



COUNCIL SUMMONS

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BE HELD IN THE PRINCIPAL COMMITTEE ROOM, THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON ON TUESDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2004 AT 18:30.

AGENDA

The meeting will be preceded by a Prayer to be offered by the Mayor's Chaplain.

1. To receive the Minutes of the Meetings of the Council held on 16 and 22 December 2004 (enclosed)
2. To report any apologies for absence
3. To receive any communications
4. To receive petitions from Local Government electors under Standing Order 17
5. To receive questions from Local Government electors under Standing Order 18
6. Members' Allowances 2004/05
To receive recommendations from Mr. D. Baker OBE, Chair of the independent Members' Allowances Panel and Councillor Mrs. M. Whitmarsh, Chair of the Resources Review Panel (enclosed)
7. Car Parking Charges 2004/05
To receive recommendations from Councillor Bishop, Executive Councillor, Planning and Transportation, following a meeting of the Traffic Regulation Order Panel held on 17 February 2004
8. To deal with questions to and receive recommendations and reports from the following members of the Executive:-
9. Councillor Williams (Leader of the Executive)
Recommendations relating to:-
 - (a) General Fund Revenue Estimates 2004/05
 - (b) General Fund Capital Programme 2004/05
 - (c) Council Tax Setting 2004/05
 - (d) Annual Investments Strategy
 - (e) General Fund Revenue Budget 2003/04 - Underspend
10. Councillor Bishop (Planning Policy and Transportation)
11. Councillor Mrs. Bradley (Leisure, Arts and Culture)
12. Councillor Mrs. Bryant (Communications)

13. Councillor Cavill (Economic Development, Property and Tourism)
14. Councillor Edwards (Environmental Services)
15. Councillor Garner (Housing Services)
 - (a) Housing Revenue Account - Revenue Estimates and Rent Levels
 - (b) Housing Capital Programme
16. Councillor Hall (Resources)
17. Councillor Mrs. Lewin-Harris (Community Leadership)
18. Freedom of the Borough
To receive a recommendation from Councillor Denington, Chair, Community Leadership Panel (enclosed)
19. Old Market Centre Multi-storey Car Park

The Leader of the Council together with the Chair of the Review Board have agreed:-

To suspend Contract Standing Order 13 (b) - seeking of three written quotations - in respect of permanent security fencing at the Old Market Centre car park under the urgency provisions of Contract Standing Order 14(f).

This decision is taken in accordance with the provisions of Rule 15.9 of the Procedure Rules for Review Board and Panels. It is therefore not subject to the Call-in procedure.

The Council's Constitution requires that decisions of this nature, taken under the "Urgency" procedure be included for information on the next full Council agenda.

20. A Combined Management Plan and Community Strategy for the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Final Document.
To receive a recommendation from Councillor Denington, Chair, Community Leadership Panel (enclosed)

G P DYKE
Member Services Manager

The Deane House
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TAUNTON
Somerset

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17 February 2004

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 16 December 2003 at 6.30 pm.

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Govier)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
Councillors Beaven, Bishop, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, N P Cavill, Davies, Denington, Durdan, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Hill, Hindley, House, Mrs Jones, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Lisgo, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, Paul, Ms Peppard, Phillips, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith, Stone, Stuart-Thorn, Trollope, Vail, Watson, Wedderkopp, Weston, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson.

The Mayor (Councillor Govier) drew attention to the recent death of Mrs G Deacon and Mr M Jennings, both of whom had been former members of the Council. The Council stood in silence as a mark of respect.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 October 2003, copies having been sent to each member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Bone, Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Croad, Edwards, Mrs Nixon and Ms Priscott.

3. Public Question Time

Steve Brooks, Chairman of the East Taunton Development Trust used the opportunity to thank the Council for its support for the local Link Centre which had made a major contribution to the community.

4. Vision for Taunton

Members received a presentation on the Vision for Taunton from Ralph Willoughby-Foster, Forward Plan and Regeneration Manager.

5. Recommendations to the Council from the Executive

(a) Old Market Shoppers Car Park - Anti-Suicide Measures

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the principle of the capital scheme to provide anti-suicide fencing to this car park be agreed and the necessary Supplementary Estimate of £100,000 from unallocated capital funds be also agreed.

(b) Equality Policy for Taunton Deane Borough Council

On the motion of Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris it was RESOLVED that the draft Equality Policy, as submitted, be agreed.

6. Questions to and reports from the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

The following reports were made to the Council on the main items of current and future business.

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

The Leader submitted a report covering the many initiatives being carried forward by the Council. These included the Vision for Taunton proposals, Urban Extension study, response to the Local Plan Inspector's report, relocation of the livestock market, proposals for redeveloping High Street/Crescent car park area completion of the Wellsprings Sports Centre. Also, measures to ease traffic congestion and promote alternative means of travel, and the budget setting process.

In Wellington the Council were committed to improvements in the Cornhill and preservation of the important listed Tonedale buildings and its machinery. It was also intended to replace the dilapidated and vandalised North Street public toilets subject to funding being available.

(Councillor Mrs Bryant declared a prejudicial interest in relation to the relocation of the Livestock Market and left the meeting whilst this matter was discussed).

(ii) Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Bishop)

Councillor Bishop's report updated the Council on progress in relation to the Taunton Deane Local Plan, the Local Development Framework, Structure Plan, transportation issues and the Green Apple Award.

It was also reported that Nynehead village had recently received a prestigious Calor Gas Best Small Village Award. The Mayor agreed to write a letter of congratulation to the Parish Council.

(iii) Leisure, Arts and Culture (Councillor Mrs Bradley)

The report submitted by Councillor Mrs Bradley covered Wellsprings, the Leisure Trust, Vivary Golf Course, Castle Green Cultural Quarter, Huntscourt, the Somerset Cultural Forum, Social Inclusion and Wellington Park.

(iv) Communications (Councillor Mrs Bryant)

The report on the Communications portfolio drew attention to the work being undertaken on the production of a Corporate Communications Strategy. Members were encouraged to attend a workshop to be held on 6 January 2004.

In addition to the Communications Strategy details were submitted of the vital role being played by Communications in the Housing Stock Options Appraisal Project, the Vision for Taunton and Wellsprings. The December issue of the Deane Dispatch had been published.

(v) Economic Development, Property and Tourism (Councillor Cavill)

Councillor Cavill drew attention to the Lyons Report, Firepool, the Egg Packing Station at Henlade, Broadband, Business networks, the Agricultural Development Officer and the Taste of Taunton event. An update was also given on tourism and requirements of the Asset Management Plan

(vi) Environmental Services (Councillor Edwards)

In the absence of Councillor Edwards, Councillor Williams submitted the report in relation to Environmental Services. The report covered litter, the Taunton Deane Crisp and Clean initiative and the current situation relating to public toilets.

(vii) Housing Services (Councillor Garner)

Councillor Garner submitted his report which provided a further update on the Housing Best Value Review and the Council Housing Stock Option Appraisal. In addition the new and existing initiatives being developed to reduce Bed and Breakfast accommodation and combat homelessness were reported upon.

(viii) Resources (Councillor Hall)

Councillor Hall drew attention to developments relating to procurement, member services, financial and revenue services, personnel, benefits and reception and Somerset Direct.

(ix) Community Leadership (Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris)

The report submitted by Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris provided details of Neighbourhood and Parish Wardens, Community Planning, the Local Strategic Partnership and tackling anti-social behaviour.

7. The Constitution

Reported that the Community Leadership Review Panel was responsible for overseeing the use being made of the Council's formal Constitution and to recommend changes when necessary.

Three such issues had been considered at the Review Panel on 25 November 2003, namely:-

- (a) Contract Standing Orders
- (b) Substitutions
- (c) Proposals for a Corporate Governance Committee.

Contract Standing Orders

The format of the existing Contract Standing Orders did not embrace modern procurement methods. A major review of the current standing orders had been carried out and had resulted in a complete re-write in a more modern form. The proposed Contract Standing Orders were submitted.

Substitutions

The procedural rules which governed the way in which the Council carried out its business were largely found in the Constitution which was adopted by the Council in October 2001.

A source of uncertainty since that time had been over the use of substitutes on Board, Panels and Committees - particularly as to whether such substitution could take place part way through a meeting - or for a single item.

The Review Panel had considered the advantages and disadvantages of substitutions on both the Planning Committee and on the Review Board and Panels. They concluded that:-

- some restrictions should be placed on such substitutions at all such meetings; and
- rather than preventing any substitution at meetings of the Planning Committee provision should be made for some limited substitutions of members so long as some proper safeguards are in place.

Corporate Governance Committee

In preparing the Constitution the aim was that all of the Council's functions both internal and external should fall within the remit of one of the "Overview and Scrutiny Panels". One of the areas that was not specifically allocated in this way was the field of "Corporate Governance". It was now commonplace amongst Councils to reflect the increased importance of this area by the setting up of an "Audit Committee" or "Corporate Governance Committee". Such a committee would have responsibility for the monitoring of the Council's approach to Corporate Governance, which was the system by which the Council directed and controlled its functions and related to its communities.

By forming such a committee greater reassurance could be achieved that existing arrangements were operating satisfactorily. The terms of reference of the committee were submitted.

On the motion of Councillor Denington it was RESOLVED that the Constitution be amended:-

- (1) by the inclusion of the revised Contract Standing Orders as submitted;

- (2) as to the substitution of members at meetings:-
- (a) by the inclusion of “Such formal notice must be given to the Member Services Manager not later than the beginning of the meeting concerned and such substitution will last for the whole of that meeting” in the Procedural Rules for Review Board and Panels (page 4-E3);
 - (b) by the insertion of a new paragraph (5.2) in Part 3 (Section 2 - Regulatory Powers of the Council) (Page 3-A6) as follows:-
“Planning Committee - Substitutions - substitution of members at meetings of the Planning Committee may only be effected as follows:-

Such formal notice must be given to the Member Services Manager not later than the beginning of the meeting concerned and such substitution will last for the whole of that meeting. Substitutes may only be appointed from those councillors noted by the Member Services Manager as having undergone recent and satisfactory Planning Committee training. (For the purpose of this paragraph those Planning Committee meetings which require the use of a ‘reserve date’ shall be treated as two separate meetings).”
- (3) by a Corporate Governance Committee being added to the Council’s constitutional arrangements with terms of reference as set out in the report.
- (4) by the Monitoring Officer being authorised to effect these amendments to the Constitution and to circulate the resulting changes to all Councillors.

(The meeting ended at 9.20 pm).

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, on Monday 22 December 2003, at 6.30pm.

Present: The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
Councillors Beaven, Mrs Biscoe, Bishop, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, N Cavill, Miss Cavill, Croad, Davies, Denington, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Hindley, House, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Meikle, Morrell, Mrs Nixon, Paul, Phillips, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith, Stuart-Thorn, Trollope, Watson, Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

1. Apologies

Councillors Bone, C Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Durdan, Edwards, The Mayor (Councillor Govier), Guerrier, Mrs Jones, Lisgo, Ms Priscott, Weston.

2. Council Tax on Second Homes

The Local Government Act 2003 had introduced new freedoms to Local Authorities regarding the amount of discount offered on Council Tax on second homes and long-term empty properties.

Any additional income raised by reducing the discount offered on second homes could now be shared by the billing authority (TDBC) and the two main precepting authorities (Somerset County Council and Avon and Somerset Police Authority) in proportion to the amount levied via the Council Tax Bills.

Somerset County Council had suggested that all Somerset Authorities should earmark any additional revenue raised by this change of policy for investment in schemes within the billing authorities area. This could be done by giving first priority to any plans put forward by the Local Strategic Partnership and/or the Local Crime and Disorder Partnership.

The County Council had approved this proposal but the Avon and Somerset Police Authority had declined to make any contribution to the Local Strategic Partnership.

Long-term empty homes for Council Tax purposes included properties which had been empty and unoccupied for six months or more or, where they required major repairs, 12 months or more. The legislation gave Local Authorities the freedom to decide whether discounts should be applied to these properties. Currently, long-term empty homes received a 50% discount once the period of exemption expired. The Act allows authorities to reduce or remove that discount.

Reducing or removing the discount for long-term empty homes would not generate any additional income as the additional amount charged would be offset by a reduction in Revenue Support Grant.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) 90% of the full Council Tax on second homes be applied instead of the present 50%; and
- (2) the additional income raised be delegated to the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership for decisions on how it would be spent.

(3) Councillors Williams, Henley, Lisgo and Mrs Whitmarsh together with the Head of Finance be authorised to consider further the level of discount to be applied to long-term empty properties.

3. Audit Commission Report – SAS 610

Reported that the audit commission had now concluded their audit of the Statement of Accounts 2002/03 and were required, under the new Statement of Auditing Standards (SAS) 610 to report their findings to full Council.

Submitted report which outlined their findings and provided the formal uncertified audit opinion on the Council's accounts. The report highlighted one area that they considered to have material weaknesses (Asset Register). This had been discussed fully with the audit commission and work was underway to rectify and improve the controls in place.

RESOLVED that the SAS 610 report from the Audit Commission be noted.

4. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that the Press and public be excluded from the meeting for the item numbered 4 on the agenda because of confidential information which might otherwise be disclosed relating to Clauses 1, 7 and 12 of paragraph 12 (a) of the Local Government Act 1972.

5. Leisure Trust

Submitted details of the recommendation made by the Executive at its meeting which took place immediately before this meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Executive be agreed and that:-

- (a) the decision to transfer the Council's Leisure Services and facilities to Tone Leisure be deferred for six months and the current Trust lawyers have no further input into the project;
- (b) work commence immediately on a medium-term leisure strategy;
- (c) a contribution of £200,000 from Somerset County Council towards the cost of completion of the Wellsprings Leisure Centre be accepted;
- (d) a Supplementary Estimate of £330,000 be made towards the VAT liability triggered by the Wellsprings Leisure Centre - £151,000 from unallocated capital resources and £179,000 from General Fund Reserve;
- (e) the Chief Executive be authorised to negotiate with the Hawkins Family Trust to release the clause preventing a sub-lease at Blackbrook and, if required, authorise the implementation of appropriate Compulsory Purchase Order powers.

(Councillor Prior-Sankey, who is also a member of Somerset County Council, declared a personal interest in this item).

(The meeting ended at 7.37pm).

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL FROM DAVID BAKER OBE, CHAIR, MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES REVIEW PANEL AND COUNCILLOR MRS WHITMARSH, CHAIR RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL

Members' Allowances

(a) Recommendations of Members' Allowances Review Panel

The independent Members' Allowances Review Panel completed its review of members' allowances in November last year.

The report and recommendations were circulated with the papers for the Resources Review Panel which considered the matter at its meeting on 13 November 2003. Our recommendations were arrived at following consideration of much background information and comparisons with other local authorities in Taunton Deane's "family" group.

The full details of the Panels' terms of reference, the methodology used and research undertaken to carry out the review are contained in our report.

We reached the following conclusions:-

Carers Allowance

There is still little evidence that this is an issue with the current membership of the Council. However, we remain of the view that every opportunity should be given to any individual who might want to stand as a candidate. We are therefore recommending that the current level of carers allowance, which covers all forms of care assistance, should remain unchanged.

Basic Allowances

Once more we would like to emphasise that the basic allowance is not a full and proper recompense for the duties performed and that it does not reflect a similar level of responsibility in the private sector. It also reflects the fact that a proportion of any Councillor's work continues to be voluntary.

Our comparisons with other authorities, including those in our "Family Group", indicates that the level of basic and special responsibility allowances at Taunton Deane are below the average. It is clear from this information that the gap between Taunton Deane and other authorities has widened since last year. The limited increase that the Council awarded to Councillors in April 2003, rather than the full recommendations of the Panel, has contributed in no small measure to this situation.

Therefore we believe that last year's recommendations, together with an appropriate increase to reflect the rate of inflation, should be submitted.

Special Responsibility Allowances.

We saw no reason to make any alteration to the posts previously identified as having special responsibilities. We now have a good understanding of the responsibilities of those offices that attract special responsibility allowances. The "Cabinet" system has meant greater responsibility and time commitment for those given Executive roles. It is also very evident from the figures of the other "family" authorities that there is now a general recognition of the extra responsibilities that such Councillors have. We feel that the level of special responsibility allowances we have recommended accurately compensates Councillors for these important and time consuming duties which now form such an integral part of administering a modern local authority.

The new Regulations make provision for the consideration of payment for special responsibility allowances to members of a committee that deals with a licensing function. We are aware of the new Licensing legislation but as this function has not yet been implemented we feel that a special responsibility allowance is not justified.

Approved Duties

Since the Council extended its list of approved duties two years ago we are happy that this list is satisfactory. Concern has been raised in the past regarding the non payment of expenses for attending political group meetings.

The panel continue to feel that the payment of expenses for these meetings would not comply with the spirit of openness and transparency that formed such an important theme within the local government legislation. Although we acknowledge that Group meetings might help the administration of Council meetings we remain of the view that they are primarily used for party political purposes and should not therefore qualify as an approved duty.

Our suggested list of Approved Duties is set out in the attached Appendix.

Parish Council Allowances

Existing powers to pay Parish Councillors allowances have been repealed and replaced with a new system which involves this Panel.

Under the new system, although a Parish Council would determine the level of allowances payable itself, it has to have regard to the advice received from the Panel.

Allowances payable in the future included a basic 'participation allowance' which could be paid to the Chairman only or to all members and 'travelling and subsistence allowance' which, in the future, could be claimed for duties within the parish as well as those outside.

As far as the participation allowance was concerned, the general view from Parish Council's nationally was that they wished to retain the existing practice whereby Parish Councillors were 'unpaid'. We feel therefore that there is no

need to consider this matter until a formal request for advice as to the level of allowance that should be paid is received.

As well as seeking the Panel's views on the level of travelling and subsistence that should be payable to Parish Councillors, we were also asked for comments in relation to proposals for Parish Council's to meet the cost or minor expenses incurred by its members, such as the replacement of computer consumables used in respect of parish business.

We have come to the conclusion that:

- (a) no advice on a level of participation allowance for Parish Councillors be offered by the Panel until a formal request was received from a Parish Council;
- (b) allowances for travelling and subsistence should be identical to those payable to Borough Councillors and that the same level of such allowances should apply for all Parishes throughout Taunton Deane; and
- (c) it would be in order for Parish Councillors to seek the reimbursement of the actual cost of items used for Parish Council business, such as computer consumables, or a nominal sum, provided such payments were approved by the Parish Council.

Travel and Subsistence Allowances

The new Regulations now allow local authorities to determine their own travel and subsistence allowances after having regard to the recommendation of their independent remuneration panels.

As far as mileage rates are concerned, the Panel consider that car expenses should be limited to the tax free amount allowed by the Inland Revenue.

It was therefore felt that the basic mileage allowance for cars should be standardised to the limit which the Inland Revenue would not treat as a taxable benefit – that is 40p per mile. This rate would apply whatever the size of the car engine, because the size of car was a matter for the individual.

With regard to subsistence allowances, the Panel noted that a small difference existed between that paid to officers and that paid to Councillors. Following consideration of the information received from other Authorities, the Panel felt that Councillors should receive the same subsistence rates as officers.

Pensions for Councillors

The Government has agreed to give local authorities the power to admit Councillors to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The Regulations require that the Council's independent remuneration panel will make binding recommendations on which Councillors may be eligible for access to the LGPS.

We have taken advice from a Pensions Fund Advisor from Somerset County Council on this matter.

The original rationale behind the Governments' decision to admit Councillors to the LGPS was to compensate those members who spent so much time on Council duties that it affected the amount they were able to contribute to a work based pension.

This was the position taken by the Government when the legislation was in its draft form.

Following representations, the Government decided not to restrict membership of the LGPS just to members of a local Authority's Executive and Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The independent remuneration panel can now make recommendations as to which members (under 70 years of age) should be entitled to membership of the Scheme and whether the basic allowance or the special responsibility allowance or both should be made pensionable.

This was a matter that we considered very carefully. We acknowledge that the current level of basic allowance might not make membership of the Scheme worthwhile for some Councillors. However, we agree with the principle that all Councillors should be treated equally on this issue. Every opportunity should be taken to encourage individuals to stand as candidates and an enhancement of the overall remuneration package for Councillors will help this aim. We feel, therefore, that the Scheme should be made available to all Councillors who want to take advantage of its benefits.

Time Limit

The Panel are aware of the recommendation of the Council's own Audit and Review Unit that allowance claims be submitted regularly. They are also aware that a former Councillor submitted a claim which went back three years.

Although not strictly within our remit we would suggest that the Council might wish to impose a time limit of six months for backdated claims.

Recommendations

The Panel therefore submit the following recommendations for consideration by the Council:

1. The existing Members' Allowance Scheme be discontinued and replaced with the following scheme with effect from 1 April 2004.

	£
Basic Allowance (payable to all members)	3,312
Leader	9,315
Executive Councillors (8)	3,623

Chair, Planning Committee	3,105
Chair, Review Board	3,105
Chairs, Review Panels (5)	1,035

2. (i) Travelling and subsistence allowances shall be payable to Councillors incurred by them in the necessary carrying out of those official activities as a Councillor as appear on the list of "Approved Duties" set out in the Appendix to this report.
- (ii) A new mileage rate of 40p per mile be paid with effect from 1 April 2004. The rate for motor cycles to be 24p per mile and bicycles to be 20p per mile.
- (iii) Subsistence rates be as set out below:

Breakfast	£4.48
Lunch	£6.17
Tea	£2.43
Evening Meal	£7.64

3. Payment for the care of Councillors' Dependent be in accordance with the following conditions:
 - (a) Councillors shall be reimbursed, up to a specified maximum limit, for costs actually incurred in providing care for any of the following who are at the time part of the claimant's household living with him/her and who would normally be looked after by him/her, whilst the claimant is undertaking an "approved duty".
 - children under the age of 14
 - elderly person (aged 60 and over)
 - people with disabilities
 - people with learning difficulties
 - (b) In addition to living as part of the claimant's household the dependent must be unable to be left unsupervised by the carer.
 - (c) The carer must not be someone who also ordinarily lives with the claimant as part of the household.
 - (d) For the purposes of (a) above:
 - (i) "approved duty" would be a duty under the Council's scheme
 - (ii) the maximum hourly rate repayable should be consistent with the statutory minimum wage
 - (e) The claimant must produce a receipt for payments he/she has made to the carer and must sign a certificate which, amongst other things, will state that the costs were properly and necessarily incurred in the course of, or to permit, him/her undertaking his/her duties as a Councillor.
4. (a) no advice on a level of participation allowance for Parish Councillors be offered by the Panel until a formal request be received from a Parish Council;

- (b) allowances for travelling and subsistence be identical to those payable to Borough Councillors and the same level of such allowances should apply for all Parishes throughout Taunton Deane;
 - (c) Parish Councillors be permitted to seek the reimbursement of the actual cost of items used for Parish Council business, such as computer consumables, or a nominal sum, provided such payments were approved by the Parish Council;
5. (a) that all members of the Council be entitled to membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme;
- (b) both the basic and special responsibility allowance be treated as amounts in respect of which such pensions are payable.

David Baker O.B.E, D.L.
Chair
on behalf of the Members Allowances Review Panel

(b) Recommendations of Resources Review Panel

The Resources Review Panel, at its meeting on 13 November 2003 considered the report on the annual review of members' allowances undertaken by the Members' Allowances Review Panel.

The Resources Review Panel RECOMMEND that the recommendations of the independent Members' Allowances Panel be agreed.

Councillor Mrs M Whitmarsh
Chair, Resources Review Panel

RECOMMENDED LIST OF APPROVED DUTIES

Approved duties for the payment of travelling and subsistence allowances:

- (a) meetings of the Council, the Executive, its Executive Boards, Panels, Committees, Working Parties and sub groups;
- (b) meetings of County Council's committees where the Councillor has been appointed by Taunton Deane as a member or representative;
- (c) any national conference authorised by the Council and involving an overnight stay;
- (d) meetings of other bodies to which the Council make appointments (representatives of the Council on outside bodies);
- (e) the following types of meetings:-
 - briefing meetings convened in The Deane House for members by an officer
 - Council organised induction/training seminars
 - agenda setting meetings
 - meetings on Council business with officers, MPs, VIPs and others holding official positions.
 - Informal Council
 - civic functions (twinning ceremonies, Britain in Bloom awards, Design Awards, etc).
 - meetings of Parish Councils or Community Associations where the Councillor attends as a representative of the Council (not as a member of the Parish Council or Community Association).
 - meetings within a ward, generated by business with a constituent (any such claims be supported by completion of a form indicating the area of the journey and the nature of the business).
 - site visits by members of the Planning Committee
- (f) such other duties approved by the Council.

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL **COUNCILLOR WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE EXECUTIVE**

(a) General Fund Revenue Estimates 2004/2005

The Executive have considered its 2004/2005 budget proposals. The report we considered contained details on:-

- (1) the General Fund Revenue Budget proposals for 2004/2005;
- (2) the results of the public consultation exercises;
- (3) draft figures on the expected financial position of the Council for the following two years;
- (4) Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005; and
- (5) an overview of the proposed increases in fees and charges for 2004/2005.

The report has also been considered in detail by the Review Board.

The Council are RECOMMENDED that the budget for General Fund services for 2004/2005 be agreed and that:-

- (a) the transfer for any under spend in 2003/2004 back to General Fund Reserves be agreed;
- (b) the use of £16,523 from General Fund Reserves to support the 2004/2005 budget be agreed;
- (c) the development bids outlined in the report submitted to the Executive be agreed;
- (d) the increases to fees and charges set out in the report to the Executive be agreed;
- (e) the proposed 2004/2005 budget being Authority expenditure of £10,975,203 and Special Expenses of £25,750 to be agreed in accordance with the Local Government Act 1992;
- (f) the predicted General Fund Reserve balance at 31 March 2005 of £1,310.466 be noted; and
- (g) the Prudential Indicators for 2004/2005, as set out in the report to the Executive be agreed.

(b) General Fund Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007

The proposed capital programme of the Council amounts to £6,383,046, leaving £1,381,056 of unallocated capital resources available for future schemes.

All capital expenditure has to be financed from borrowing, capital receipts or other revenue funds. After taking into account the current programme which has already been approved and financed, the anticipated available surplus resources for the period 2003/2004 to 2006/2007 are £175,000 of Capital Receipts and £1,813,356 of unallocated Capital Reserve, making a total of £1,988,356.

In previous years, the Council's resources took into consideration the use of Credit Approvals. With effect from 1 April 2004, a new system called the Prudential Code will come into effect which will give Local Authorities the freedom to borrow providing

the borrowing is affordable, prudent and sustainable. It is not anticipated that the Council will take advantage of its new freedom to borrow.

The Capital Receipts of £175,000 represents income that is expected to be generated from the sale of assets. This income could be wholly reinvested in funding capital schemes.

The current approved capital programme totals £5,483,621. This includes any slippage in schemes that have been rolled forward from 2002/2003 and any subsequent Supplementary Estimates that have been approved by Council.

The Review Board have considered the Capital Programme and have made no suggestions for changes.

Since the consideration of the programme to the Review Board, Executive Councillors have revisited the proposed programme and suggest one further addition. The scheme for continued financial support in 2004/2005 for improvements to the Taunton Canal/River Corridor (£10,000) is now included in the draft programme.

The Council are RECOMMENDED that the General Fund Capital Programme as set out in the report to the Executive be agreed.

(c) Council Tax Setting 2004/2005

The Council is required to make an annual determination which set its gross expenditure (including the Housing Revenue Account and balances brought forward) and gross income (also included in the Housing Revenue Account and balances brought forward) with the difference as its budget requirement. (This determination is set out in the resolution).

The estimated expenses chargeable to the non-parished area of Taunton in 2004/2005 amounts to £25,750 and this forms part of the total net expenditure of the Council.

The estimated balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund is a deficit of £78,043. Taunton Deane's share of this amounts to £8,435. This is reflected in the revenue estimates.

The overall debt outstanding on Community Charge is now approximately £140. The overall debt has been reduced during the year by write offs of over £1000 and it is estimated that the Community Charge Collection Fund as at 15 January 2004 has a deficit of £27,217. This element is not shared with the County Council or the Police Authority and is, therefore, a cost for the General Fund. This is reflected in the revenue estimates.

The Council's budget requirement including parish precepts and non-parished special expenses is £11,306,166. This is then reduced by the amount notified in respect of the Borough's Revenue Support Grant of £3,675,969 and the Non-Domestic Rates Distribution from the Pool amounting to £2,824,141.

The net amount having taken the Collection Fund position into account of £4,841,708 is used to calculate the Council Tax at Band D, reflecting the parish precepts, etc by dividing it by the total of the Council Tax Base as approved by the Executive in January 2004.

The Council Tax for the Borough (excluding parish precepts and special expenses for the non-parished area) is £1116.63, an increase of £7.12 (6.5%) compared to the 2003/2004 Council Tax. The total Council Tax including the County Council and Police Authority precept is still subject to confirmation.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that, subject to final determination, including the Council Tax for Somerset County Council and the Police Authority, which is still to be advised:

1. That it be noted that at its meeting on 14 January 2004 the Executive calculated the following amounts for the year 2004/2005 in accordance with the regulations made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended):-

(a) 38,675.69 being the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as its Council Tax base for the year.

(b)

Ash Priors	66.24	Neroche	241.01
Ashbrittle	86.72	North Curry	684.85
Bathealton	84.19	Norton Fitzwarren	657.25
Bishops Hull	1,070.16	Nynehead	147.57
Bishops Lydeard / Cothelstone	1,822.78	Oake	317.62
Bradford on Tone	276.96	Otterford	163.25
Burrowbridge	203.81	Pitminster	444.97
Cheddon Fitzpaine	626.00	Ruishton/Thornfalcon	606.84
Chipstable	113.17	Sampford Arundel	128.78
Churchstanton	307.45	Staplegrove	715.61
Combe Florey	110.46	Stawley	116.69
Comeytrowe	2,066.03	Stoke St Gregory	374.36
Corfe	131.93	Stoke St Mary	192.98
Creech St Michael	934.29	Taunton	15,417.20
Durston	57.56	Trull	938.40
Fitzhead	118.96	Wellington	4,509.10
Halse	145.65	Wellington (Without)	292.30
Hatch Beauchamp	244.08	West Bagborough	153.99
Kingston St Mary	432.85	West Buckland	398.46
Langford Budville	213.97	West Hatch	139.68
Lydeard St Lawrence / Tolland	193.38	West Monkton	1,073.39
Milverton	573.00	Wiveliscombe	1,081.75

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax Base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

2. That the following amounts now be calculated by the Council for the year 2004/2005 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-

(a) £50,521,900 being the aggregate of the amount which the Council

estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) of the Act. (*Gross expenditure including amount required for working balance*).

(b) £39,215,734 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act. (*Gross income including reserves to be used to meet Gross Expenditure*).

(c) £11,306,166 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.

(d) £6,464,458 being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be payable for the year into its general fund in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates, revenue support grant, additional grant or SSA reduction grant (increased by the amount of the sums which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year from its Collection Fund to its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (*Council Tax Surplus*) and increased by the amount of any sum which the Council estimates will be transferred from its Collection Fund (Community Charge) directions under Section 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 made on 7 February 1994 (*Community Charge Surplus*).

(e) £125.19 $\frac{(c) - (d)}{1(a)} = \frac{11,306,166 - 6,464,458}{38,675.69}$

being the amount calculated at (c) above less the amount at (d) above, all divided by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year. (*Average Council Tax at Band D For Borough Including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses*).

(f) £330,963 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act. (*Parish Precepts and Special Expenses*).

(g) £116.63 $\frac{(e) - (f)}{1(a)} = \frac{125.19 - 330,963}{38,675.69}$

being the amount at (e) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (f) above by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items relate. (*Council Tax at Band D for Borough Excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses*).

(h)

Ash Priors	120.40	Neroche	131.15
Ashbrittle	122.40	North Curry	133.42
Bathealton	123.76	Norton Fitzwarren	136.65
Bishops Hull	129.30	Nynehead	130.18
Bishops Lydeard / Cothelstone	129.80	Oake	126.70
Bradford on Tone	131.07	Otterford	116.63
Burrowbridge	138.37	Pitminster	125.39
Cheddon Fitzpaine	124.62	Ruishton/Thornfalcon	132.86
Chipstable	132.54	Sampford Arundel	151.11
Churchstanton	139.02	Staplegrove	127.39
Combe Florey	127.04	Stawley	125.20
Comeytrowe	123.89	Stoke St Gregory	132.66
Corfe	126.10	Stoke St Mary	125.96
Creech St Michael	131.52	Taunton	118.30
Durston	117.32	Trull	124.09
Fitzhead	130.92	Wellington	133.13
Halse	128.65	Wellington (Without)	128.60
Hatch Beauchamp	128.10	West Bagborough	129.62
Kingston St Mary	130.49	West Buckland	135.45
Langford Budville	124.34	West Hatch	130.50
Lydeard St Lawrence / Tolland	124.65	West Monkton	126.88
Milverton	127.10	Wiveliscombe	131.42

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at (g) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 1(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate. (*Council Taxes at Band D for Borough, Parish and Special Expenses*).

(i) See attached.

Note: Since the meeting of the Executive, notification of the level of the Police Authority precept has been received. Somerset County Council will meet on 18 February and an indication of its likely level of Council Tax has also been received. Attached as Appendix A and B are tables which indicate the revised figures.

(d) Annual Investments Strategy

Recent legislation requires each Local Authority to produce an annual Investments Strategy.

In summary, the strategy requires that:-

- all Council investments must be made with prime consideration being given to security of capital and liquidity of those investments;
- security was enhanced by use of credit ratings;

- investments were limited on amounts and time to ensure that the Council could honour cash commitments and benefit from positive interest rate movements;
- advantage of favourable moves in the interest rates should be taken by conducting forward deals supported by advice from specialist advisers;
- external fund management was deemed not appropriate at this time; and
- the Executive would be updated on any proposed changes/amendments to the strategy at future meetings and be presented with an end of year assessment included in the annual Treasury Management Outturn Report.

An Annual Investment Strategy stated which investments the Council may use for the prudent management of its treasury balances during the financial year under the heads of specified investments and non-specified investments.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the Investments Strategy, as submitted to the Executive be agreed.

(e) Third Quarter Budget Monitoring

The forecast outturn figures for General Fund Revenue predicts a net under spend of 0.21% or £32,217 against the current approved budget.

The Executive have considered this under spend and allocated areas where it will be used.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the variations to the budget be agreed and the finance available be allocated as follows:-

£5,000	Golf Course flooding
£2,000	Golf Course Tree Pruning
£10,000	Car Park Signs
£4,000	Hunts Court – pump priming
£5,000	Chewing Gum Clearing Initiatives
£6,217	Pay on Foot – feasibility study
Total	£32,217

Councillor J R Williams

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

My report to Full Council has become the opportunity to ensure that all Members are appraised of the current position in respect of the ongoing initiatives and policies of this Council. Since our December meeting I am pleased to report we have successfully concluded on three major issues which are;

- Completion of Wellsprings Leisure Centre
- Alterations to Priory Bridge/Station Road junction
- Setting of a sound and balanced prudent budget with under a 14P per week Band D Council Tax increase which is before you for consideration tonight.

The other initiatives are ongoing such as the Vision for Taunton process, relocation of the livestock market, redevelopment of the Crescent car park/High Street area, progressing our response to the Local Plan Inspectors report. We also need to use the next few months to reassess the Leisure Trust proposals as at our special meeting in December we gave ourselves six months for this to take place. The Housing Stock Options evaluation is also progressing and implementation of the Licensing Act will soon be required but we still do not have all the necessary guidance from Central Government in order to set this up.

We must not forget that the day before this meeting the formal part of our Comprehensive Performance Review process commenced with the Chief Executive and myself taking the assessors on a tour of the district. This is to give some insight into the many initiatives we have in place to help and encourage the community to develop and help themselves. This process is very much ongoing and many Members and Officers will be involved in talking to and providing information to allow the assessors to form a judgement as to our capabilities. The whole process will extend from now until July when the final judgement will be announced as to which grade we have achieved. It is very important to this administration that we score well and at least achieve a good rating as it does impact considerably on the way we run and administer this Council in the future.

Initiatives in Wellington although not highly visible are still very much ongoing. Plans for redevelopment of Cornhill I understand have been delayed because of a change of architects for the property concerned. Included in our budget is a substantial sum for replacement of the North Street toilets which is a much needed and long overdue improvement for Wellington. It has to be said the present toilets are a disgrace to Taunton Deane. It is obvious they have suffered from years of underinvestment hence it is likely the solution will be to replace rather than upgrade. Efforts are still continuing to ensure the important listed Tonedale buildings and its machinery are preserved as a heritage site and it now

appears it has taken on international significance as English Heritage have established that the process used by Fox's mill for cloth making is quite unique.

In my last report I mentioned the need to find an alternative use for the Old Municipal Buildings. I can report that initial discussions have been held regarding a possible alternative use. Early days but if successful it would be an eminently suitable use for such a lovely old building and fit perfectly with our aspirations to create a cultural/public centre around Castle Green.

I set out as follows more detail of some of the above.

Wellsprings Leisure Centre

I was delighted to receive the keys at the formal handover of the centre on 22 December 2003 which helped draw a line under a very difficult contract. The waiting has been worth it with superb facilities set in an excellent building. Full credit must go to the centre staff who worked tirelessly to ensure the facilities were installed and ready to go for the opening of the centre to the public on the 3 and 4 January 2004 and fully operational as from the 5 January. The opening of the centre has been well received with it being well used by the public and Ladymead School for the benefit of their pupils.

The difficult task now remains of attempting to recover the increased cost of the project due to the failure of the original contractor to complete the works, from that contractor. Be assured that this administration is committed to taking all reasonable steps to achieve this aim.

Station/Priory Bridge Road Junction

I regard the improvements carried out as a great achievement for this administration. It has demonstrated our ability to work in partnership and close cooperation with the highways authority, find the necessary funding to facilitate the works and most of all bring these vital alterations to a satisfactory conclusion for the benefit of residents, business and visitors in Taunton Deane. Although it has only been operational for a few weeks the impact it has made in reducing congestion, from whichever side the junction is approached, is tremendous.

Budget Setting

The budget setting process is now concluded and the subject of a separate report to you tonight. I believe it is pertinent to say that we were advised it was difficult with the budget gap experienced, but no different to previous years with similar gaps. This is where the similarity ends. We have managed to develop a sustainable balanced budget with absolutely minimal use of reserves, unlike last year. Substantial amounts are included to protect and maintain the assets of this Council and for meeting the requirements of legislation for which no previous

sensible provision had been made, this despite the certain knowledge that legislation required us to implement works. We have also listened to our taxpayers and maintained a low increase in Council Tax at under 14P per week Band D equivalent. All this with only a net increase in Government funding over last year of 1.44%, in monetary terms this amounted to £101,000 increase but for salary increases, increased pension contributions and inflation on services we started with a £700,000 deficit. In addition the medium term financial predictions clearly indicate that we are spending beyond our means and that further budgetary correction will be required to ensure we can maintain a sustainable budget for the future. We have made a good start with this budget but I flag up that the process of evaluating costs and income must continue if we are to maintain a satisfactory budget over the coming years.

Vision for Taunton Process

The initial consultations when the Urban Design Framework plans were presented have been concluded and I am pleased to report that of the responses received the majority fully supported the aims and aspirations of the vision. We are now awaiting the next consultation process that provide information about the necessary infrastructure improvements associated with this major regeneration proposal and the feasibility studies. The plans as prepared are tremendously exciting and promise regeneration of life in Taunton with huge benefits for the economy and the region. We must not forget the cultural benefits as planned with new theatre, cinema, improved cricket ground and the proposals for a cultural/public area around Castle Green. Make no mistake, I do not underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead of us in implementing a scheme of this magnitude but we do have tremendous partners in SWRDA, SCC and local business and Economic Development groups that are fully supportive and willing us to succeed in what has to be the long term successful regeneration of major areas in Taunton.

I would flag up one potential problem and this is the proposal for the inner relief road crossing the river at Tangier, I am of the opinion that if this were to proceed it would deliver a major blow to the overall deliverability of the regeneration of the riverside corridor. It will not only seriously affect the development of Tangier and the cultural centre as proposed but will also have a major impact on Bridge Street which at present is the intended exit and access point for traffic using the new bridge. The major congestion problems we have until recently experienced in Station/Priory Bridge Road will pale into insignificance against the problems that will be caused if this inner relief road is constructed along its presently intended route. Please also do not be deceived by the prospect of the panacea of a pedestrianised precinct through North Street. Our respected Town Planners, Terence O'Rourke, advise this would be detrimental to the economic wellbeing of North Street and it would only be part time pedestrianisation at best. The highway authority advice is that because of traffic capacity problems in the town

North Street must remain as a vehicular through route in both directions during the peak hours of the day.

We do need relief roads but not so close to the town centre that it is in danger of destroying the very viability of the regeneration programme.

Town Centre Retail Redevelopment

Recently I have seen the preliminary layouts of the major town centre redevelopment in the Crescent car park and High Street area. These are exciting plans showing major retail redevelopment of the area with new multi-storey car parking, new bus station and some residential development. At the time of writing this report these plans were “hot off the press” but they show an imaginative and exciting proposed development which I look forward to presenting publicly as I sure it will be well received by the majority. Again as part of the process the infrastructure problems and feasibility studies must be carried out before we go too far in the consultation process.

Relocation of Livestock Market

Achieving this is absolutely key to the whole visioning process as it releases for development a large important section of development land for regeneration. In my report to Full Council in December I was anticipating an early submission of a planning application for the chosen site for relocation at Chelston, Wellington. Regrettably this has not occurred but it is in course of preparation now and I do believe submission is imminent. I am still of the opinion that as a Council we must take all reasonable steps to facilitate the relocation of this very important business to the preferred site of the Auctioneers, located at Chelston, and to assist us this must be achieved at the earliest time possible to free up our site in Taunton for redevelopment.

SWARMMS A358 Dualling

We have now progressed to the publication of the feasibility study as commissioned by the Minister to advise on the relative benefits of the upgrading of the A358 and the A303. In all major respects the A358 showed by far the greatest benefit from further investment which must assist our case for the A358 considerably. Again the cooperation between this Council, SCC and the business sector is an exemplar of partnership working. I represent with Officers this Council on a tactical lobbying group termed “The Missing Link” and the campaign was successfully launched recently with excellent media attendance to give the fullest coverage to our campaign. We must remain focussed on the fact that only one major scheme, if any, will be given approval by the Minister and this must be the upgrading of the A358 as providing the greatest benefits for the region and Taunton with its North/South links as well as East to West. The A358 is the gateway to the West Country for a lot of businesses in the Midlands and North.

Junction 25 of the M5 represents the closest access and egress point to the national motorway network for large areas of countryside, making it a truly regional link.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY, 2004

Report of Councillor Bishop – Planning Policy and Transportation

Taunton Deane Local Plan

A report, detailing the current progress with the Taunton Deane Local Plan, following the receipt of the Local Plan Inspector's report, was presented to the last meeting of the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Panel. The report indicated target dates for the agreement of modifications to the Plan, but I must emphasise that I consider these dates may be over ambitious as we cannot propose our recommendations on the modifications until we have received responses to our requests from other agencies who have been consulted.

The Green Apple, Civic Pride Awards **St Margaret's Leper Hospital**

In my last report to Council I indicated that our submission had been shortlisted for national recognition and I am pleased to report that we have been informed that our entry has been selected as the National Silver winner. The Gold award went to Corfe Castle and the Bronze award to The Lighthouse at Poole, Dorset.

Over 200 entries were put forward nationally and the scheme was supported by the Institute of Environmental Health, the Environment Agency, The Green Organisation the Institution of Waste Management and the Municipal Journal, Technically the award has been given to TDBC as "it" has the "civic pride"

The Cornhill, Wellington

An improved scheme of lighting has been agreed following a meeting on site with Somerset County Council Heritage and Lighting Departments and an order has been placed for the installation of the new units.

I have been informed that an application will be submitted within the next four weeks for the redevelopment of the vacant, boarded up shops.

The repatching and the repair of the pavements will be undertaken when the redevelopment of 2 to 6 Cornhill is complete.

Negotiations are continuing regarding the provision of a sign, giving details of businesses in the street, which will be placed in the Southern Entrance.

Development Control Meetings

The quality of the presentation of applications to the Committee and the public has greatly improved since the Power Point presentations were first introduced on 28th January 2004, and it was pleasing to hear a member of the public congratulate the officers on the quality of the presentation.

Building Control Service

I would like to congratulate Brian Yates and his Staff on being awarded the building control contract for the new £8million Oncology Unit at Musgrove Park Hospital. The work was obtained in the face of fierce competition from several firms of private Approved Inspectors all anxious to be associated with this prestigious new development. The award of this contract proves that we can compete with others and I hope it will persuade some architects and developers to give the local authority service the opportunity to carry out their building control work.

Taunton Transport Strategy Review

The consultation on the Strategy began earlier this month with 450 persons invited to take part in Stakeholder workshops. The strategy will take into account the proposals in the Taunton Deane Local Plan and will be an important element in the delivery of the Vision for Taunton.

During the first week of March 30000 leaflets and questionnaires will be distributed in the area and an exhibition will be held between 10.0 a.m. and 4.0 p.m. at the Old Market Centre from 9th March to 13th March, and at the Municipal Hall between 5.30 p.m. and 9.30 p.m. on 8th March, 9th March and 11th March. The exhibitions will be manned by officers of both Somerset County Council and TDBC who will be able to offer answers to queries and explain the options being put forward...I am sure that any offer of assistance by Members would be appreciated

Recent plans for Taunton have included a proposal to build an Inner Relief Road from Wellington Road to Bridge Street and the developments of Tesco and Lidl foodstores have built the first parts of the road and made contributions towards the bridge which has planning permission..

Following the Vision for Taunton, the consultants, Terrence O'Rourke have prepared plans for the Town Centre and the recent consultation carried out shows strong support for the plans which do not include the Inner Relief Road.

The evidence so far suggests that the opportunity for high quality, riverside developments at the heart of the town centre would be lost if the Inner Relief is retained in the plan.

It is up to us to ensure that, in our discussions with individuals and organisations we make it absolutely clear that the Tangier site cannot deliver the Vision and the Inner Relief Road.

Station Road /Priory Bridge Road

The majority of work in the approved scheme was completed in advance of the programme, and the activation of the new signal arrangement was completed on 6th February, 2004 .

It is apparent from comments received and personal experience that the traffic is moving much better than it has for a long time, but we shall need to monitor the traffic flows and gauge the reaction of the public before we finally pass judgement on the success of the scheme.

I should like to congratulate the County Council and Somerset Highways on completing the alterations ahead of schedule with the minimum disruption to the road users, residents and businesses.

We have been informed by Somerset Highways that the road will be planed and resurfaced with a new stone mastic asphalt (SMA) – It has a high resistance to rutting, is extremely durable and has significant traffic – noise reducing properties. It is also planned for other roads in the town centre to be given the same treatment and this work will also be planned so that minimum disruption is caused.

SWARMS A358 – A303

The Highways Agency has delivered its report but has avoided making a recommendation between the two schemes but it does say that building a dual carriageway through the Blackdown Hills would have “large adverse” impacts on the environment and that widening the A358 would be cheaper and have only “slight averse” impacts on the landscape.

Transport 2000 called on the government to shelve plans for the Blackdown Hills route, which it said would be “the most controversial tarmac ever laid”. Friends of the Earth rejected the need for a second strategic road to the South West but said that the alternative to the Blackdown Hills route is “the lesser of two evils”

If Taunton is to progress as a Principal Urban Area (PUA) it is essential that the dualling of the A358 is agreed by the Minister and that works on the scheme with improvement to Junction 25 proceed as quickly as possible.

Councillor Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS. D. BRADLEY – LEISURE, ART AND CULTURE

Wellsprings: we are in business: the New Year Launch was a great success and I would like to pay tribute to Juliette Dickinson, Steven Hughes, James Curry and all the leisure staff who slaved to get everything ready and gave up their weekend to hold open house and show people round and also to Cllr David Gill who spent the whole weekend on duty. We got good press coverage and the membership sales for the first month have topped 400. We are now planning the formal opening at the end of April by way of a "Welcome to Wellsprings Musical Event". We have booked the Beatles Tribute Band with disco for the main hall (Tickets £10 or £7.50 for those on low income or 11-16). For the formal plaque unveiling ceremony we are looking to invite not only those people involved in the project but also the many stakeholders in North Taunton.

Leisure Services Strategic Review: with the deferral of the transfer of the service to a Leisure Trust, the opportunity is being taken to work up a Leisure Strategy for Taunton Deane. It is manifestly impossible to continue to spend the current sums on the current service given our budgetary constraints. From our consultations it is clear that people prefer the option of increases in charges to increases in Council Tax but we are competing in a very competitive market. I would therefore urge all councillors to consider the base paper (App.3 Executive Agenda 11.3.04) produced by our consultants New Horizons as a starting point. We have to consider both short term operations and also our longer term direction which may include rationalisation of the facilities themselves: i.e. consideration of swimming provision in Taunton, the future role and management of Vivary Golf Course and the range of opportunities provided at Blackbrook. In the meantime I am pleased to report that the latter is starting a visually impaired exercise session in partnership with Somerset Association for the Blind. Wellsprings has received accreditation by the Somerset Physical Activity Group to run Physical Activity Schemes for GP referrals. We now run the most successful schemes in the county. A bid has been submitted for tennis. The bid to the Crime & Disorder Partnership for a diversionary project for youth has been successful thanks to James Quirk's prompt action.

Greens Spaces Strategy: we are nearing the end of the work on this document which has been based on extensive consultation with the community. We will shortly be consulting on it with elected members. In particular Ian Baggott of the Communities First Partnership will present the draft findings to Wellington Town Council together with other organisations on 3rd March and then to the Health and Leisure Panel before it goes to the Executive in April.

Vivary Park: one of the conditions of the Lottery Grant was that we should prepare a 10 year management plan and this has now been produced by the Communities First Partnership and is available in the Members' room. It includes a most interesting Ecological Survey and Nature Conservation Plan. We are being urged to treat the Park as an outdoor leisure centre in which we deliver our corporate priorities of social inclusion and community building. Alongside this we have been working with the New Horizons Consultancy using Vivary as an example of how we could manage the parks service differently; in a more holistic way and create a staff presence as this is what people tell us they want. I would also like to thank all those people who have been preparing the ground for the launch in the Spring of the Friends of Vivary Park. This leads me on to Vivary Golf

course for which I am making a budget bid for money to deal with flooding and tree thinning. We are also being challenged over the issue of alternative changing facilities since the Tennis Pavilion burnt down and are discussing all options for addressing this issue.

Leisure Grants: as you will see from the proposed Capital and Revenue Budget 2004-2005 there is a figure of £21K per annum for the next three years (T04) for parish play equipment and to this is being added another £10K per annum thus increasing the sum to £31K per annum. This is an increase not a decrease or cut. Likewise the budget for Village halls which had been cut to £44,100 per annum has been reinstated by the addition of a further annual sum of £15,400. As you are aware traditionally this council has made a percentage contribution to any scheme that meets certain criteria. However given the changing political and financial climate, the bulk of money for such projects is now channelled through external funds such as Living Spaces (www.living-spaces.org.uk), Community Fund of the RDA. Awards for All, Wyvern Trust etc. We are therefore recognising the changed regime and our role in pump-priming by reducing our percentage contribution to 33% which brings it in line with our other grants. It enables us to spread our limited funds almost two and a half times as far as previously by our 85% contribution and increases the amount of money drawn down. In addition we are deciding to make a priority of youth provision as the young people tell us they lack facilities.

Culture: I have recently attended with officers a work shop run by Sport England with the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. The government has now realised that one and a half billion pounds have been spent on sports projects and the percentage of active sporting people remains firmly at 30%. While we can argue about what this means, the government is now facing escalating health problems arising from obesity. To respond to this the SASP's strategy for 2004-2007 is entitled "Creating a Healthier and More Active Community in Somerset". This brings me on to community and culture. I have also just attended with officers a session on Integrating Cultural and Community Strategies. Again more words but for the purposes of what we do in Taunton Deane I would define culture as the way in which a community or a number of people express themselves as community. The very latest in buzz words is "hub". This appears to mean a building or club which acts as a focal point of identity and activity for an area or a number of interest groups. The driver here is cost of capital and income resources in the shape of buildings and people.

TDBC are a key partner in the Cultural Consortium set up to look at how the Castle Green area develops as a cultural quarter. We are currently consulting the major players and stakeholders on the exact need and proposed nature of the new performing arts venue proposed in the Vision for Taunton, when the Brewhouse may give place to the expanding Somerset Cricket Ground. We are also working with potential tenants; the Somerset Art Gallery Trust, The Brewhouse, Somerset Art Week, SCAT, and other organisations on a proposal to retain Hunts Court through a Creative Enterprise Development Agency.

The first phase of the Economic Impact Study of Creative Industries in Somerset has been commissioned by the district council, SCC, Culture SW and Arts Council of England South West, providing evidence at district level by the Somerset Arts Officers Group. This partnership with the Arts Council England, South West also ensures the implementation of the Disability Arts Action plan, the Voluntary Arts Audit, and the development of a training package for key strategic organisations and arts managers called "Achieving Brilliance".

1100 project: this celebration of 1100 years of Taunton since the charter of 904 is scheduled for May and will be a physical expression of the ideas expressed in the previous paragraph. Look out especially for the Water Festival in French Weir on 23rd May.

In all of this there is a lot of consultation, reflection and creative thinking to be done. The contribution of back benchers of all parties is very much needed in order to focus ourselves to succeed as an effective Council for Taunton Deane in the very different world in which we find ourselves.

Councillor Mrs D. Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

Report of Councillor Gwyneth Bryant – Communications

Communications Strategy 2004-2007

Our Vision – “*For Taunton Deane Borough Council to have good communications at the heart of its work and for all with an interest in the Council and its services to feel informed and able to give their views*”

Over the last few months ‘communications’ has become a ‘buzzword’ around the Council. We are challenging the way we do things – the way we present ourselves inside and out, and we are discovering more effective and proactive ways to get our message across to build a stronger brand and to improve information for residents, the public and our stakeholders and their confidence in us.

We are working with staff to create good internal relationships and with members to improve ways of keeping everyone informed. We have held member and staff workshops, focus groups and have distributed questionnaires to find out what you think about communications and what we need to do to improve things. The Healthy Workplace Project Board recently put out an internal communications questionnaire and I would like to thank the 223 staff who replied – this is an excellent response rate of about 40%. The results of this will be put on the Council’s intranet.

Member consultation is also ongoing – and has already identified ways we can improve communications. I have taken on board the many comments you have made about being kept informed of what is happening in your wards and the need to promote more good news stories.

All of this has been used to inform the ‘Communications Strategy’ and the work plans that accompany it. The final draft will be considered at the next Review Board in a few days time before it goes to the Executive on 11 March.

In the Spotlight – our Media coverage

What a busy period! Lots of our achievements have been well reported by the media – too many to list in full! However, there have been a few ‘not so good’ headlines too and we will be looking at our media protocol to help us work more effectively with the media and to improve relationships thus keeping them better informed of the facts so they don’t bury the good news! My list of media high spots must include:

- **Wellsprings Sports Centre** successfully opened in January. We had excellent local press coverage and now the PR team is planning our media campaign to support the official opening at the end of April.
- **‘Taunton Vision’** Recognition that this is the most exciting project Taunton faces was well illustrated by the press reporting of the successful exhibitions we held at the Brewhouse, the Old Market and at reception in Deane House last November/December. A visit from the government Minister generated equally good headlines – *‘Taunton in final four for Whitehall shake-up’* and *‘Minister excited by Firepool plan’*. The ‘Vision’ has been the topic of conversation at Parish Council meetings in many villages across the Deane. We are responding positively to the suggestions of the CPA peer review – Cllr John Williams, Leader of the Council is spreading the word on TV, on radio, in the papers. He is giving talks to Parish Councils, schools, community groups and local business, encouraging them to get involved in Taunton’s future.

Additionally, 3 workshops on the ‘Vision’ were specially arranged for our staff to inform them about the project and to listen to their views.

- **Broadband** – The Council’s efforts to support rural business through its roadshows at Wiveliscombe and SCAT were a resounding success. By raising the awareness we are helping local communities reach their trigger points so they can get Broadband connections.
- Several departments have received praise in the papers for their excellent work including Economic Development & Tourism, Building Control, Housing/Stock Options and Electoral Services. Well done everyone – all of this helps promote the good work we do for the benefit of the people in Taunton Deane.

Web Site & Intranet

Visits to the web site are increasing – a new tracking system shows that we are getting over 15,000 ‘hits’ per week, with Planning being the most visited (25%). Interestingly, after the home page the most popular were

'The Council' (4.74%), A-Z of services (4.30%), and The Council - Councillors & Committees (4.18%) pages.

The intranet is essential for good internal communications and work has now commenced on its redevelopment. Consultation with both staff and members will be done soon to define the priorities for this significant project.

Deane Dispatch – the next issue is due to be published in the next couple of months.

Reputational Risk Workshop

Councillor Williams and I took part in a 'Reputational Risk' Workshop put on for our Corporate Management Team by Connectpoint Public Relations (Manchester).

Reputation often an organisation's greatest asset, is impossible to control, as it is a reflection of what others think about our organisation. It includes how we take people along with us and the risks we take for the greater good; the quality of our services and products; the way we treat our staff; our financial performance; our social and environmental responsibilities. We can manage this by recognising possible risks, where and how they could arise, the influence different groups of people/organisations can have on this, the effect this could have on the our ability to deliver our services, and what we need to do to minimise these risks and stay on track. Members and staff will be informed regarding this as our communications strategy is developed.

Public Relations Officer

Finally, many of you will already know that Nan Heal is leaving us after nearly 10 years. I am sure you would all like to join with me to thank Nan for her support and her contribution in raising the Council's profile and the services we give, and for the professional way she has handled all those tricky moments with tact and skill. We all wish you every success and happiness in your new career.

Councillor Gwyneth Bryant

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

Report of Councillor Cavill – Economic Development and Tourism

Asset Management

We are currently undertaking a number of reviews:

a) our public open spaces and playing fields. The purpose of the review is to ensure best use is being made of these areas, and to plan for the future so that they are maintained to the standard that is required.

b) a survey of our shops, to be finished by the end of March. This will assess the condition of the premises, identify any asbestos problems and will be incorporated into the five-year maintenance plan.

c) DDA. We are now looking at car parks as well as our premises in order to complete our assessment before October. The assessment will allow us to prioritise the work required.

Work is progressing on GIS/Computerised Asset Management register, transferring our asset management plan onto the computer system, to inter-link with other systems and thus to make best use of valuation services.

Other minor works to improve the workplace environment include checking all windows in Deane House so they function correctly. Toilets are being fitted with 6 litre flushes to economise on water use.

Assets and the Vision for Taunton

In undertaking a survey of the open spaces in Taunton, our valuation department and surveyors have drawn up plans, to maximise their value. It has become apparent that it would not be prudent at this moment to dispose of any of these assets until we know how they will affect the Vision plan. As one of the major landowners along with the SCC we have the ability to assist and enhance the Taunton Vision. Thus the proposed inner relief road line needs to be reviewed or it could be a serious economic detriment to our assets, the Vision, and the economy of North St.

Broadband

The Broadband road-shows that were held at SCAT and Milverton were a great success and well received by individuals and businesses alike. Building on this success three more have been planned, Corfe Village Hall 18th March, Cleeve Hotel Wellington 24th March, and WPA Blackbrook Business Park 29th March. In addition to morning and afternoon sessions, an evening session will be held from 7 – 9.30pm on each occasion.

TICs

Our TIC in Taunton won the 'Best Development Award – South' from National Express/Holiday Extra's for the period April – June 2003. Of the 17 TICs in the South West, Taunton was the second busiest with over 136,000 visitors. The TIC is jointly funded, equally by SCC and TDBC, at present. SCC is considering reducing its funding and is asking their staff to consider reducing the opening hours. There must be concern that if this is done, their success in generating an income of £221,600 (in 2003/4) may be compromised, with subsequent economic knock-on effects in the Deane. There is a proposed £1.2billion e-business action plan for Tourism in Somerset. This would make the Taunton TIC a hub office of strategic importance, as a central point for collecting data on a County level.

Visitor Guide for 2004

This has been launched, 26000 copies have been distributed to date, and have been well received. There have been considerable numbers of requests from institutions and businesses, indicating it may be a source of information for those interested in relocation.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Kerbside Recycling Waste Management

There have been some very positive steps forward in the kerbside recycling scheme. Firstly there was the introduction of the full service (including glass) to Hatch Beauchamp and North Curry as a result of negotiations with the contractor and at no extra cost to the Council. There was then the announcement of additional revenue support from DEFRA amounting to an additional £34,500, the success of the SWP bid for £5m to develop recycling services in 2004/5 and 2005/6 and a further £460,00 bid being awarded providing it can be spent in 2003/4.

The result of this is that we are now able to expand the service going forward for kerbside recycling by at least a further 4000 properties and all our collections will now include glass. This takes the coverage of the service to at least 92% in Taunton Deane.

This is a very positive step forward in the recycling of all waste produced in Taunton Deane and the success of the bids for SWP was in part due to the efforts of Bruce Carpenter who should be commended for his efforts.

Environmental Health

It became apparent that there was a problem in the parks and other areas with dog fouling and it was concluded that a review of our present situation needed to take place and action taken. There are a number of plans to look at this in the medium to short term and I am grateful to the officers for there responses to my requests.

In the short term there will, as a result, be more plain-clothes warden checks on certain areas and enforcement notices will be issued if we catch any offenders. Further changes are being considered and will be reported at a later date when a full reports has been drawn up and can be considered by the Health and Leisure Panel.

Litter/Street Scene

It is the intention to allocate £5000 for gum clearance iniatives from unallocated funds for 2003/4. This will further the “Crisp and Clean” agenda being followed by this Council. More information on this will be circulated shortly.

I will shortly be writing the owners of a number of properties within the Deane asking them to assist us in either cleaning their building if appropriate. In addition in certain instances I will be writing to ask that when land is left idle or derelict if they can assist by keeping the site tidy. Again this is another part of the “Crisp and Clean” agenda.

Public Toilets

The facility at Victoria Park has now re opened after I was satisfied that the contract would be enacted and the facility kept clean.

A full review of all services has gone forward to Health and Leisure, which met last week after submission of this report. I will assess their views in due course.

Out of Hours Noise

I have had comments with regard the possibility of this service from some Councillors but was not truly sure what the actual need was. To assist in reviewing this a form is being circulated to all Councillors so we can assess the true need.

Once again thank you to all the officers within my portfolio who are very able, supportive and hardworking and I am grateful for their continued support.

Councillor Mark J Edwards

COUNCIL MEETING - 24 FEBRUARY 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR GARNER - HOUSING SERVICES

(a) **Housing Revenue Account - Revenue Estimates and Rent Levels**

The Executive have considered the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2004/2005 Financial Year. It also includes details relating to the new rent level, service charges and other housing related charges such as garage rents. It also provides information on the Deane Helpline Trading Account and Deane Building DLO Trading Account.

In addition to the Executive, both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board have considered this report. The recommendations submitted reflects the views raised at those meetings.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the Housing Revenue Account budget be agreed.

(b) **Housing Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007**

The Executive have considered, together with a draft programme for 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2004/2005. It includes details of the resources available as well as recommendations for how they should be allocated. Investment focuses on the three areas of maintaining and improving the Council housing stock to a Decent Home Standard, providing grants to Registered Social Landlords to build new homes and providing grants to individual homeowners to reduce levels of unfitness in private sector properties.

In addition to the Executive, both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board have considered this report. The recommendations submitted reflects the views raised at those meetings.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the Housing Capital Programme be agreed.

Councillor Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

This report covers 4 topics:

1. Housing Stock options (update)
2. Housing Best Value review (update)
3. Houses imported from Canada
4. Deane Helpline

1. Housing Stock Options (update)

The stock options appraisal continues and remains on course for submission to Full Council in July 2004.

The on going process continues, on 31 January 2004, DOME the Independent Tenants Advisors held the second Insight Group meeting at the Holiday Inn.

Forty tenants took part, most of whom had previously been involved with the group however others had seen the article in the Somerset County Gazette inviting tenants to attend.

The topic for the morning was a discussion about housing need and demand within Taunton Deane during which Malcolm Western gave a comprehensive report on the key facts.

In summary the group understood that there is insufficient affordable housing for rent in Taunton Deane and there is a mismatch between the requirements of those on the waiting list and the sizes of properties available.

Other meetings are planned and these will cover

- Current housing stock condition
- Council's Housing finances
- Assessing current/desired Housing
- Setting the criteria for choosing the best option and making that choice

In March a group of about fifteen members of the Insight Group will visit three other Housing organisations, to meet tenants and staff and learn more about the options being considered.

On behalf of tenants, DOME commissioned a telephone survey. The results show that despite newsletters and road-shows being held in thirty three locations of the TDBC's housing estates there was a low level of awareness of this process. A further survey will be conducted towards the end of this process to test whether there is a greater understanding amongst tenants after consultation.

Stock Option Survey forms were sent to all 54 members before Christmas but only 6 were returned. This pitiful response led to the forms being sent out again after

Christmas, just over 20 have been returned which is still disappointing. It is not too late to submit returns, if members require a form, please advise.

This month, representatives from Government Office South West recently visited TDBC. They praised the officers managing this process and indeed made it clear that TDBC are a role model for others to follow.

2. Housing Best Value review (update)

This process works largely in parallel with stock options but must be completed in advance of the stock option process in order for the BV findings to be considered within the stock option appraisal.

A summary of work undertaken in the last quarter together with a future timetable is as follows:

Recent actions

- Series of best practice visits to Derby, Stroud, Rochdale, Exeter, Mid Devon and North Somerset
- Updates given at all Housing team meetings and improvement plan proformas circulated for front-line staff to contribute their ideas and suggestions
- Partners event held on 21st January with comprehensive feedback on how to improve our services
- Core group agreement (30th Jan) on structure of the Review report
- Verbal feedback from our external critical friend at the Core group (30th Jan)
- Update of the risk register at Core group (30th Jan)

Ongoing actions

- Outstanding actions still to be completed for Customer Services, Decent Home and Building Capacity working groups
- Gathering position statement information and evidence
- Writing up the Review

Future actions and timetable

- First draft (with missing items) to be discussed at Core group on 27th Feb
- Evaluation of the Review process to be carried out at Core group on 27th Feb using SWOT test
- Prioritising the Improvement Plan to be carried out by Housing Services Management Team on 3rd March
- Completion of writing up the Review 5th March
- Draft to be critiqued by Audit and Review, Director, external critical friend and Portfolio holder to be carried out during week beginning Mon 8th March.
- Review to CMT 17th March
- Review for discussion at CMT on 23rd March
- Review for decision (sign-off) at CMT on 29th March
- Review to Tenants Forum 13th April

- Review to Housing Review Panel 14th April
- Review to Executive 12th May

3. Houses imported from Canada

For approximately three years a site occupied by under utilised garages and land had been considered for housing development at Greenway, Bishops Lydeard.

The Quantock partnership through the Falcon Housing Association and TDBC carried out research in June 2003 to explore the viability of alternative housing i.e. wooden construction, this small site at Bishops Lydeard was considered ideal for such an experiment.

Various suppliers from the UK, Scandinavia and Canada were contacted. A company called Canadiana could meet the specification and were the most competitive. Canadiana is an established house builder in Canada but, to date, has only built church halls in the UK but no housing. Given that we are the first, this has enabled Falcon to negotiate favourable terms.

At the beginning of February three containers from Canada arrived together with a crew of four Canadian builders (plus two from their UK representative company). The containers contained two three bedroom and three two bedroom houses in kit form. These kits were erected to a watertight condition within about 10 days.

These houses are more spacious than comparative UK houses as they all have a fully fitted loft area creating an extra 30% of useable space (additional bedroom?).

The total cost is expected to be 85% of the normal cost indicator and is therefore a further benefit.

Thus:

- The Housing Association benefits through lower cost.
- TDBC benefit with additional affordable housing built relatively quickly.
- Tenants benefit with a new and well proportioned house.

If this experiment is successful three similar sites have been identified in Wellington, Bishops Hull and Monkton Heathfield.

Whoever said that there was no initiative and blue sky thinking in Taunton Deane!

4. Deane Helpline

The success of the Deane Helpline continues, we have received verbal confirmation from South Somerset District Council that we have been successful in winning a monitoring contract for 4000 homes. This contract is due to commence from April and is worth £55k revenue (with no additional costs).

The growth of the Deane Helpline can be summarised as follows:

2002	TDBC connections	3500
2002	Mendip	2300
2003	Torrige DC, Mid Devon DC, North Devon Homes, Western Challenge Housing Association	4200
2004	S. Somerset DC	<u>4000</u>
		14,000

An impressive performance, Pat Potter and her team are to be congratulated. The Deane helpline started from modest beginnings in 1983 relying on volunteers and sheltered housing staff until it became self-sufficient. The service is operational 24 hours a day throughout the year and also has a dedicated emergency response service for TDBC clients.

Councillor Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004

Electoral Services

The Daily Mail of the 7th February reported that it successfully registered a bogus voter (Gus Troobev) in 31 marginal constituencies. It however admits that it was foiled at Taunton Deane and The Forest of Dean. I wish to congratulate and thank Craig Morse, our Electoral Services Officer, for his diligence and quick thinking.

Revenues

Instalment dates for Council Tax and Business Rates are being brought forward to 1st April. Mail-shots were sent to all affected ratepayers on 10th February.

Second home and long term empty property owners are being advised they will be liable to 90% charge as from April.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs are being told of their eligibility to claim 80% relief on their Business Rates.

Somerset Direct

The initial services to be accessed via this project are Council Tax, Benefits, Waste Management, Democratic Services, Electoral Services, Parking, Planning, Land Charges, 356356 and Payment Facilities. As from mid March these services will begin to migrate to the new Customer Services section, with completion of these 10 services by 1st April, and all remaining Council Services by autumn of this year.

Benefits

Benefits performance is a significant element of the CPA exercise. Considerable time has been spent, since Christmas, completing the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) diagnostic for despatch on the 16th February, in readiness for their inspection in May.

As I reported in my last report, performance during the 3rd quarter was adversely affected by sick absence and maternity, it is expected that performance will improve again in the 4th quarter.

Our Benefit Fraud Investigation Team successfully prosecuted two benefits claimants for false claims; both offenders received 1- year conditional discharges.

Personnel

The new combined Payroll and Human Resources system is currently being operated in parallel with our old Payroll System. The new system will be able to supply much more data, including sick absence information, is on target to be implemented from the 1st April.

Financial Services

The Unit has been very busy over the past few weeks in preparing the budget. Work has commenced on closure of the accounts for 2003/4, which will be submitted to members by the end of June.

Our Treasury Management and Insurance contracts both expire in the next few months and work is under way in preparation for the re-tendering process.

E- Government

The government has produced a consultation paper in which it proposes a number of priority services to be e-enabled by all Councils by the target date of the end of 2005. The ODPM is currently considering the responses to the priority services consultation and will be writing to Councils by the end of March setting out the agreed priority services and outcomes as part of the IEG 3 claim process.

Future funding of e-government will be linked to progress in achievement of these priorities.

Each Local Authority in England submitting a satisfactory IEG statement in 2003/4, 2004/5 and 2005/6 will receive a £500k capital grant (£350k in 04/05 and £150k in 05/06).

Information Technology

All hardware required for the launch of Somerset Direct (Customer First) has been received and installed. Two members of staff are dedicated to developing the service request processes.

Work related to the Revenues Improvement Plan is proceeding with a demonstration of the completed common person database in January. This key element enables proper linking of the Council Tax and Benefits accounts and is necessary for the populating of the person database for Somerset Direct.

The two major processes of running Council Tax bills and Housing Benefit recalculation are being run consecutively in the first week of March, previously there was a break of a week between the two runs.

Service Support

The Freedom of Information Act will come into full affect next year. We are looking how we can best meet our obligations. This includes how we should manage, store and retrieve documents within the Council. The main drive will be to scan and store electronically wherever practical.

Work is progressing well with the GIS two priorities of digitising the Council's Land Terrier and editing our Local Land and Property Gazetteer. The first will make the Terrier available as a corporate resource and act as a template for other property-based sets of information. The second is one of the components of the e-government agenda and will form part of the National Land and Property Gazetteer.

Councillor Terry Hall

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Corporate Strategy 2004-07

Members of the Executive and the Community Initiatives Manager have worked hard over the past few months to develop the Corporate Strategy. The draft strategy was considered by the Review Board before the Executive agreed the final version of this important document earlier this month. There was a strong feeling among officers and members alike that hitherto this Council has tended to have too many equal priorities and that a serious effort had to be made to be more robust in identifying where our real priorities lie. Progress has been made here, and you will see that Delivering the Vision for Taunton is now our top priority, with Tackling Anti-social Behaviour, Transport and Housing also designated as high priorities. A considerable amount of public consultation has informed this process and I am confident that we have focussed on areas that members of the public have told us are important for them.

It is worth noting that what we have done so far is just the beginning of the process. We need to keep working to ensure that we have clear and meaningful priorities. We also need to ensure that the priorities are embedded in the culture of the Council and that they drive the allocation of resources.

Local Strategic Partnership

The Local Strategic Partnership was formed 2 years ago, and its first remit was to develop a Community Strategy to show how people, communities and organisations will work together to improve the quality of life of those living and working in the area. This Community Strategy has now been published and, I think it is fair to say, has been well received.

The Local Strategic Partnership now needs to move on to deliver the priorities in the Strategy. Considerable consultation with partners has taken place as to how this can best be achieved, particularly with officers from the County Council, the Learning and Skills Council, the Primary Care Trust and the Community Council for Somerset. It has now been agreed that a smaller core of 11 representatives of local agencies will meet regularly, and a much wider 'associate membership' will be kept informed, and involved as appropriate, providing advice and support on specific issues. An early task for the new, slimmed down, LSP to tackle at its next meeting (March 8th) will be to determine a limited number of shared priority areas/issues where the LSP can direct its combined effort and resources.

As agreed between the County Council and this council, the LSP will next year be the vehicle through which the extra funds raised by lowering the

Council Tax discount on second homes will be spent. The commitment is to spend this money in line with the priorities in the Community Strategy.

Crime and Disorder Partnership

Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Partnership have allocated almost all of their 2003/04 allocation (£128,455) under the Building Safer Communities funding received from the Home Office. This money has to be spent by the Partnership on projects that will help to deliver the targets in the Crime and Disorder Strategy.

Around 16 projects will benefit from a financial contribution. Several of the schemes offer diversionary activities for young people, including a programme of multi-sports sessions at Wellsprings Leisure Centre on Friday evenings. There is also a proof-of-age card scheme, security equipment for victims of racial crime, work with young offenders, help for Taunton Retailers Against Crime and support for the Promise Mentoring scheme. Full details of all schemes that have been awarded funding are available from the Community Safety Officer.

I have taken on board comments that members feel they do not have enough information about the work of the Crime and Disorder Partnership. Firstly, I have asked that regular reports on meetings of the Partnership are included in the Weekly Bulletin. Further, the proposal that the Community Leadership Panel should take on responsibility for reviewing all aspects of the Crime Corporate Priority will give members an very good opportunity to get more involved with and informed about the work of the Police and other agencies who work with them. The Chief Superintendent of Somerset West District is due to attend the next meeting of the panel and I am sure that, following on from this, invitations to attend will be extended to others who have a role in helping to reduce crime. I hope these meetings will lead to a shared understanding of the problems of each organisation and to finding ways in which we can help each other.

Community Planning

The results of the consultation event held in Wellington last December have been collated, together with the information gained from the launch event held earlier in the year. The Steering Group will meet again in March to discuss emerging issues and to establish priorities with the help of a range of agencies and community representatives and one further consultation event will be held in Wellington to expand the opportunity to get involved and build on what we have already learnt. Further consultation will also be undertaken in the surrounding parishes and Nynehead will be able to feed their parish plan into the process.

The Diary Room

The Diary Room is a mobile consultation tool to aid the development of this Community Plan. People are invited to answer simple questions on what they

like and don't like about the area in which they live, plus how they would improve it.

Somerset Film and Video provided the hardware and also the expertise for the use of the equipment. The trailer was deployed around public areas and local people invited to give their views. Extra information was gathered through a questionnaire outside the trailer while people wait to take part.

The trailer visited several sites in Wellington and over 150 young people took part in the consultation and gave their views.

Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 FEBRUARY 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP REVIEW PANEL

Freedom of the Borough

The Review Panel has given consideration to recommending Council to admit Councillor J R G Meikle MBE, as an Honorary Freeman of the Borough.

The Local Government Act 1972 (amended by the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980) allows a Borough or City Council to admit “persons of distinction and persons who have in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the city, borough or royal borough” as Honorary Freeman.

A resolution passed by not less than two thirds of the members voting at a specially convened meeting is required to admit the Honorary Freeman but this does not confer any rights upon them.

However, the conferring of the title of Honorary Freeman is the highest honour that a Council of a City or Borough can bestow and, in the view of many, should not be given too often.

Taunton Deane Borough Council have granted this honour on only three previous occasions. To the Light Infantry to mark its long association with the area, to Sir Edward du Cann to mark his many years as Member of Parliament for Taunton and most recently to 40 Commando Royal Marines.

Under the terms of our Constitution any grant of freedom must be made by Council on the recommendation of this Panel.

Councillor J R G Meikle MBE

Councillor Meikle has been an elected Councillor for 46 years and during that time has made a significant contribution to the local community. Set out below is a brief synopsis of many of the milestones in his career as a local politician.

- 1947 Joined Young Conservatives, founder Chairman of Western Area Young Conservatives.
- 1955-58 Chairman, Taunton Conservative Association.
- 1958 Elected to Taunton Borough Council.
During his early days as a Councillor, Councillor Meikle was instrumental in persuading the Housing Committee to adopt a new post war ‘Raglan’ Estate layout for the future (footpaths to front doors, grass areas, cars out of way at rear compound – Pyrland Estate, Churchill Estate).

As Chairman of the Planning Committee he inaugurated a biennial 'Design Award' for the encouragement of good design, good layout of buildings both residential and commercial. The Design Awards continue to this day.

The Government of the day tried to persuade councils to build high-rise housing. Councillor Meikle was completely opposed to this type of housing.

Highways Committee were persuaded to introduce an early form of pay and display at Whirligig Car Park.

- 1967-68 Elected Mayor of Taunton Borough Council and launched four Mayoral projects.
 1. Perceived need for a 'Council of Voluntary Service', which has expanded considerably and still serves the social needs of the town significantly.
 2. Launched the Abbeyfield Society, which now has two homes and Taunton Vale Rotary has added an 'extra care' Abbeyfield home.
 3. Set up a 'Voluntary Services Overseas Committee'.
 4. With aid of many voluntary organisations, sought to establish the incidence of severe loneliness in Taunton. A 'Gold Rimmed Invitation' was issued from the Mayor and Mayoress for people on their own to take tea with them. The objective was to link them with weekly social groups.
- High Street Pedestrianisation.

The shopping gravity of the whole town moved southwards, the Pig Market development completed the new triangle High Street, Fore Street and East Street.
- The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre.

Chaired the Taunton Theatre Trust whose purpose was to initiate interest and funds to build a theatre and arts centre. It took ten years to raise both the money and site. The Brewhouse in its years has been responsible for a renaissance of drama, music and the arts in Taunton Deane and the community at large.
- 1974 – Taunton Deane District Council created and Councillor Meikle was its leader from 1974 to 1991.
- 1975 Achieved Borough status and with it the Mayoralty.
- Taunton Deane Business Forum.

Councillor Meikle inaugurated this forum with County, Deane, SCAT membership working with the Chamber of Commerce and the local Job Centre. The forum did its best for many years to identify priorities, ultimately persuading councils to set up their own organisations.
- Taunton Deane Citizenship Award

In the late eighties Councillor Meikle received an MBE. He was aware of many people in Taunton Deane who also deserved an award for their contribution to the community. The solution he found was to create a 'Taunton Deane Citizenship Award'. It continues to run successfully every year.

- 1991 Taunton Deane changed political control and Councillor Meikle became leader of the opposition from 1991-2002.
- In 1999 following an initiative from Councillor Meikle, Taunton Deane started the successful national movement 'Vote for Life' to enrol hundreds of thousands of citizens to join the National Register of Organ Donors.

This has now been taken up by many other local authorities and as a result has attracted over 650,000 registrations.

This is just a few of the many initiatives that Councillor Meikle has been involved in during his 46 years as a Councillor. It does, however, give examples of the eminent service he has given.

Should the Council agree to grant this honour to Councillor Meikle there is a procedure, laid down in statute, which has to be followed.

The Freedom resolution is passed at a special meeting of the Council when a formal presentation is made. It is necessary, however, for Council to agree that they will pass that formal resolution well in advance of that ceremony.

After passing the resolution the newly admitted Freeman may take the appropriate Freeman's Oath and sign the Freeman's Roll with the signature being witnessed by the Mayor and Chief Executive.

A sealed and illuminated certificate of the grant of the Honorary Freedom, incorporating a copy of the formal resolution, contained in a suitable Scroll Holder is then usually presented to the newly appointed Freeman by the Mayor with the recipient being given an opportunity to reply. The Council would arrange a reception for guests following the special Council meeting.

The cost of these proposals can be met from within existing budgets.

It is therefore **RECOMMENDED** by the Panel that Councillor J R G Meikle be made an Honorary Freeman of the Borough in recognition of the eminent service rendered by him to the Taunton Deane community.

Councillor Bryan Dennington
Chair, Resources Review Panel

COUNCIL MEETING - 24 FEBRUARY 2004

**RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
REVIEW PANEL**

**A Combined Management Plan and Community Strategy for the Blackdown Hills Area
of Natural Beauty - Final Draft Document**

The Community Leadership Review Panel have considered the combined Management Plan and Community Strategy for the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Plan has been widely consulted upon and responses to it carefully considered by the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership. The final draft, which has been circulated to all Councillors with the papers for the Community Leadership Review Panel meeting on 10 February 2004, has been amended to incorporate the responses of this Council and is now submitted for adoption by full Council.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the final draft of the Management Plan and Community Strategy for the Blackdown Hills AONB be adopted.

Councillor Bryan Denington
Chair, Community Leadership Panel