which they are entitled even more quickly than in earlier years. We now process new claims in only 16 working days, compared to 27 days previously and sort out changes in circumstances in 6 rather than in 10 days.

BM!: How might the experience of contacting Babergh by phone be further improved?

BS: We are aware that in a small minority of cases, people have been unable to get through. We are very sorry about that and in the short term will be increasing the number of phone lines to 20 to increase our call handling capacity.

BM!: What about the views of customers?

BS: We have already received a lot of useful feedback. We now plan to find out in more detail the views of customers through a survey in the autumn.