



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 14TH DECEMBER 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 Meeting of the Council held on 12 October 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 2005/06
To receive recommendations from David Baker OBE, Chair of the independent Members' Allowances Panel and Councillor Mrs Whitmarsh, Chair of the Resources Review Panel (enclosed)
7. Car Parking Charges 2005/06
To receive a recommendation from Councillor Bishop, Executive Councillor, Planning and Transportation, following a meeting of the Traffic Regulation Order panel held on 21 October 2004 (enclosed)
8. Part 1 - To deal with questions to and receive recommendations from the Executive:-
 - (i) Councillor Mrs Lewin - Harris (Community Leadership)
Disability Discrimination Act 1995 - Strategy
 - (ii) Councillor Edwards (Environmental Services)
Licensing Policy
9. Part II - To receive reports from the following members of the Executive:-
 - (i) Councillor Williams (Leader of the Executive)
 - (ii) Councillor Bishop (Planning Policy and Transportation)
 - (iii) Councillor Mrs Bradley (Leisure, Arts and Culture)
 - (iv) Councillor Cavill (Economic Development, Property and Tourism)
 - (v) Councillor Edwards (Environmental Services)
 - (vi) Councillor Garner (Housing Services)

- (vii) Councillor Hall (Resources)
- (viii) Councillor Leighton (Communications)
- (ix) Councillor Mrs Lewin- Harris (Community Leadership)

10. The Constitution - Licensing Committee
To receive a recommendation from Councillor Denington, Chair, Community Leadership Review Panel (enclosed)

G P DYKE
Member Services Manager

The Deane House
Belvedere Road
TAUNTON
Somerset

TA1 1HE

07 December 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 12 October 2004 at 6.30 pm.

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Lees)
Councillors Beaven, Mrs Biscoe, Bishop, Bone, Bowrah, Mrs Bradley, Mrs Bryant, N P Cavill, Miss Cavill, C A Cluff, Mrs Cluff, Croad, Davies, Denington, Edwards, Floyd, Garner, Gill, Govier, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Mrs Hill, Hindley, House, Mrs Jones, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Lisgo, Meikle, Mullins, Paul, Miss Peppard, Phillips, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Stuart-Thorn, Stone, Vail, Watson, Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams and Mrs Wilson

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20 July 2004, copies having been sent to each member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Durdan, Mrs Nixon, Miss Priscott, Trollope and Weston.

3. Communications

The Mayor referred to the recent award to the Council of the "Business Britain Local Authority of the Year 2004/2005" and displayed the plaque which had been presented.

The Mayor also welcomed the new Strategic Director (Operations), Mrs Joy Wishlade, to the meeting.

(Councillor Mrs Hill arrived at the meeting at 6.37 pm.)

4. Public Question Time

(i) Mr Harris asked a number of questions on behalf of Mr S Robins concerning the smoke alarm system at 47 South Street, Taunton.

Councillor Williams responded that if a copy of the questions was submitted, they would be dealt with appropriately.

(ii) Miss D Robins also asked a number of questions on behalf of her father, Mr S Robins.

Councillor Williams informed the Council that he was currently unwilling to deal with questions from Miss Robins, following an incident at a recent meeting of the Executive. He added that if a copy of the questions was submitted, they would be passed to the Chief Executive who would deal with them appropriately.

- (iii) Mr A Bryant asked whether an area of land owned by the Council, adjacent to Wellington Sports Centre, could be used for mini-motorcycling?

Councillor Mrs Bradley responded that if Mr Bryant wished to supply further information she would ask for the request to be properly considered.

- (iv) Mr Treble of Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council, Mr Hurst of Creech St Michael Parish Council, Mr Emmett of Hatch Beauchamp Parish Council, Mr Grandfield of Chipstable Parish Council and Councillor Mullins on behalf of Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council were all in attendance concerning the recent decision of the Executive to withdraw from the Public Footpath Agency Agreement with the Somerset County Council.

The main points raised were:-

- (a) Somerset County Council was too remote. Taunton Deane Borough Council provided a quality, locally based service;
- (b) 90% of rights of way were open in Taunton Deane, compared to only 35% in areas of Somerset where the County Council looked after the footpath network;
- (c) Rural footpaths needed a lot of attention. It would take very little time for paths to become overgrown again;
- (d) How much would be saved by Taunton Deane and by a Band D Council Tax payer by withdrawing from the agency agreement?; and
- (e) There would be no saving to the Council Tax payer. Somerset County Council would incur the same costs.

Councillor Bishop replied that due to the considerable budget gap faced by the Council, steps had to be taken to cut Taunton Deane's costs. The maintenance of the public rights of way in Somerset was a duty of the County Council and it was felt that the time was now right to pass this function, which Taunton Deane had done to good effect since 1974, back to the County Council. In so doing, approximately £38,000 per annum would be saved. This equated to a saving of 97p per annum on a Band D property in Taunton Deane.

The continued quality of service locally would depend very much on the resources the County Council put into rights of way.

Councillor Bishop reported that he had attended a Rights of Way Advisory Panel Meeting yesterday at County Hall. It was recognised that the high standard of service provision in Taunton Deane was not replicated in the other districts. It was also recognised how important a high quality rights of way network was, particularly in terms of attracting tourists to the County.

The Panel had decided that:-

- an audit of all footpaths in Somerset would be essential;
- investment was needed to improve the network; a Medium Term Finance Bid had been made;
- ways in which assistance could be given to Parish Councils and community groups to help maintain the footpath network would be investigated; and
- the Modification process should be streamlined.

He added that Devon County Council had taken back all its former agency agreements and 78% of their footpath network was now open compared with 54% previously. This had occurred through proper investment and he hoped Somerset County Council would act along similar lines.

Taunton Deane would continue to fund the Parish Council Footpath Grant Scheme which currently cost £10,500 per annum.

Councillor Bishop went on to say that the Council was willing to re-negotiate the agency agreement with Somerset County Council but that all our costs would have to be met in the future. If this did not occur, the agreement would come to an end next April.

Since the Executive's decision, quick action had been taken to secure the services of two Taunton Deane staff who were involved in rights of way. Somerset County Council had confirmed that they would continue to employ them under the TUPE arrangements.

Councillor Bishop ended by expressing his regret at the loss of the agency agreement, but the current budgetary situation had forced the Council into taking this action.

(v) Alan Debenham asked the following questions:-

- (1) He was aware that £1/2 million had already been spent on the proposed Housing Stock Transfer and that costs of another £1/2 million were likely. With Labour Ministers currently looking at stock transfers, why were Taunton Deane still proceeding with this "premeditated attack on Council Housing"?
- (2) Whilst understanding the budget difficulties faced by the Council, he deplored the need to cut any front line services. Wasn't there any other option?
- (3) With reference to car parking in Taunton, he asked why the Council's on-street car parking charges of 20p per half an hour were so low? In London they would be £2 for the same amount of time.

Councillor Garner responded to Mr Debenham's first question by stating that the Council had no choice in this matter. The process of asking tenants to vote with regard to a Stock Transfer had to be done. £400,000 had been budgeted to meet the cost of this but, to date, little had been spent. He referred to recent comments made by the Housing Minister, Mr Keith Hill, who had made it very clear that there would not be a "fourth option". He added that the other three options had all provided a good standard of housing for tenants at other authorities who had already gone through the stock transfer process.

Councillor Williams addressed Mr Debenham's other two questions:-

- The strategy to deal with the anticipated £1.2 million budget gap had been agreed last April. The strategy recognised that the Council could not continue providing non-statutory services at the same level or allow duplications to take place, otherwise local people would be facing potential rises of between 25% and 30% on their Council Tax bills.
- Mr Debenham's support for higher car parking charges was welcomed. He added that the Council was mindful that rural dwellers should not be penalised too hard by increased charges.

(Councillor Hayward and Stone arrived at the meeting at 6.52 pm and 6.54 pm respectively during Public Question Time.)

5. Recommendations to the Council from the Executive

(As members of the Somerset County Council, Councillors Govier, Paul and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests in this agenda item.)

(a) Corporate Strategy 2004-2007

Reported that the Corporate Strategy was reviewed on an annual basis. It was used to determine the allocation of resources across the Council through the Medium Term Financial Plan and service budgets.

The Corporate Strategy had been published in June 2004 together with the performance plan. Through a series of workshops and meetings, the objectives and outcomes of the Corporate Strategy's ETCHED Action Plans were determined for each year to 2007/2008.

Delivering the Vision for Taunton remained the Council's highest priority, followed by working with partners to tackle transport issues, tackling anti-social behaviour and housing.

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the Corporate Strategy ETCHED Action Plans 2004-2007 be agreed.

(b) Capital Strategy 2004-2007

Although the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had now removed the requirement for the Council to submit an Annual Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan, it was considered good practice to continue to prepare these documents annually.

The Capital Strategy was a summary of the Council's approach to capital investment including:-

- development and ongoing management of the capital programme;
- partnership working on capital projects;
- consultation; and
- performance measurement.

The draft Strategy for 2004-2007 had been updated from the 2003 version by taking recent developments in the Corporate Strategy and other corporate developments and incorporating them into a revised document.

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that the Capital Strategy for 2004-2007 be agreed.

(c) Budget Monitoring 2004-2005

Reported that at its meeting in September, the Review Board had received the results of the Quarter 1 Budget Monitoring exercise. As a result it was necessary to submit a request for a number of supplementary estimates to support certain variations to the budget.

On the motion of Councillor Williams it was RESOLVED that supplementary estimates be made to support the following variations:-

- the General Fund expected underspend of £45,980 to be returned to the General Fund Reserve;
- returning the 2004/2005 pay award underspend of £65,000 to the General Fund Reserve;
- the Housing Revenue Account expected overspend of £70,590 from the Housing Revenue Account working balance;
- the General Fund Capital Programme overspend of £76,375 from unallocated General Fund Capital Resources;
- the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme overspend, due to slippage, of £585,700 from unallocated Housing Revenue Account Capital Resources; and

- the increase of £3,000 in the working balance on the Piper Trading Account.

(d) Public Rights of Way Agreement

Reported that Somerset County Council, as Highways Authority, would normally be responsible for the maintenance of all public rights of way (footpaths, bridleways and roads used as public paths (RUPPs)).

Under an agency agreement, the maintenance of unsurfaced public rights of way was currently carried out by Taunton Deane Borough Council. This Council currently contributed £54,160 per annum to this particular service and the County Council contributed £42,500. The agreement could be terminated by either party on the 31 March on any year providing appropriate notice was served.

Faced with the need for economies in the Council's budget, all services were being reviewed in the light of the Corporate Priorities and statutory obligations. Consideration had therefore been given as to whether this Council should inform the County Council that it intended to terminate the existing agreement.

The Executive had recently considered a report which contained details of the staffing implications of relinquishing the agency agreement together with the budget implications and the result of consultations with Parish and Town Councils. The Rights of Way Service was a statutory function of County Councils and there was no evidence to suggest that the level of service provided by the County Council would be less than under the agency agreement.

By terminating the agency agreement, the Borough Council would save £39,780 per annum at current prices. In the event of the County Council increasing its funding of this service, Taunton Deane might seek to re-negotiate the terms of the agency agreement to continue to provide the service but only if the full costs were covered.

In the circumstances, the Executive considered that the existing Rights of Way Agency Agreement with Somerset County Council should be ended on 31 March 2005 and notice of such be served on the County Council.

Moved by Councillor Bishop that:-

- (a) the decision to serve notice on Somerset County Council be confirmed;
- (b) the necessary amendments be made to the Council's base budget;
- (c) the existing Parish Grants budget to assist with the delivery of footpath maintenance be maintained;

- (d) any associated one off costs of termination be met within approved budgets of the Council; and
- (e) consideration be given to re-negotiation of the agency agreement in the event of the Somerset County Council being in a position to cover the full costs of the service.

Councillor House, seconded by Councillor Henley, requested that a formal roll call of votes be taken and recorded in the minutes in accordance with Standing Order 19(2). This request was supported by the votes of at least a quarter of the Councillors present. The motion was put and was carried, the voting being 26 for and 19 against as follows:-

FOR

The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Allgrove)
 Councillors Beaven
 Bishop
 Bowrah
 Mrs Bradley
 Mrs Bryant
 N P Cavill
 C A Cluff
 Mrs Cluff
 Davies
 Denington
 Edwards
 Garner
 Gill
 Guerrier
 Hall
 Hayward
 Hindley
 Mrs Lewin-Harris
 Meikle
 Miss Peppard
 Phillips
 Stuart-Thorn
 Vail
 Watson
 Williams.

AGAINST

Councillors Mrs Biscoe
 Bone
 Croad
 Floyd
 Govier
 Henley
 Mrs Hill
 House
 Mrs Jones
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Lees)
 Lisgo
 Mullins
 Paul
 Prior-Sankey
 Slattery
 Stone
 Wedderkopp
 Mrs Whitmarsh
 Mrs Wilson.

The motion was put and was carried.

(e) Taunton Deane Local Plan Modifications

(Councillors N P Cavill, C A Cluff and Meikle declared prejudicial interests and left the meeting during the consideration of this item. Councillor Hayward, Mrs Lewin-Harris and Williams declared personal interests.)

At its meeting in September, the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel considered the proposed responses to the representations which had been received during the consultation period to the proposed modifications to the Taunton Deane Local Plan.

After careful consideration, the Review Panel had recommended that the responses to the representations which were submitted in respect of the proposed modifications should be agreed. The Executive had agreed with this recommendation.

On the motion of Councillor Bishop it was RESOLVED that the adoption of the Taunton Deane Local Plan be agreed.

(Councillor Bone and Councillor Mrs Cluff left the meeting at 8.02 pm.)

6. Questions to and Reports of 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)

Councillor Williams' report covered the following topics:-

- Comprehensive Performance Assessment - "Excellent" Rating
- "Business Britain Local Authority of the Year 2004/2005"
- Budget Setting
- Vision for Taunton
- Adoption of Local Plan
- Cornhill, Wellington
- Car Parking Charges
- Britain in Bloom.

Councillor Williams also welcomed Mrs Joy Wishlade to the Council and thanked Peter Weaver for carrying out the role of Acting Strategic Director - Operations over the past six months. He also thanked the efforts of June Norman for her efforts with Taunton in Bloom.

(Councillors Gill and Croad left the meeting at 8.28 pm and 8.38 pm respectively. Councillor Miss Cavill arrived at the meeting at 8.46 pm.)

(ii) Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Bishop)

Councillor Bishop submitted his report, which drew attention to the following:-

- Planning fees
- Parliamentary statement - handling of planning applications

- Joint Structure Plan Alteration - proposed alternative to proceeding to examination in public
- Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West 2006-2026
- Development at Tone Mill, Wellington
- Tone Mill Partnership
- Public Transport Review
- Consultation on housing and planning in the region
- Planning obligations.

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

The report from Councillor Mrs Bradley dealt with:-

- Tribute Band and Proms Concerts
- Cultural Quarter Consortium
- Somerset Art Week
- Wellington Skate Park
- Taunton and Wellington in Bloom 2004
- Parks and Green Spaces
- Tone Leisure Limited activities
- Networking.

(Councillor Mrs Hill left the meeting at 9.19 pm.)

(iv) Communications (Councillor Mrs Bryant)

Councillor Mrs Bryant submitted her report which covered the following areas:-

- Notable headlines
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment Result
- Press releases
- Deane Dispatch
- Press Office/Public Relations.

(Councillor Mrs Biscoe left the meeting at 9.25 pm.)

(v) Economic Development, Asset Management and Tourism (Councillor N P Cavill)

The report from Councillor Cavill covered:-

- Tourism and TIC
- Neroche Project
- Valuation
- Asset Management Plan
- Economic Development.

(Councillor Bowrah and Mrs Whitmarsh left the meeting at 9.33 pm and 9.34 pm respectively.)

(vi) Environmental Services (Councillor Edwards)

Councillor Edwards submitted his report which covered the following issues:-

- Environmental Health and Licensing
- Cemeteries and Crematorium
- Waste Services.

(Councillors Stone, Govier, Vail, Watson, Floyd and Hindley left the meeting at 9.38 pm, 9.49 pm, 9.50 pm, 9.51 pm, 9.53 pm and 10.02 pm respectively.)

(vii) Housing Services (Councillor Garner)

Councillor Garner reported upon Housing Stock Options and Homelessness.

(viii) Resources (Councillor Hall)

The report from Councillor Hall provided an update on the following areas of his portfolio:-

- Financial Services
- Members Services
- Benefits
- Information Systems
- Revenues
- Internal Audit Services
- Office Services
- Personnel.

(Councillors Slattery and Mullins left the meeting at 10.07 pm and 10.22 pm respectively.)

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

Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris submitted her report which covered:-

- Local Strategic Partnership
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- Equalities Co-ordinator.

(The meeting ended at 10.29 pm.)

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 DECEMBER 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.

The report and recommendations were circulated with the papers for the Resources Review Panel which considered the matter at its meeting on 11 November 2004. 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 carer's allowance be increased by 3.1% to bring the allowance more in line with similar authorities and that the RPI rate of 3.1% should be followed.

Affordability

We did not see it as part of our remit to consider the affordability of our recommendations. We have deliberately not received any advice on the financial implications of our recommendations, as it was felt that this was a consideration to be made solely by the Council itself.

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”, indicate that the level of basic allowance and special responsibility allowances at Taunton Deane are below the average.

We believe that the basic allowance should be increased by 3.1% to bring the allowance more in line with similar authorities and that the RPI rate of 3.1% should be followed.

Special Responsibility Allowances

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 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. We have been made aware of the requirements of the new licensing legislation and feel that the Chair of the Council's Licensing Committee should be entitled to be in receipt of a special responsibility allowance. This has therefore been included in our recommendations.

We believe that the Special Responsibility Allowance should also be increased by 3.1% to bring the allowance more in line with similar authorities and that the RPI rate of 3.1% should be followed.

Approved Duties

Since the Council extended its list of approved duties three 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.

In order to gain a better understanding of the work of the political group we offered to send a representative to attend Group meetings. Anne Elder attended a Conservative Group meeting and reported her findings to the Panel as to whether attendance at such a meeting, should qualify as an approved duty. As a result, the Panel could see no evidence which would make it ask for a change in the Members Allowances Regulations which clearly state that the basic allowance is intended to cover time spent at political meetings and that approved duty payments should not be made in respect of single party meetings. .

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

Parish Council Allowances

Existing powers to pay Parish Councillors allowances were repealed at the end of 2003 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 include a basic 'participation allowance' which could be paid to the Chairman only or to all members and 'travelling and subsistence allowance' which can 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 Councils 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 the 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 previously asked to comment in relation to proposals for Parish Councils to meet the cost of 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:-
no advice on a level of participation allowance for Parish Councils be offered by the Panel until a formal request was received from a Parish Council;
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
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 should remain at the limit which the Inland Revenue would not treat as a taxable benefit – 40p per mile. The rate would apply whatever the size of car engine, because the size of car was a matter for the individual.

With regard to subsistence allowances, the Panel felt that the subsistence rates should remain the same.

Pensions for Councillors

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

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

We have previously taken advice from the 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 last year. Despite the fact that the Council chose not to accept our recommendation our view remains unchanged. 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 continue to feel, therefore, that the Scheme should be made available to all councillors who want to take advantage of its benefits.

Renunciation

The Panel noted that a Member may, by notice in writing, elect to forgo any part of his/her entitlement to an allowance and associated benefits.

Time Limit

As previously recommended, councillors should submit their allowance claims regularly and we suggest a time limit of 6 months for backdated claims.

Recommendations

The Panel therefore submits 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 2005:-

	£
Basic Allowance (payable to all members)	3521
Leader	9901
Executive Councillors (8)	3851
Chair, Planning Committee	3301
Chair, Review Board	3301
Chairs, Review Panels	1100
Chair, Licensing Board	2000

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) The mileage rate remain at 40p per mile. The rate for motorcycles to be 24p per mile and bicycles to be 20p per mile.
 - (iii) Subsistence rates as set out below:

Breakfast	£4.48
Lunch	£6.17
Tea	£2.43
Evening Meal	£7.64
3. Payment for the care of Councillors' Dependents be increased to £4.78 per hour and to 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":-
 - i. children under the age of 14
 - ii. elderly person (aged 60 and over)
 - iii. people with disabilities
 - iv. 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 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 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.

(b) Recommendations of Resources Review Panel

The Resources Review Panel, at its meeting on 11 November 2004 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

APPENDIX

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 – 14 DECEMBER 2004

CAR PARKING CHARGES 2005/2006

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR BISHOP, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

1. At the meeting of the Traffic Regulation Orders Panel on 21 October 2004 consideration was given to the various proposed changes to car park tariffs in Taunton and Wellington for 2005/2006. A full breakdown of the proposed changes, as advertised, is set out in Appendix 1.

The Traffic Regulation Orders Panel recommended to Executive Councillor Bishop that the parking tariffs be increased as advertised and that the appropriate Traffic Regulation Order be confirmed.

2. It is therefore RECOMMENDED that:-
 - (a) the parking tariffs for 2005/2006 be increased as set out in Appendix 1; and
 - (b) the appropriate Traffic Regulation Order be confirmed.

Executive Councillor Bishop
Planning Policy and Transportation

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC NOTICE AFFECTING ALL PUBLIC CAR PARKS IN TAUNTON DEANE

PROPOSED CAR PARKING CHARGES 2005/2006

THE TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH (OFF STREET PARKING PLACES) (NO. 25 AMENDMENT) ORDER 2004

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Taunton Deane Borough Council, proposes making an Order under Sections 35 (1), (3) and (6) and Part IV of Schedule 9 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act, 1984, the effects of which will be:-

TAUNTON

1. To increase the car parking tariff in the Fons George 'Limited Stay Car Park' as follows:-

<u>Car Park</u>	Up to	1 Hr	5 Hrs	6 Hrs
Fons George (maximum stay 6 hours)	Current	40p	£2.50	£3.00
	Proposed	50p	£2.50	£3.00

2. To increase the car parking tariff in the 'Shopper Group 1 Car Parks' as follows:-

<u>Car Parks</u>	Up to	1 Hr	2 Hrs	3 Hrs	4 Hrs	5 Hrs	6 Hrs	7 Hrs	10 Hrs
Canon Street, Coal Orchard, High Street, Levels 1, 1A, 2, 2A,	Current	60p	£1.00	£1.40	£1.80	£3.00	£3.50	£4.00	£4.50

3 & 3A Old Market Shoppers (Paul Street) and Crescent Car Park (maximum stay 4 hours)	Proposed	70p	£1.10	£1.60	£2.00	£3.50	£4.00	£4.50	£5.00
---	-----------------	------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------

3. To increase the car parking tariff in the 'Shopper Group 2 Car Parks' as follows:-

<u>Car Parks</u>	Up to	1 Hr	2 Hrs	3 Hrs	4 Hrs	5 Hrs	6 Hrs	7 Hrs	10 Hrs
Belvedere Road, Castle Street, Duke Street, Elm's Parade, Greenbrook Terrace, Wood Street, Levels 4, 4A, 5 and 5A	Current	50p	80p	£1.00	£1.20	£1.50	£1.80	£2.00	£2.50
Old Market Shoppers (Paul Street) and on Saturdays only at Shire Hall/The Well/County Hall Car Park at the rear of Block A and 31 spaces at the front of Block A	Proposed	60p	£1.00	£1.20	£1.50	£2.00	£2.50	£3.00	£3.50

4. To increase the car parking tariff in the 'Commuter Car Parks' as follows:-

<u>Car Parks</u>	Up to	1 Hr	2 Hrs	3 Hrs	4 Hrs	5 Hrs	6 Hrs	All Day
Enfield, Kilkenny, Tangier, Priors Bridge Road and Victoria Gate	Current	40p	80p	£1.00	£1.20	£1.50	£1.70	£2.00
	Proposed	60p	£1.20	£1.40	£1.70	£2.10	£2.50	£3.00

5. To increase the Season Ticket (6 months) charges in the Taunton 'Shopper Group 1' Car Parks (namely Canon Street, Coal Orchard and Levels 1, 1A, 2, 2A, 3 & 3A Old Market Shoppers (Paul Street) from £555 to **£650**.
6. To increase the Season Ticket (6 months) charges in the Taunton 'Shopper Group 2 Car Parks' (namely Belvedere Road, Castle Street, Duke Street, Elms Parade, Greenbrook Terrace, Levels 4, 4A, 5 and 5A Old Market Shoppers (Paul Street) and on Saturdays only at Shire Hall/The Well/County Hall Car Park at the rear of Block A and 31 spaces at the front of Block A from £295 to **£455**.
7. To increase the Season Ticket (6 months) charges in the Taunton 'Commuter Car Parks' (namely Enfield, Kilkenny, Tangier, Priors Bridge Road and Victoria Gate) from £260 to **£390**.

WELLINGTON

8. To increase the parking tariff in the South Street 'Shopper Car Park' as follows:-

<u>Car Park</u>	Up to	1 Hr	2 Hrs	3 Hrs
South Street (maximum stay 3 hours)	Current	30p	60p	80p
	Proposed	40p	70p	£1.00

9. To increase the parking tariff in the 'Commuter Car Parks' as follows:-

<u>Car Parks</u>	Up to	2 Hrs	3 Hrs	4 Hrs	All Day
Longforth Road and					

North Street	Current	30p	50p	80p	£1.00
	Proposed	40p	70p	£1.00	£1.30

10. To increase the Season Ticket (6 months) charges in the Wellington 'Commuter Car Parks' from £130 to **£165**.

Full details of the proposals are in the draft Order, which may be inspected at The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, during normal office hours.

If you wish to object to the proposed Order or to make representations in support of the proposal, you should send your grounds, in writing, to reach the undersigned by **Friday 8 October 2004**.

G P DYKE, Member Services Manager,
The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE

17 September 2004

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 DECEMBER 2004

Part I

To deal with written questions to and receive recommendations to the Council from the Executive.

1. COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – Strategy

The Executive have considered a strategy which will enable the Council to achieve compliance with The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995.

The DDA has been introduced to prevent discrimination against disabled people. It is based on the principle that disabled people should not be treated less favourably, simply because of their disability, by those providing goods, facilities or services to the public or by those selling, letting or managing property.

The Council has been pro-active on disability issues not necessarily covered by the Act. This includes the Equality Policy and the Equality Improvement Plan 2003-2006.

The Community Leadership Review Panel also considered the DDA Strategy in September 2004 and recommended that the Executive support the strategy and that it be adopted by Council.

Full details of the Strategy together with an explanation of how it is intended to be implemented, are contained in the agendas of the meeting of the Executive on 20 October and the Community Leadership Review Panel meeting on 21 September. It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the Disability Discrimination Act Strategy for Taunton Deane be formally adopted.

Councillor Mrs J Lewin-Harris

2. COUNCILLOR EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Licensing Policy

The Executive, at its meeting on 8 December 2004, will have given consideration to a draft Licensing policy. This is something that all local authorities have to do in line with the requirements of the Licensing Act 2003. Each Licensing Authority is required to publish a policy framework document every three years. Consultation with existing licence holders, local residents and businesses, the police and the fire authority has been taking place since September 2004.

The Health and Leisure Review Panel also considered this matter at its meeting on 30 September 2004 and a presentation on the effects of the legislation was made by the Council's Chief Solicitor at last week's Member Briefing Forum.

A copy of the report that was submitted to the Executive has been circulated to all Councillors together with the draft Licensing Policy. Any changes that are subsequently recommended by the Executive will be reported at the Council meeting.

(If any councillor has not, for some reason, received a copy of the report to the Executive and the draft Licensing Policy , further copies can be obtained from Greg Dyke, Member Services Manager (Tel. (01823) 356410)

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the Council adopt the Licensing Policy as submitted to the Executive at its meeting on 8 December 2004.

Councillor Mark Edwards

FULL COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

As we approach the festive season it will be a good opportunity for us all to relax and reflect. Since our last meeting in October it has certainly been a very busy period, much has been happening, the major points of which I will try and reflect in my report.

Good News A358 and Silk Mills

After much deliberation the Secretary of State announced that the chosen scheme on sound economic and environmental grounds for the upgraded road route to Devon and Cornwall would be the A358. This is not just good news for Taunton but the whole of the peninsula and not least the South coast area down to Poole and the Northern coastal area of Devon and Somerset. In addition, it will include the desperately needed bypass for Henlade which presently suffers from unacceptable congestion and pollution. It also has to be good news for the taxpayers across the country with this scheme coming in at around £90 million less than the A303 improvements. We now need to obtain a clear timetable of when this is likely to move through the planning and consultation stage to the reality of a much needed improved road link.

Regarding the Silk Mills bridge project, only recently the County Council shared with us that their application for final approval together with extra funding for the project had been called in by central government for review. This was potentially a serious blow, particularly as they were unable to gain any responses to their requests for reassurance from the powers that be. After a week of nail biting the government announced the bridge would be funded to £11.6 million, a serious shortfall but not enough to cause a failure of the whole scheme and it is now going ahead full steam. This Council, as a demonstration of its commitment to working in partnership with the County Council, agreed to release the £399k funds agreed to assist the County in maintaining progress whilst central government deliberated.

The failure of either of the above road schemes would have called into question our ability to carry forward our plans for the regeneration of Taunton. Easing of congestion is a fundamental part of our ability to succeed in achieving our ambitious plans.

Budget Setting

Good progress has been made towards balancing our budget for 2005/06. I warned in the last report to Full Council, hard choices would have to be made if we are to seriously address our underlying structural budget problems. As already announced, our budget gap based on provisional figures, is down from £1.2M to £1.09M which has to be good news, but it still leaves us with a substantial gap to bridge. We have already shared with Members our prioritisation of services (Profile of Services) to meet our corporate objectives and provided a detailed schedule of proposed savings (Savings Delivery Plans) for consideration and comment. This is the result of a huge amount of work by officers, identifying where efficiency savings/increased income can be found and prioritising this in terms of delivery and acceptability. My thanks to all for the efforts so far made which has assisted Members greatly in their consideration of the wealth of information produced. (Notwithstanding the print size!!)

We are on target for the production of the usual Xmas folder for Members to consider the budget proposals prior to these being incorporated in the final budget statement. The Head of Resources will be visiting the various Group meetings to discuss and explain these proposals to ensure they are fully understood, this assistance is always welcomed by Members.

In terms of the central government settlement by way of the Revenue Support Grant, I am pleased to acknowledge it ranks as a better settlement than last year resulting in an increase of circa £281K above the grant for last year. This sounds good news and I do not wish to appear ungrateful but it pales into insignificance when compared to the additional costs imposed upon us, some by government diktat. To mention just a few budget figures at present:

Recycling revenue costs	£301K
Increase in wages and salaries	£411K
Inflationary price increases	£86K
Leisure support and debt repayment	£94K
Civil contingencies bill	£25K
Extra costs of pensions	£164k

This is by no means a comprehensive list but it clearly indicates my reticence about the size of increase for next year and demonstrates why I offer my note of caution. Make no mistake, we have no option but to continue with the hard choices that will have to be made in order to balance the budget, and create a sustainable and affordable budget position for the future. This administration is prepared to make those hard choices to ensure any increases in Council Tax are minimised for the taxpayer but equally maintaining our front line services to ensure efficient delivery.

Incursion of Gypsies

Regrettably, a group of Gypsies set out to commit a flagrant breach of planning regulations. This was carried out in a completely premeditated manner even down to the delivery of their planning application, as the invasion commenced and offices were closing at 4.30PM on a Friday afternoon. The land in question is well outside the village envelope and under normal circumstances would never be eligible for development, yet the Gypsies have decided they can develop it with impunity from the normally strict planning regulations. This begs the question, why do itinerants such as this, consider themselves above the law, this is an appalling state of affairs and we urgently need government help and direction to strengthen our eviction powers in the face of these flagrant and premeditated breaches of planning regulations. We can apply the strict regulations that apply to development in the open countryside but it is depressing and frustrating to realize that you are merely in a lottery of chance as to the support that will be given when our decisions are inevitably appealed to higher authorities.

I feel our very democracy is under threat because the government does not take the urgent, positive action required to prevent what is now turning into an epidemic of invasions in the open countryside across the land. The Gypsies claim they have rights, I most certainly agree, but what they do not understand, or refuse to accept, is that with rights come responsibilities. Those responsibilities for the settled population require they do not commence development without adequate and appropriate permissions in place. The Gypsies refuse to acknowledge this and they are setting themselves up as more privileged than the settled population. I find this wholly unacceptable, therefore, immediate measures should be implemented to allow us to deal with this situation. This should happen before it creates intolerance from the settled

community of the itinerant groups, because of the favoured position they create for themselves by their total disregard of laws and the community around them. This they appear to be able to do with impunity.

Having said this, we are committed to acting in as robust and rapid a manner as possible to prevent the continued flagrant breach of development in open countryside and I would add this is not a case of nimbysism, as Taunton Deane already has more than adequate provision for Gypsies and travellers within its boundaries, particularly in the Parish of North Curry. My sincere sympathies to those afflicted. I can only offer reassurance that we are determined to fully implement all measures open to us to assess and correct this flagrant breach.

Vision for Taunton

We have made great strides with these proposals, so much so that I now refer to it as the “regeneration” of Taunton as I feel at last we are moving from the aspirational visioning stage to the actual implementation. The senior Advisory Board is now established with representatives from SWRDA, SCC, EA, TDBC, GOSWA, SCAT and other stakeholders, an independent Chairman is being considered and I may be able to report further on this at the meeting. Below this is the Executive Board of Senior Executive officers from the main organisations of which Penny James is our representative. It has been agreed that Penny will take the lead in the direction of the project team that will carry out the implementation. The project team will be a dedicated group of officers and commercial professionals to oversee the assembly and implementation of projects, whether this is by commercial development or public investment in the public realm spaces.

In addition to this the East Goods Yard at Firepool now has planning consent for development and final details are awaited with an anticipation that actual development will commence early to mid next year. The County Cricket Club is now actively pursuing funding sources to assist with their regeneration and plans to become a venue for one day international matches. We have also received a planning application for development of the private car parks in the Tangier area which is being considered at present and if acceptable, this would be another tangible move forward in the much needed regeneration of Taunton.

The inner relief road is resurrected in the form of the “third way” and has been accepted in principle by this Council subject to further details about satisfactory means of servicing shops in Bridge Street to avoid the inevitable congestion that will occur. The important point about the realignment of the road is that it respects development of the Tangier area, minimises impact on existing houses, allows development of the cultural facilities on the West bank of the Tone and provides the new link across the river to relieve the unacceptable levels of congestion in Park Street, Corporation Street and North Street.

The other area of major importance is the relocation of the agricultural livestock market presently situated at Firepool, I am pleased to report that all the required information for consideration of the planning application is now available and it should be considered by the Planning Committee early next year. The relocation of this market is a vital link in the regeneration process as it releases one of the single largest sections of land for redevelopment.

The Terence O’Rourke proposals for the Urban Design Framework and Urban Design proposals were unanimously accepted when considered by Members so we are able to

proceed with implementation where in accord with our Local Plan or development of the new “Local Development Framework” as appropriate.

Adoption of Local Plan

This has now been formally adopted by this Council and is only subject to challenge on legal matters to February 2005. Following this, subject to any matters that may be raised, it will be produced for issue to all interested parties as being the vital document to guide future development decisions for the next few years.

In addition to this, an Urban Extension Study was considered as to where a further 3,000 to 4,000 houses and more employment land was best sited. The recommendation was for an extension to the Monkton Heathfield site towards Walford Cross but the report acknowledged that the study was finely balanced between the recommended site and an alternative beyond the Comeytrove area. Due to the vast increase in housing numbers proposed it was felt that the most sensible way forward would be to fully consult on both proposals to gain some understanding of the thoughts of local residents before a final decision was taken. This is likely to be incorporated in a much wider consultation exercise which will be conducted by County in order to inform longer term planning required by the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Cornhill, Wellington

I am pleased to report that the working group of local shopkeepers and Wellington Town Councillors with input from TDBC officers has now been established and is working. With total local involvement, hopefully this will deflect the previously negative criticism and assist with achieving success through constructive cooperation. Be assured, there is no lack of will on the part of this administration to see a successful regeneration of this area within the bounds of our influence.

And Finally

I was delighted to be invited to participate in the recent launching of the new Atrium at the Somerset College of Arts and Technology (better known as SCAT). What a wonderful facility we have available to a huge number of students which brings vibrancy, business and hope to our town. This should start addressing the striking demographic gap we have in the 20 to 45 year age group for which Somerset as a whole suffers a loss against the average of the West Country and fares even worse when compared against national averages. My small part was to draw the link between the wonderful training facilities now available at SCAT and the regeneration of Taunton. This was an easy task, comparatively, as with such a huge demand for a highly trained workforce from our economic development proposals, together with the necessary re-skilling as demands change, SCAT is pre-eminently situated to fulfil and assist with the growth predicted. Also with its links to the University of Plymouth with an established faculty, degree courses are now an established fact of life here in Taunton. I am sure this will greatly facilitate the reversal of the brain drain we have experienced from Somerset to date.

Good luck to Alyson Scott and her staff and with the wonderful facilities now available, I am sure the College will be a resounding success and go from strength to strength. I was honoured to be invited to the launch of the impressive facilities now available.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 December 2004-

Report of Councillor Bishop – Planning Policy and Transportation

Building Control Conference

The Castle School and Sports complex was again the venue for this, the Sixteenth annual Building Control Conference and Exhibition organised by Taunton Deane's Building Control Service.

The Sports Hall was transformed into a bustling exhibition hall, where 42 trade exhibition stands competed for the attention of the Conference delegates and a flourishing coffee bar provided all-day refreshments for exhibitors and delegates alike.

A total of 210 delegates registered for the event – close to capacity for the venue. Soft lighting, plush seating, specially erected staging and professional sound systems turned the school hall into an inviting lecture theatre, where the delegates listened to papers from invited speakers on a range of topics, from ground contamination to fire regulations, describing the growing importance of risk assessment in formulating acceptable solutions to health and safety issues.

An excellent buffet lunch, superb value for money and a smoothly professional presentation are the hallmarks of the Taunton Deane Conference, and the reasons for its continuing success. I would like to pay a special tribute to Mary Sims for the detailed planning and dedication which underlies the successful running of this event, and to Brian Yates and the Building Control team for their enthusiasm and unstinting hard work in the run up and “on the day”. No time to sit back, though. Planning for next year's event begins in earnest as soon as Christmas is over.

Planning Delivery Grant

The ODPM has ordered all local authorities to review their performance submissions following allegations of widespread abuse to gain extra funding under the planning delivery grant. I am confident that our submissions are accurate and in accordance with the recognised procedural instructions.

The grant, worth £130 million this year and £170 million in 2005-06, rewards councils that have improved their performance on handling planning applications. Under government targets, planning departments should determine 80 per cent of minor and major applications within eight and thirteen weeks respectively. We need to ensure that performance targets represent quality and efficiency in the operation of the planning system – not just a numbers game.

Temporary Stop Notice

The ODPM published on 29th November draft Temporary Stop Notice Regulations, an associated draft circular and draft Regulatory Impact Assessment.

The decision to use the “temporary stop notice” will be at the discretion of local authorities, if they think that there has been a breach of planning control and they consider that it is expedient that the activity is stopped immediately. The draft regulations (the subject of the consultation) restrict the use of temporary stop notices in certain circumstances and specify activity not prohibited by a temporary stop notice provision in the Act.

Details of the consultation are available on the ODPM web site at

<http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/>

You should then select Consultation Papers. The document will be near the top of the page.

Changes to Planning Fees

The Minister, Keith Hill issued a statement with the consultation document stating that Council’s must be allowed to recover more than just their costs to deliver a first class planning service. It is intended to increase the fees in April 2005 by 17% on a differential basis with minor applications increasing by a minimum amount. The suggested threshold will be £28,500 compared with the current fee of £13,800 and it is intended that a further increase will take place in 2006. An added incentive would allow lpa’s to raise their fees by a further 10% if they meet their time taken targets. There are significant references in the consultation paper to lpa’s charging for pre application advice provided that the charge does not exceed the cost of supplying the service.

Transportation items of interest

The long awaited decision on the dualling of the A358 has been made and the extensive lobbying has resulted in a favourable decision.

The North West Taunton Package (Silk Mills Bridge and Park and Ride) is proceeding at full speed following the announcement of the Government’s financial backing of the scheme.

The Taunton strategy will be presented to the SCC Scrutiny Panel investigating Somerset Passenger Transport at a Panel meeting in Jan 2005.

The final draft of the Countywide Parking Strategy will soon be considered.

The draft Local Transport Plan 2 is expected in the Spring of 2005 and will be submitted to Government Office for the South West in July 2005.

Bus users surgery – this **will** happen in the new year and members will be advised of the details

Congestion Protocol will be presented to SPTED in Feb,2005 and this will provide an update on the various action points.

Councillor Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004

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

CULTURAL FORUM

The newly established Cultural Forum for Somerset met for the first time in November. Its purpose is to :

- Establish a strong county-wide voice for culture
- To put the community into cultural and community planning
- To build strong partnerships for culture
- To build effective leadership for culture

The Forum debated the proposed terms of reference and these will come back to the Executive Group of the Forum in January

CULTURAL QUARTER CONSORTIUM

The Cultural Quarter Consortium for Taunton met on 8 November and discussed their PR campaign. They have also set up meetings with Somerset Cricket Ground and SWRDA to discuss their aspirations for the cultural quarter.

CURRENT RESEARCH INTO THE ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Taunton Deane Borough Council is one of the partners in the Somerset Local Authorities (LA) annual agreement with the Arts Council of England, South West (ACE). This partnership has commissioned or part funded three reports to inform Creative Industries development across the county:

The Economic Impact Study of Creative Industries identified that at least 1814 people worked in Taunton Deane in the creative industries in 2002/3 generating approximately £ 300 million.

The Voluntary Arts Audit established that there are at least 550 arts organisations in Somerset, attracting 600,000 attendances to voluntary arts groups sessions and well over 1 million attenders as audiences at voluntary arts events per annum. Voluntary arts groups also have a significant economic impact with an annual turnover of over £4 million. They support the local economy by around £1.1 million a year.

Harnessing Opportunities: (A Creative Strategy for Taunton and Somerset) commissioned by TDBC alongside the L.A/ A.C.E. partnership and the Somerset Art Gallery Trust from the consultancy Integria, suggests that if the local growth of Creative Industries reaches parity with the regional performance, then 1800 new jobs could be created and could contribute £100 million to the local economy.

Integria proposes a creative industry resource centre in Taunton with satellites in the other districts funded by the Rural Renaissance, local authority and private finance alongside a raft of other creative industry initiatives in the Cultural Quarter and Tangiers.

These reports, alongside the Somerset County Council review of local authority investment in the arts by Diana Johnson, were discussed by the Somerset Arts Alliance (SAA) meeting on 8 December.

A joint Somerset and Dorset research event will be held on 31 January 2005 to launch these four reports. A summary of, and response to them is available from Caroline Corfe, as are the full documents.

In brief all this work substantiate the argument for the contribution that the arts and culture in its most inclusive sense, make to social and economic regeneration and in particular The Vision for Taunton.

GREEN FLAG AWARDS DAY

Taunton Deane was invited to host the prestigious Green Flag Award Ceremony at Wellsprings Leisure Centre in November. We achieved the award for Vivary Park for the first time and were re-awarded it for Wellington Park which also achieved Green Heritage status – the only such award made in the southwest. Attended by 400 delegates from across the country, the ceremony was hosted by the Mayor and addressed by the Head of Public Space Policy at the ODPM, the Chairman of Cabespace and the Head of Corporate Affairs at the Civic Trust. Over 100 of the delegates toured Vivary Park after the ceremony and attended the raising of the green flag in the park.

VICTORIA PARK

Building on the success in winning Green Flag Awards the Parks Service is continuing in its plan to seek accreditation for one new park each year. Next year we will be entering Victoria Park in the Eastgate ward of Taunton. Already we have a development plan for the park agreed with the local community and will be seeking to implement the early phases next year. Quick wins so far include addressing issues of personal safety by pruning some of the vegetation along the boundaries to allow better visibility into the Park and to make the area around the subway, between the Park and Lambrook Road, more open. These areas will be replanted this Autumn/Winter along with bulbs in three areas under trees, to provide colour during the Spring

Further improvements planned include replanting the formal areas of the Park adjacent to Eastbourne Gate, repainting the park furniture, working with the community on ideas for a new play area funded from Section 106 agreements, and a formal gated entrance to the Park at the Victoria Gate next to the pavilion.

VIVARY PARK

In response to last year's consultations, work continues on the development of a public facing service in Vivary Park. Plans have been submitted for a pavilion next to the Vivary Park Golf Course to replace the one burnt down in 2002. It will be a 'log cabin' structure providing changing for 'pay and play golfers', a café for the park, WC's to replace the existing outdated block in the Fons George Car Park and a golf sales area.

The idea is for this building is to form a new focus for the Wilton Lands family area enabling some to enjoy a snack while others enjoy the park in other ways. Tenders have been invited for the building and it is hoped to have it in place and open by April 2005

EVENTS

The Vivary Park project also includes expanding the events programme to generate income for further improvements in the park. A report will be taken to Health and Leisure Panel in February setting out a proposal for a charging framework and licence system for events held in Vivary but also on other open spaces.

This month sees our annual Christmas music event at the bandstand on Monday 20th December at 7.30 around the bandstand.

The Taunton Flower Show is planning to extend onto the Wilton Lands in addition to Vivary Park to create a family entertainment area.

PARKS NEWSLETTER

The first Parks newsletter is about to be published to acknowledge the value of the work of our Friends Groups in helping us to manage and develop the parks for the local community. We have Wellington and Vivary and Victoria Park Friends groups already as well as the Community Orchard Group – all doing excellent work.

PARKS WEBSITE

The parks website is being developed to further improve communications and promote the parks and open spaces. It will enable the public to contact the parks service electronically to report problems or issues.

WELLINGTON

a review of the open spaces in Wellington will begin next April and we are seeking users with an interest in their local park or greenspace to come forward to work on development plans for new play areas, site improvements and other issues.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS IN TAUNTON DEANE.

Tone Leisure and Taunton Deane Borough Council have recently received the results of national and local research into activity levels across the country.

Taunton Deane residents achieved the highest levels of physical activity in the research. Activity levels to improve health are recognised to be 30 minutes of activity (making you moderately out of breath and sweating) at least five times a week.

33% of people asked in Taunton Deane said they were active 5 times per week or more. This was higher than the Newcastle (17%) and Kirklees (18%) areas that were also surveyed.

Other key messages from the research included;

- 95% of people know that physical activity/exercise is important to their health but only 28% know they should be doing at least 5 times 30 minutes a week.

- 51% of people don't exercise as much as they would like and 48% of people don't take as much exercise as they think they should
- More than 3/4s of the population can gain a positive health benefit from increasing their activity levels
- 59% of people would like to do more physical activity/exercise

The key question remains around why people do not exercise as much as they should when they know how important it is to better health. The research identified lack of time, work and family commitments as barriers to activity in many age groups.

Participants in the research identified time during the day and facilities in their workplace could be important in removing these barriers.

WELLSPRINGS – A REGIONAL CENTRE

Since opening in January the Wellsprings Leisure Centre has developed in to the community facility that had been hoped for. Most importantly the centre has found a niche in the market as a regional venue for events, sporting and non-sporting. This is hard evidence of our function on the ground and not just in documents, as a regional centre with PUA status.

As expected the local Taunton Tigers national league basketball team are making good use of the facilities, and the South West Gymnastics Association book the centre for regional competitions, as do the British Gymnastics Association for Trampolining. However, Wellsprings is also attracting a new customer base with some other high profile spectator events. Such events include; the Dymond Snooker Classic with Jimmy White and John Virgo in attendance, the Round Table who recently hosted their annual speaker evening in the centre raising £11,000 for local charity. Several concerts have also been hosted, including the 'Wurzels'.

Future events include a Kickboxing demonstration evening with movie star Jean Claude Van Damme - the muscles from Brussels The centre is hosting two Christmas party nights with live music in December and in the New Year there are already bookings for a Chinese New Year celebration, World Darts and Lord Archer will be speaking at the Taunton Vale Rotary Club annual speaker evening. In addition to this Wellsprings has been used by over 50 local businesses and organisations for meetings and conferences and is currently used by the Living Light Church every Sunday for its services. All this shows the centre's profile continues to grow and this can only be positive for Taunton Deane and its residents.

TAUNTON AQUATHLON

The first Taunton Aquathlon, organised by Tone Leisure and Somerset RC Tri club, is planned for Sunday 20th February 2005 and involves a swim and a run. The event takes place at Wellington Sports Centre and is based on the Taunton Deane Triathlon course. There are two distances and various age categories - Short Distance is 500m swim and 5k run and Long Distance is 1000m swim and 10k run. The cost to enter is £10 and entry forms can be found on www.tauntondeanetri.co.uk

EXERCISE REFERRAL SCHEME FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH MILD CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (COPD).

A need has been identified for a Community-based scheme to support and encourage individuals with *mild* COPD to adopt and commit to a programme of regular physical activity. COPD is a progressive disease of the lungs that causes disability and impaired quality of life. The benefits of regular physical activity include an improved exercise capacity, reduced dyspnoea, increased peripheral and respiratory muscle strength and endurance and an improved health-related quality of life.

The Pilot scheme is planned to start in January 2005 at Wellsprings Leisure Centre. Referrals are being requested from Warwick House Medical Centre. It will be an 8-week programme of twice-weekly gym-based exercise with assessments at the beginning and end of the programme. Individuals will be encouraged to maintain physical activity levels at the end of the course. It will be evaluated with a view to seeking referrals from other surgeries in Taunton Deane in the future.

To sum up, the work of Tone Leisure in the health field brings in funding to the Trust and contributes to their business plan.

NET WORKING:

The LGA Rural Commission: I would refer my colleagues to the report in the Weekly Bulletin.

Taunton Town Centre Partnership; I attended the launch of their new interactive website; www.tautontowncentre.co.uk

Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership; Taunton Deane's contribution of £6,500 has levered in £250,000 into the area. The Sports Council are now leaning to supporting people rather than buildings. They see the solution to the latter to be "Hub Clubs".

Councillor Mrs Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL **ECONOMIC, ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM**

Lyons Review

Work has continued on making our case as a suitable area for relocation. There has been more conferencing with the assistance of the RDA, where we are able to meet and supply literature on Taunton. Currently a conference is being planned to take place in Taunton early in the new year.

Sale of Land at Wiveliscombe

Re-negotiation for an area of land to be sold to a successful local company, Brendan Powerwashers, has been completed, adding uplift and potential uplift clauses to an agreement. This is a good result for the council and secures long term benefit for Brendan Powerwashers, and employment in the area.

Business Property Survey

We recently set a cut off date for this survey, which has received a good response. The questionnaires are now being analysed, so that a report may be presented to SPTED. There are many useful and interesting comments made on the questionnaires, and from an initial review it would seem to confirm our concern on lack of availability of industrial land.

Tourism

The new 'Heart of Somerset' tourism brochure has been printed, and approximately one third of the copies have been delivered to TICs nation-wide. There is a new and improved layout, to compliment the new marketing themes of SW Tourism. The Guide now works on two levels, not only to attract visitors to the area, but also as a user guide for when they are here.

A new Wellington 'Specialist Shops' leaflet with full colour images of shop frontage and information details has been printed. Such information is also available on line at www.heartofsomerset. This site is presently being re-designed and will be launched early in 2005.

The 2005 marketing campaign goes nation-wide in mid December with adverts on radio and tv. Further national advertising will start in January 2005. This advertising is expected to generate requests of the order of 16,000 guides.

The Taunton TIC has had a most successful year so far, and the hand over process between SCC and TDBC is progressing well and is expected to be completed on 1st April 2005.

Rural Renaissance Steering Group

This group met for the second time, and five projects have been asked to come forward with full applications for funding consideration. A bid is being made to Rural Renaissance to secure funding of the ADO posts to deliver a service that compliments the Rural Enterprise Gateway (recently launched at the Bath and West Show-ground).

Innovative Market Towns

This European Social Funded project, under the direction of Stephanie Berry, is organising a business breakfast to promote the project and its findings on 12th January 2005.

Agricultural development officer (ADO)

With the help of funding from the Wool Marketing Board and DEFRA, our officer has been developing and delivering a series of workshops designed specifically for the agricultural section in the Deane area. The aim of these workshops is to help farmers improve existing skills and develop new ones. So far the ADO has concentrated in three main areas – 1) the use of computers and IT, 2) designing and carrying out a workable market strategy, and 3) developing a programmed approach to livestock health. The first IT programme was a resounding success and over subscribed. By offering this particular choice, there is something for everyone, and will hopefully equip the users better to manage their businesses and improve their profitability.

Asset Management

Work is continuing on resolving the DDA and fire regulation requirements, for the OMB. Talks are continuing with the SCC re more beneficial usage of this building.

The draft report on the balustrading of the multi-storey car park is now being considered to see if any additional improvements are required.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING

Environmental Protection Team.

1. Weather Station. A new computerised weather station has been installed on the roof of the swimming pool and staff have received training in its use. This equipment replaces an unserviceable unit and the data gathered will be integrated with air quality software to provide an accurate picture of the link between local weather and air quality episodes. The new equipment was funded as the result of a successful bid for supplementary credit approval from the Government.
2. Air Quality Action Plan. The Action Plan for Taunton's two Air Quality Management Areas (in East Reach and Henlade) has now been completed, together with our Stage Four Review and Assessment. These two technical documents have been circulated to the Air Quality Officer Work Group for final comments before being presented for formal adoption and submission to DEFRA.
3. Water Quality. Application is being prepared to obtain a Warrant from the Magistrates' Court to enter a property in order to take samples of drinking water from a private water supply. The supply is used by two other properties and this action has become necessary to protect public health because of the refusal of the supply owner to allow samples to be taken.

It is extremely rare for legal action of this sort to be taken and we are not aware of any other Authority that has attempted it.

4. Ombudsman Enquiry. The Ombudsman has concluded that there was neither injustice nor maladministration by Environmental Health in a case of noise disturbance in a residential area arising from a Planning decision to allow a childrens' nursery. The Environmental Protection Team recommended refusal of the application on noise grounds but this was not accepted.

Health and Safety Team

1. Enforcement. Officers successfully prosecuted two cases during November. One related to a traveller caravan site near West Hatch, where the electrical system was unsafe and the site owner failed to comply with an Improvement Notice. He was fined £2500 plus £500 costs.

The other case was a prosecution of a major carpet retailer that was using unsafe methods for the storage and retrieval of stock at high levels, despite having been warned about similar practices before. The company was fined £3000 plus costs.

2. Retail Supply Chain Project. The Health and Safety Executive have recently adopted a project focussing on health and safety during deliveries of goods to retail premises, developed by Taunton Deane, and representatives of all local authorities in the South West for roll out across the region. The Principal Environmental Health Officer (Food/Health and Safety) is a member of the steering group for this project, which is likely to be highly influential with major retail and distribution firms.
3. Fireworks. For the first time this year we ran a Voluntary Registration scheme for Bonfire and Firework Displays targeting local schools, sports clubs, community and other groups who ran organised event to celebrate Bonfire Night 2004.

Set up by the Council and supported by Avon and Somerset Police, the Fire Service, Trading Standards and St John Ambulance Service, the scheme aimed to promote best practice at these events and to encourage local residents and visitors to go to firework displays that are properly organised and well run.

Event organisers received a detailed information pack from the Council, and the Council and Fire Service carried out a site visit, where necessary. The Council issued a Certificate of Registration to all displays successfully meeting the safety criteria.

There was limited take up this year with some display organisers approaching the Council too late to participate. It is hoped to increase the numbers participating next year, subject to resources.

Food Safety Team

1. Inspection Programme. The food premises inspection programme is currently running slightly ahead of schedule following a concerted effort by the team to bring forward inspections. The new Food Standards Agency Code of Practice (mandatory) has been received and the implications are being considered in conjunction with other Somerset local authorities.
2. Educational Game. The “Foodo” game, an educational tool based around a food poisoning outbreak and funded by a £10,000 grant from the FSA, is currently in production by our commercial partner and should be distributed to schools around Xmas time. Several sponsors have come forward to fund their local school’s participation in our hand washing education programme, and officers are currently liaising with the schools to carry out the classroom sessions. This has been a very popular scheme with the schools that have participated so far.
3. Enforcement. A well-known national soup company has been issued with a formal caution after supplying a carton of soup containing the remains of a blue rubber glove used by workers on the production line. The company has since considerably tightened its procedures on glove use and control.

Licensing Unit

1. **Licensing Policy**. Following the publication of the guidance issued in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 the licensing Unit has been busy writing the Council's Draft Statement of Licensing Policy. The consultation on the Licensing Policy has just finished and is hopefully ready for adoption tonight.
2. **Licensing Act 2003**. The Licensing Unit is liaising with other departments both within and external to the Council to ensure the smooth transition of the Licensing Act.
3. **Drink Safe Be Safe Award**. The Licensing Unit has also been working on the preparation of the Drink Safe Be Safe award scheme, and it is hoped that licensed premises will start applying for the award in the very near future. I wish to congratulate Jim Hunter on his efforts with regard this award scheme.

TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM

1. **Crematorium Organ**. Quotations have been received for repairing and renovating the crematorium organ. The crematorium is very fortunate to have such a quality instrument in its chapel. Having been installed when the building was built in 1963 this is its first major renovation.
2. **Cremator Brickwork**. This year £31,000 had been budgeted for cremator brickwork replacement. Fortunately this brickwork has lasted longer than anticipated so light repairs are currently underway with a complete re-bricking being postponed until necessary.
3. **Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting**. Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. This lighting will be installed during 2005/06 and paid for by income generated by the crematorium.
4. **Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions**. Legislation requiring crematoria to carry out mercury abatement is expected at the end of the year. It will probably require crematoria to make their intentions known within one year as to whether the crematorium proposes the abatement of mercury within seven or ten years (this time span is not yet known) or if it intends to enter an emissions trading scheme. Members will be provided with a report once the legislation has been published.
5. **Crematorium Waiting Room Extension & Office Refurbishment**. Tenders have been received and opened and details of the cheapest tender are being checked to ensure that all the required specifications are met, this is essential with such a high quality listed building. It is expected that work will commence following the busy winter period.
6. **Wellington Cemetery Extension**. For several years now both the estates and planning sections of Taunton Deane have been looking for suitable land at

Wellington to use as future burial ground. As yet no land has been identified. The proposal put forward to use part of the existing car park for burial is advantageous because it continues to provide burial space where the deceased can be laid to rest alongside relatives previously buried. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken during 2006.

7. Taunton Deane Cemetery Extension. The Council owns land at the crematorium, which will be used for future burial. This land requires developing for the service. An entrance road, paths, drainage, planting etc have to be in place before its use can commence. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken during 2006.
8. The Reclamation of Metals Following Cremation. The Federation of British Cremation Authorities and the Environment Agency are currently sharing legal opinion and discussing proposals before plans proceed for any collection or recycling operations.

WASTE SERVICES

1. Refuse collection. The introduction of the new collection arrangements continues to go as well as can be expected considering that over 45000 changes were made during week commencing 22.11.04 involving 11 heavy goods vehicles and about 35 of Cleanaway's staff . 85% of properties in the Deane now have same day collections for all waste services including refuse, dry recycling and garden waste. This will improve access to the services for the customer by making them more convenient as well as improve the efficiency of the refuse service to limit cost pressures in the future.
2. Recycling. The expansion of the dry recycling service to most properties in the borough and including a full range of materials has significantly increased the amount of recycled material collected. The combined recycling and composting rate in Taunton Deane is now 21.6%.

The performance of the Somerset waste Partnership is also improving to the extent that collectively the Somerset Councils now have the third highest recycling and composting rate in the country after Dorset and Cambridgeshire and equal to Hampshire.

The garden waste collection service was suspended for the winter season at the end of November. This year almost 1500 tonnes of garden waste was collected for composting at Priorswood.

3. Street Cleansing. A small precinct sweeper has been introduced into the street cleansing service as part of a trial to target detritus (silt etc). It is this material that accumulates at the back of the footpath and in highway channels that has suppressed the "cleanliness index " since performance monitoring commenced in April 2003. The machine has proved useful in clearing leaves quickly from problem areas and is also ideal to clean the very tight estate roads and cul de

sacs that are a feature of some estates in Taunton.

4. **Public conveniences.** The planning application for the replacement public toilets in the North Street Car Park in Wellington has been approved and work commenced on producing the detailed drawings and specifications that will form the basis of the tender documents.

Councillor Mark Edwards

COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004
REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

This report will focus on three areas within the Housing Portfolio. The first is to provide an update on Housing Stock Options and the second will be to make members aware of the current situation in respect to Anti Social behaviour. I will also comment on proposed changes to the sheltered housing scheme.

Housing Stock Options

Further to the update and format in October, advice to members on the past three months and future quarters activity is noted below.

Last three months:

- A formal application was made to the Government Office South West (GOSW) on the 9th November to get the process “Signed Off”. Initial feedback is that the work we have undertaken is viewed as “Good Practice”.
- On the 17th November the Head of Housing met with the GOSW, Community Housing Task Force and Housing Corporation to discuss the work being undertaken. All Government agencies indicated they were happy with Taunton Deane’s current and future work plans.
- Also on the 17th the GOSW and Community Housing Task Force (CHTF) spoke at a Special Executive Meeting about the national scene. Part of their presentation included making it very clear that there is no Fourth Option and there is no intention for there to be a Fourth Option.
- DOME, the Independent Tenant Advisors have almost completed their work in helping tenants choose their preferred type of landlord should a stock transfer take place. Their final meeting with the Insight Group is scheduled for the 11th December. The outcome of this meeting will be feed into the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel on the 20th and 21st December respectively.
- Prior to the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel taking place this month, DOME will also be attending a Special Executive and Housing Review Panel on the 8th December to discuss the work they have undertaken to date. This will include feedback on the views of tenants from undertaking “Drop In Sessions” and a Postal Questionnaire on which type of landlord they would prefer.

Next Three Months:

- It is hoped to advise Members that the Stock Options Process has been “Signed Off”. This decision will automatically be relayed to the Office Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) will be presenting to the Tenants Forum and Housing Review Panel on the 20th and 21st December respectively the financial position on a Stand Alone and Group Structure Stock Transfer. **They will also provide an update on the Prudential Code.** A similar presentation on all these areas will be made to the Executive on the 12th January.
- A formal application to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme is being drawn up. This application has to be submitted no later than the 28th January 2005. PWC are assisting staff with this work.
- In January, the Corporate Management Team will discuss the composition of the required Project Team and provide a recommendation to Members. It is anticipated this team will be formed from April 2005 and manage the process up to and including the ballot of tenants in 2006. As mentioned at October’s Full Council, the team will consist primarily of housing staff but will also compromise non-housing staff to ensure corporate involvement and that the Council rather than Housing owns this process.

Anti Social Behaviour

Local Housing Authorities are required by the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 to prepare and publish a policy for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, and the procedures for dealing with occurrences of Anti-Social Behaviour, no later than December 2004.

Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing Service has had a published policy and set of procedures in place since November 1998 but never updated, these have now been updated to take into account the following developments:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 – particularly the introduction of “demoted” tenancies. A demoted tenancy is where the Council apply to the court for a demotion order. A demotion order lasts for 12 months during which time the tenant cannot engage in any anti social behaviour for fear of losing their secured tenancy.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) protocol
- Acceptable Behaviour Protocol (ABC) protocol

The following actions will also take place

- The Housing Service will work closely with corporate and partnership colleagues to achieve targets relating to Anti-Social Behaviour in the Crime and Disorder Strategy 2005 – 2008
- The Housing Service Anti-Social Behaviour Policy will now be reviewed annually to ensure that tenants and residents receive the best possible service

The updated Anti Social Behaviour policy was approved by the Housing Review Panel in November.

Sheltered Housing Scheme

There have been a number of letters in the press in relation to the Council's removal of resident wardens.

During recent months residents were asked to complete a support plan, in some cases these were completed with warden assistance. This is the first time that such plans have been completed in Taunton Deane, the purpose of which is to identify the kind of support that they consider is appropriate to them. 885 of just over 1000 residents submitted their support plan.

Given that many elderly people are living longer healthier lives, the support plan survey revealed that a number of respondents wanted to remain independent and in their own homes in the knowledge that support was available (Deane Helpline) and that this facility would be supported by mobile wardens if they wanted it. Other respondents however required greater levels of support.

This has led to support categorisation as follows:

Non-Sheltered Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Specialist equipment including emergency call system, movement sensors and door entry systems.

Sheltered Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Provision of meeting hall, laundry, office (with staff available at core hours)
- Specialist equipment as above.
- Regular contact calls as specified by residents in their support plan.
- Response from the Emergency Response Team (also able to provide a lifting service).
- Cleaning of communal areas.

Extra Care Housing

- Accommodation specifically for older people, (pension age) or younger with disability.
- Responsive staff presence 24hrs a day, 365 days a year.
- Provision of meeting hall, laundry, office.
- Specialist equipment as above.
- Regular contact calls as specified by residents in their support plan.
- Cleaning of communal areas.

One of the key improvements is that residents in Extra Care Housing will have 24/7 cover, it is impossible for sole resident wardens to provide this level of support.

Members should note that these initiatives are not about saving money. Looking to the future we seek to provide the most appropriate service levels for our residents across as wide a geographical spread as possible. Mobile wardens have a role to play and where already introduced these are proving successful.

Nevertheless we are still talking to our residents through letters and a number of meetings (last scheduled meeting 21st December) to explain exactly what we are trying to achieve now and in future.

Similarly a process of questionnaires and consultation was also carried with our wardens the results of which support this Councils course of action.

Councillor Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 DECEMBER 2004
REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL – RESOURCES

PERSONNEL

Continuous improvements in technology, and changing expectations of the public around communication methods mean that the way local authority services can be delivered is changing. Some jobs may just as effectively be performed at home, with no detriment to service delivery. As part of implementing the Council's People Management Strategy, and in recognition that some public services can now be delivered in many different ways, we have recently developed a policy framework to enable staff to work from home where it is agreed that jobs are suitable for this. Many employers are adopting similar policies and these can be key factors in helping the recruitment and retention of staff. There is also the potential to help support the Council's Green Travel Policy by reducing the number of car journeys made into Taunton.

We are coming to the end of the Equalities and Diversity training for staff and elected members. The outcome of the CPA Inspection highlighted a need to address this area, so we are pleased to report that the final sessions have now been organised for this training to be completed.

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) has now been through our pilot management development programme, which was recently developed in-house. Initial feedback from the programme shows that it was found to be extremely effective, and very well received. Plans are now being drawn up to roll it out across the Council so that other managers may also benefit from it.

OFFICE SERVICES

Efforts within the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team are directed at three major areas of work. Two cover e-government initiatives; digitising of Land Charges' documents is ongoing, and preparation work for the Local Land & Property Gazetteer has begun in earnest following movement on computer software issues. The third area is the Freedom of Information Act that comes into force on 1 January and will impact on all areas of the Council. The team has also been supporting Waste Services by preparing information for the changes to refuse and recycling collection arrangements.

Investigations continue into the possible future for the Old Municipal Buildings. Work has recently been completed there on several of the matters brought to light through the Fire Risk Assessment, although full compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act remains a contentious issue.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

The main task confronting the Customer Services Section in the past month has been the recruitment of additional staff. We have been seeking 3.64 staff, one to cover the loss of a previous CSA and two to bring us up to strength. This exercise attracted 90 applications, from which we have recruited to 2.64. We have still to interview for the

remaining post. The recruitment of the extra people should contribute to better performance. The remaining issue is that of office accommodation, which is still under consideration.

Operationally, the reorganisation of the waste collection days added significantly to calls from the public. We were able to identify however that most calls were generated as a result of either the Royal Mail not delivering the leaflet, or simply that the public did not read the leaflet, and not as a result of poor administration.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit has in recent weeks been working mainly on the budget for 2005/06, including meeting with Managers over delivery plans and finalising the Detailed figures prior to approval of the budget in February 2005. In addition work has started on the procurement phase of the new financial management system, and it is hoped to have the new system in operation by October 2005. Finally we have just concluded working with our external auditors on the 2003/04 Accounts and we have just received their unqualified opinion on the Annual Accounts.

ELECTORAL SERVICES

The annual audit or canvass has just been completed. The new Register of Electors came into force on 1st December 2004. Just under 47,000 properties were canvassed. The response rate was just over 95%. Of these responses 21.75% used the Free phone telephone service, introduced last year.

As at 1st December the total electorate is 81767. However, rolling registration has already kicked in and there are already another 191 (at the time of writing) electors to be added from 4th Jan 2005. There are currently just over 9000 electors who vote by post (10% of the electorate). From the canvass there are around another 1500 applications to be added to this total.

Next *scheduled* elections will be the County Council on Thursday 5th May 2005. Will there be a Parliamentary on the same day? If there is this will increase the turnout at the County Council election.

BENEFITS

As reported in July, the new review regime means we must visit over 1,500 benefit recipients this year. To ensure we meet our targets, Benefit Officers have supplemented the work carried out by our 2 Visiting Officers. We have been piloting new technology by using tablet PCs allowing us to electronically complete claim forms in the customer's home. This, combined with the use of digital cameras has assisted us in improving our speed in processing. So far, our Investigation Team has taken action against 11 fraudulent benefit recipients. This has earned "SAFE Rewards" of £20k from the Department for Work and Pensions as part of the additional funding available for authorities taking action to reduce fraud.

REVENUES

The major areas of the Revenues Team Plan for 2004/05 currently being worked on are as follows:

- *Cash deposit machines implementation* – a company named SCANCOIN have been selected through the tender process to provide the machines. We are aiming to install machines at Taunton and Wellington during February 2005. Currently we are in the process of agreeing contracts with SCANCOIN and obtaining estimates from the DLO for the necessary building work.
- *Document imaging & workflow* – imaging and workflow has now been fully introduced for all Council Tax and Business Rates post. We are now imaging all post upon receipt and working from images. This will speed up processing time, allow us to keep more accurate and detailed processing statistics and make it easier for us to quickly locate outstanding items of work.
- *Business Rates 2005 revaluation* – the new transitional relief and bill content regulations are due to be released within the coming week. Once received we can then start to identify the amendments required to our IT programme.
- *Small business relief* – the regulations will be released on 3 December 2004. These will differ somewhat from the proposed regulations and increase the number of businesses eligible to receive relief. Once received we will undertake publicity and start inviting applications from January 2006.
- *Team planning for 2005/06* – 2 team planning sessions have been held in order to identify what tasks we need to complete within Revenues during 2005/06.
- *Council Tax new-year billing planning for 2005/06* – preparation has started for next year's annual billing. We are intending to produce the Council Tax leaflet in conjunction with 3 other Somerset Districts, thereby making a substantial saving on production costs.

INTERNAL AUDIT

The Audit Team have continued to progress with the system-based audits during the last quarter, which include Housing Benefits, Taunton Deane Debts and Creditors. Staffing changes within the team have had a limited effect on output and the section has continued to progress informal joint working arrangements with South Somerset District Council. The joint audit approach focussed on the Housing Benefits and Creditors reviews; it has resulted in service improvements to the audit process and has enabled the Audit Team to increase the scope and coverage within these core system reviews. The Team continues to get involved with non-audit duties, highlights this quarter include: -

- Data Protection – Continued provision of general advice and guidance on data protection issues.
- Wessex Reinvestment Trust – Advice and guidance on audit and risk management issues.

- E-Government and Information Management – Preparing for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and help in the completion of the Council's IEG4 submission.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

With the retirement of Mike McLaughlin responsibility for e-Government has been taken over by Simon Kirkham. One of his first tasks is to complete and return our IEG4 return to the ODPM by 20th December. This important document must be approved by ODPM to secure next year's IEG funding of £150,000, and now includes reference to how e-government is helping deliver efficiency savings.

The SomersetOnline partnership has agreed that the existing Somerset Online Portal is not delivering what it should, and some work that Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane have done in providing a more suitable alternative has been adopted as the way forward. This style of working utilises the significant skills and knowledge already present in our organisations to deliver value-for-money projects for the partnership, and it is hoped that further work will be delivered on this basis.

Tina Saunders has joined us as E-government project coordinator, helping to mitigate to a certain extent Mike's absence. We have also secured the services of Chris Danby to do some work on reviewing the content of the web site, out of which will come some proposals on how the content is managed in the future. His report will be available in January.

The storage-area-network project is very near completion now. We are now using the new backup devices, and will be migrating to the new disk storage in the next 2 weeks.

The new IS Strategy is nearing completion and will be with CMT in January.

Councillor Terry Hall

COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004
REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON - COMMUNICATIONS

Crisis Communications

The villagers in North Curry have lived harmoniously with Gypsy neighbours for many years. However, on Friday 22nd October the village tranquillity was overturned by what has been aptly described as a military-style incursion of land at Oxen Lane by Gypsies that provoked an understandably vocal response from local people. Within 48 hours Taunton Deane Borough Council was under the scrutiny of the national and local press and broadcast media and still is. For 2 weeks the phones were ringing non-stop and the PRO working long hours. The public relations office is still on alert and handling regular calls from the media. Our aims are to ensure that the media is kept well informed and we provided a spokesperson at all times throughout the crisis period.

It was essential that the people of North Curry felt that they were being heard by the Council and that we were pulling out the stops for them. The Leader, Councillor Williams was our key spokesperson and his ability and willingness to talk to reporters was fundamental in winning the media and resident support. Judith Jackson and Councillor Norman Cavill did their share of interviews. The Council was never unavailable for comment either in or out of office hours.

We will this week be putting our skills to the test again and are expecting a high turnout from the Press at the Planning Meeting scheduled for Thursday evening. Press releases will be issued the next day to inform residents and the media of the outcome and the reasoning behind the decisions made.

I am proud of the professionalism displayed by our Public Relations Office through the work of Emma Brewster with assistance from Becky Brown – they did a great job under what can only be described as extreme pressure. They both went that '**extra mile**' for TDBC and residents of North Curry.

In summary the coverage in the press has been positive, the majority of articles generated by the media being based on fact and containing direct quotes from the Council. We are pulling out the stops to ensure that residents feel they are aware of the events and understand the action we are taking. However, there is a feeling amongst some residents that we are not keeping them informed, somehow we must aspire to overcome this.

Media & Monitoring

In the past there has been no analysis of coverage in the press and we are now putting together a monitoring programme to identify what is being said about us. Knowing what is good or what is bad will help us formulate media plans to revert negative press.

On the positive side – the Green Flag Awards for Vivary and Wellington parks were given excellent local coverage. We arranged press interviews on the Vision for Taunton and are working in partnership on this with Somerset County Council on media handling for The Vision, Silk Mills Bridge and the Dualling of the A358. The 'Drink Safe, Be Safe' campaign got off to a successful start with the help of the Somerset County Gazette. ITV are producing a programme in which the Council will be shown as an authority that is taking positive action against the anti-social effects of binge drinking. The Daily Telegraph reported on our request to the Office of Fair Trading that we be allowed to include minimum price drinks in the campaign, resulting in national media interest from 5-Live and the Daily Express. Jim Hunter, Licensing Officer was interviewed on Radio 4 from which we received very positive feed back from local residents.

As you might expect, we have also received some negative press, mainly relating to budget issues, the arts, possible redundancies and changes to the wardens scheme where misinformation has abounded causing public concern and confusion about the consultations and proposals being made by the Council.

Communications Strategy

Work continues to meet the strategy aims. A consultation toolkit is currently being developed and managers are being encouraged to consider how they will manage communications and consultation through their 'Heads Plans'. A process is now in place to control the quality of consultation along with a hard to reach database to help those undertaking any consultation ensure that they are being inclusive.

Corporate Management of Media & Communications

It is important the organisation is aware of the importance of good communications and public relations. Over the next three months the Communications Team will be focussing on putting in systems and Media Training in place for the Executive and the Senior Management Team.

The Communications Team is producing a PR Tool Kit that will include:

- What is Public Relations and how it can benefit the Council
- Media tools – press releases, statements, press briefings
- An updated Media Protocol
- Do's and don'ts in dealing with the media including broadcasting

Publications Audit

The publications audit is currently in progress and covers all leaflets, brochures, newsletters, posters, forms and information packs issued by the authority. The aim of the audit is to gather information on the volume and costs to help improve cost effectiveness. We are reviewing all publications to ensure compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and E-Government Strategy and to check for uniformity of corporate style and accessibility to information by minority and hard to reach groups.

Deane Dispatch

Members were each sent an advance copy of the latest edition of Deane Dispatch prior to distribution to households in Taunton Deane.

Weekly Bulletin

The Weekly Bulletin plays a vital role in keeping members informed of Decisions – this was endorsed at the Review Board on 25 November and members will continue to be notified of Decisions this way. The Bulletin was originally devised as a method of keeping members informed about news that is not reported through normal Council business then its circulation widened to include the press and public. It has had a mixed level of contributions over the past few months and there have been some weeks when news was rather thin on the ground. It is the perfect way for representatives on Outside Bodies to report back to Council colleagues, simply email weeklybulletin@tauntondeane.gov.uk

A Merry Christmas & Happy New Year to you all!

Councillor Gwyneth Leighton

COUNCIL MEETING 14 DECEMBER 2004
REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN HARRIS

CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)

The most recent Audit of Crime Statistics, carried out by Taunton Deane's community safety team on behalf of the Crime and Disorder Partnership, is now complete.

Overall it shows a 3% increase in recorded crime. Within this figure there are some significant successes: notably a 29% reduction in dwelling burglaries, a 7% reduction in non-dwelling burglary and a 29% reduction in total vehicle crime.

There has been, however, a 52% increase recorded in violent crime. This is in line with national trends and it is important to note that the heading of violent crime covers more than physical attacks. Other categories under this heading include offences such as harassment, dangerous dogs in public places and possession of an offensive weapon. The ABH (actual bodily harm) figure has increased from 355 to 751 incidents. These can be linked predominately to the night time economy.

I am therefore very pleased that, through the CDRP, various initiatives have been introduced to tackle the problems created by binge drinking, particularly but not exclusively in the town centre. These include the Drink Safe, Be Safe campaign which includes the Gold Silver and Bronze awards for licensed premises that achieve certain standards and the Louise McClintock Appeal which has led to a big increase in the number of plastic or shatterproof glasses and bottles being used in town centre pubs and clubs.

I attended the launch of the most recent initiative "Three Strikes" at the beginning of this month. The 3 Strikes policy aims to quell alcohol related anti-social behaviour in Taunton Deane.

Based on the yellow and red cards shown to footballers, Taunton's three-step system has been put in place to deal predominately with drink-fuelled late night disorder in and around the town's clubs and pubs.

For a first offence, the offender will be sent a Yellow Card warning of the likely consequences of further offending and also containing a health education message and details of support organisations.

For a second offence within twelve months, the offender will be sent a Red Card, with a stronger warning about the consequences of a further offence. The card will outline the effects of alcohol abuse and explain where help is available. A second offence will also mean that the convicted person is banned from all Taunton Pubwatch premises for 3 months.

After a third prosecution for anti-social behaviour, offenders will become targets for an ASBO.

EQUALITIES

Harry Connery, our Equalities Officer, has been in post since October and he is leading the drive for the council to achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. To this end we need to establish where we currently stand, and thus identify the gaps. A system of Equality Impact Assessments is therefore being tried out in selected services and, when the “bugs” have been ironed out, will be gradually rolled out across all services.

Work is also ongoing in obtaining more information regarding the different Ethnic Minority groups in Taunton Deane. Census information can quickly become outdated and we need to know about the different communities so we can provide support in terms of translation and appropriate communication. If Members have knowledge of any such minority groups, perhaps they would pass the information on to Harry Connery.

The Website is a specific area where improvements are needed and again work is ongoing with regard to our obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act.

Equalities and Diversity training has been offered to all members. To date, around a third of members have not yet attended this training. A further course will be laid on in the New Year, and I would urge all members who have not yet received this training to attend. This is important both from the point of view of the Local Government Equalities Standard and our Members Code of Conduct.

WARD PROFILES

Another area of work currently being undertaken by the Corporate Policy and Performance team is the development of Ward Profiles. These will contain key information about the borough, its people and their needs as well as statistical information on the social, economic and environmental trends in Taunton Deane and its wards. This information will finally be in one place in a standard and easy-to-use format. The profiles are intended for use by the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership and all the related bodies in the public, voluntary, community and private sectors in our various efforts to target resources to those areas of greatest need, provide evidence for funding bids, develop policy options, and readily access local information.

REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

As Taunton Deane’s representative on the South West Regional Assembly, I attended a meeting of the Assembly in Exeter in November.

The main issues at the meeting covered the launch of the Integrated Regional Strategy, the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and the merger of Regional Housing and Planning Bodies.

The Integrated Regional Strategy, Just Connect 2004 - 2026, has been developed through widespread consultation as an overarching strategy for the long term to enable the region to focus its thinking and action on achieving long term as well as short term goals. It gives a clear set of aims and objectives for integrating all the region's strategies. The key aims are:

- To harness the benefits of population growth and manage the implications of population change
- To enhance our economic prosperity and quality of employment opportunity
- To enhance our distinctive environment and the quality and diversity of our cultural life
- To address deprivation and reduce significant intra-regional inequalities
- To make sure that people are treated fairly and can participate fully in society

Further information is available on the SWRA Website: www.southwest-ra.gov.uk

The Regional Spatial Strategy contains three options for future growth in the South West up to 2026 and these options are currently out for consultation. Broadly, they are:

- Focus most new development in eleven designated Principal Urban Areas in the South West. Taunton is one of these.
- Focus a greater share of regional development on seven Principal Urban Areas in the South West. Under this option, Taunton would not be included.
- Recognise that different parts of the Region have different needs and potential and that a more flexible approach is needed that includes development eleven Principal Urban Areas but also recognises the contribution that can be made by market towns and smaller centres, particularly in the more rural parts of the region that are remote from the Principal Urban Areas.
-

In its response to the consultation, Taunton Deane Borough Council has expressed a preference for the third option, which keeps Taunton's PUA status while representing a more sensitive response to the needs of the rural areas.

Government policy now means that the Regional Assembly will become responsible for producing a Regional Housing Strategy and advising Ministers on housing investment allocations. The proposals at the meeting concerned the new structures that need to be set up within the Assembly to take on this responsibility that will come into effect in September 2005.

Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 DECEMBER 2004

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL FROM THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP REVIEW PANEL

1. The Constitution

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

At the Review Panel on 9 November 2004 an amendment was passed for recommendation to Council to provide for a Licensing Committee to be established to deal with the matters arising from the Licensing Act 2003. The Act, which came into force on 10 September 2003, required the Council to establish a Licensing Committee consisting of at least 10 but not more than 15 members of the Authority. The Council currently issued public entertainment, cinema, theatre and late night refreshment house licenses and had a Licensing Board to deal with contentious applications.

The Licensing Act transferred the responsibility for licensing premises from which alcohol was sold by retail to the Council and consolidated the legislation concerning public entertainment, cinema, theatre and late night refreshment house licenses.

The new Licensing Committee would deal with all new licensing functions, with the exception of the statement of licensing policy, which had to be approved by Council.

The Licensing Committee would be able to appoint sub committees of at least 3 members of the Licensing Committee to deal principally with contested applications for licenses under the Act and there would be a considerable degree of delegation to officers of various functions under the Act.

The new legislation will come into force on 7 February 2005 and as a heavy workload was expected the Review Panel supported the formation of a Licensing Committee comprising of 15 members.

The Licensing Committee would be a regulatory committee and both Executive and Non Executive Councillors could serve on it. The Committee would be politically balanced based on the proportionality rules which gave a composition as follows:- 9 Conservatives, 4 Liberal Democrats, 1 Labour and 1 Independent.

A Licensing Sub Committee, comprising of 3 members, whose main function would be to hear contested applications for new licenses, or

variations to existing licenses would not need to be proportionally balanced.

2. It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the Constitution be amended to the following effect:-
 - (a) by establishing a Licensing Committee, made up of a membership of 15 comprising of 9 Conservatives, 4 Liberal Democrats, 1 Labour and 1 Independent, to discharge the licensing functions detailed under the Licensing Act 2003 and the powers and duties of the present Licensing Board as detailed in Part 3 of the Constitution; and
 - (b) by the Monitoring Officer being authorised to effect all necessary amendments to the Constitution in consultation with the Chairman and/or Vice Chairman of the Community Leadership Review Panel, so as to incorporate the establishment, powers and duties of the Licensing Committee, and to circulate the resulting changes to all Councillors.

Councillor Denington
Chairman of Community Leadership Review Panel