

Press Release

**From Councillor Barry Stamp
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Stafford Borough Council**

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Use: Immediate

Outrageous Changes to Planning Procedures

Changes to the way Borough Council Planning Officers deal with members of the public have been described as “outrageous” by a senior Councillor today.

Cllr Barry Stamp said he was appalled that new rules had been put in place by senior managers in the planning department that prevented members of the public speaking directly with the officer who was dealing with their planning application.

“Over the years Stafford Borough Council has prided itself in talking to members of the public, architects, and developers who are in the process of seeking planning permission from the Council. As a Councillor I am also in regular contact with the planning department over different issues so you can imagine my amazement when I telephoned them today and was told I could not speak to a planning officer and must wait until one had time to ring me back! I understand these new rules have been put in place in an attempt to prevent the planning officers having their work interrupted, which in turn is making it difficult for the Council to meet targets sets by central Government. Unfortunately this latest scheme just reinforces the view that the Council seems to have forgotten they are here to provide a public service. Over the last few weeks we have seen the Council do away with bus tokens for the majority of pensioners in the town, agree to demolish people’s homes in South Walls, and scrap the rent collection service. It is clear that since the Conservatives took control of the Council last year the focus has moved away from caring for the local community to one of saving money and meeting government targets,” said Councillor Stamp.

Councillor Stamp has already asked for an explanation for the change in procedure from David Rawlings the Council’s Chief Executive and will be urging the Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee to investigate the change and the way it was introduced.

“As a Councillor I certainly was not told that this change was about to be introduced and would have certainly have voted against the plan had I had the chance to do so. I would urge anyone who is having problems contacting the planning officers to let me know as I will be monitoring the new scheme carefully,” added Cllr Stamp.

Further details from: Councillor Barry Stamp
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Notes to Editors:

- i) Government Targets say that:
 - a) 80% of all householder planning applications should be dealt with within eight weeks of being submitted.
 - b) 65% of non-householder applications should be dealt with within eight weeks of being submitted.
- ii) Latest figures (quarter up to 31st December 2003) show that the Borough Council actual performance for the above is:-
 - a) 66%
 - b) 40%