

COUNCIL SUMMONS

YOU ARE REQUESTED TO ATTEND A MEETING OF THE TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL TO BE HELD IN JOHN MEIKLE ROOM, THE DEANE HOUSE, BELVEDERE ROAD, TAUNTON TA1 1HE ON TUESDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2008 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 7 October 2008 (attached).
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. Declaration of Interests. To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct.
7. Members' Allowances 2009/2010.
To receive recommendations from the independent Members' Allowances Panel and the Chairman of the Strategy and Performance Panel (attached).
8. Proposal for exemption to Contract Standing Order 13 for the procurement of specialist Consultancy Services for Project Taunton. Report of the Strategic Director (Joy Wishlade) (attached)
9. Part I - To deal with written questions to and receive recommendations from the Executive:-
 - (i) Councillor Henley - Recommendation relating to the adoption of options in relation to the Minimum Revenue Provision (attached);
 - (ii) Councillor Coles - Recommendation relating to the re-adoption of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and the Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (attached);
 - (iii) Councillor Coles - Recommendation relating to the adoption of the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (attached).
10. Part II - To receive reports from the following Members of the Executive:-
 - (i) Councillor Ross Henley - Leader of the Executive;
 - (ii) Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey - Housing Services;

- (iii) Councillor Mrs Fran Smith - Resouces;
- (iv) Councillor Alan Wedderkopp - Community Leadership;
- (v) Councillor Steve Brooks - Communication;
- (vi) Councillor Simon Coles - Planning and Transportation;
- (vii) Councillor Jefferson Horsley - Economic Development and the Arts;
- (viii) Councillor Richard Lees - Sports, Parks and Leisure;
- (ix) Councillor Mel Mullins - Environmental Services.

Tonya Meers
Legal and Democratic Services Manager
03 December 2008



Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussion. Lift access to the main committee room on the first floor of the building is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available. There is a time set aside at the beginning of the meeting to allow the public to ask questions



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter. If you require any further information, please contact Greg Dyke on:



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Website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk (Council, Executive, Review Board & Review Panel Agenda, Reports and Minutes are available on the Website)

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 7 October 2008 at 6.30 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Slattery)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Bowrah)
 Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Beaven, Bishop, Brooks, Coles, Mrs Copley,
 Mrs Court-Stenning, Critchard, Denington, D Durdan, Ms Durdan,
 Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Govier, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley,
 Ms Herbert, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Horsley, House, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs
 Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, McMahon, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Paul,
 Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone,
 Stuart-Thorn, Thorne, Watson, Mrs Waymouth, A Wedderkopp,
 D Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams, Mrs Wilson and Woolley.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 15 July 2008, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Bone, Cavill, Murphy, O'Brien, Ms Webber and Miss Wood.

3. Britain in Bloom

Mr Shaun Cregan, the Taunton Deane in Bloom Co-ordinator, reported on the recent success Wellington and, particularly, Taunton had enjoyed in the Britain in Bloom Competition.

In the South West in Bloom Competition, Wellington had been awarded a gold medal but had narrowly missed securing the Portman Cup which was awarded to the best small town.

Taunton had been awarded a silver gilt medal but had retained the Tesco Cup in the large town/small city category.

In addition, at a ceremony in Chester on 24 September 2008, Taunton had also been named the winner of the National Britain in Bloom title, again in the large town/small city grouping.

The trophies that had been awarded were displayed.

The Mayor thanked Mr Cregan for his presentation and congratulated everyone involved in achieving these highly prestigious awards.

4. Communications

The Mayor reported the sad death of Mr. Harold Inder, who would have been known to Members through his work with the Friends of Konigslutter and as one of the Independent Members of the Council's Standards Committee.

5. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors Brooks, Govier, Henley, Paul and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Prior-Sankey also declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Viridor. Councillors Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mrs Lewin-Harris and Stuart-Thorn declared personal interests as Citizen Advice Bureau Trustees. Councillor Stuart-Thorn also declared a personal interest as a YMCA Trustee. Councillor Bowrah declared a personal interest as a resident of Holyoake Street, Wellington. Councillor Mrs Whitmarsh declared a personal interest as a Director of the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership.

6. **Borough Council By-Election – 2 October 2008**

The Democratic Services Manager, on behalf of the Returning Officer, reported that Councillor Kelly Durdan of Tristram Drive, Creech St. Michael, Taunton had been elected as a Councillor for the Ruishton and Creech Ward.

7. **Further Changes to the Constitution**

Submitted report which detailed a number of further proposed changes to the Constitution following meetings of the Constitutional Sub-Committee held on 4 September 2008 and the Corporate Governance Committee which met on 15 September 2008.

The changes were required to bring the Constitution up to date with the Council's current ways of operating and to make the decision making process even more effective and efficient.

Resolved that the proposed changes to the Constitution as set out in the Appendix to these Minutes be approved.

7. **Written Questions to Members of the Executive**

Councillor Meikle asked a series of questions which are set out below, together with the replies given by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Henley:-

- (1) Could the Council be given the immediate assessment of a rough outline of the major factors which have to be considered when approaching the budget?

Response: The Overview and Scrutiny board will receive a report at

their meeting on 13 October on the forecast budget gap and the reasons why there is a forecast funding gap. Major cost increases include inflation and staff pay increases – we are also experiencing reductions in income due to the “credit crunch”, for example, car parks.

The following meeting (on 30 October 2008) will also receive a report on the Executive’s strategy for closing that budget gap. Issues such as the Core Council Review and the need for ongoing savings and efficiencies to be found will no doubt feature in that plan.

- (2) Such matters as the £500,000 shortfall of the Government’s contribution to their national pensioners free bus passes of last year. Have there been any indications that they will close the gap this year?

Response: Last year the Government issued figures on the specific grant for concessionary travel for three years. The position for Taunton Deane is as follows:-

2008/2009 - £388,000;
2009/2010 - £397,000 (+2.3%);
2010/2011 - £408,000 (+2.8%).

These figures will be built into the Medium Term Financial Plan. Therefore, at present, we are forecasting only a minimal increase in external support for this service.

- (3) Have we any sort of picture from our own bus companies or other parts of the country that since the scope for ‘national’ travel is included, has there been a marked extra take up, which will add to the expense next year? Knowledge of the take up would enable the very roughest assessment of the extra financial burden.

Response: At present, based on information received to date, we expect to remain within budget, overall usage has gone up about 14% but this has been diminished by the poor summer weather, we are monitoring the position in the current year and any new information on usage in 2009/2010 will be incorporated into the budget gap.

- (4) What is the current forecast of ‘drop off’ in car parking income?

Response: As reported in the quarterly performance report the expected position at Quarter 1 was an expected decline in income of £100,000. This will be revised as part of the Quarter 2 budget monitoring exercise.

- (5) Also Tone Leisure, do we have any indicators that they are suffering significant loss of income due to current economic conditions?

Response: Over the last couple of months Tone Leisure had seen a slight decline in membership and were 2% under budget.

- (6) Are there other areas of dropping income such as Planning, search charges which can be reported at this present time?

Response: This was included in the Quarter 1 performance report to the Strategy and Performance Panel. Other significant budget issues that relate to the economic downturn include:-

Land Charges - £20,000 drop off in income;
Tourist Information Centre - £40,000 drop off in income;
Planning fees - £50,000 drop off in income.

- (7) The Council welcomes the new Government scheme for free swimming for the elderly and young people. Have we had notice from Whitehall that this national scheme will be fully funded, and that resources of local councils will not have to be used to fill the gap? Should we give notice to the Government that we may not be able to implement such a scheme if a promise of funding is not forthcoming (since an officer's rough assessment of the cost of between £90,000 and £140,000 would not be acceptable to add to the Council Tax burden)?

Response: The information received from the Government shows that for over 60s swimming they will provide a grant of £37,420 for this new initiative. As yet no formal notification has been received for the funding of under 16s. We are currently in discussions with Tone Leisure over the expected funding gap and if we choose to support this scheme we hope to agree a funding mechanism, which shares any financial risks appropriately. This topic will be covered by a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in October 2008.

- (8) Is there now detectable overspend or underspend overall for the Council within this financial year?

Response: The report to the Strategy and Performance Panel for Quarter1 reported a potential overspend of £88,000 on the General Fund, mainly as a result of the drop off in income reported previously. The Housing Revenue Account reported a net increase of £120,000 primarily due to increased forecast interest income.

- (9) Can we calculate the actual financial benefit figures from belonging to Southwest One or other cost saving alliances?

Response: The Somerset Waste Partnership saves the Council £231,000 when compared to the cost of the service before its formation.

The contract with Southwest One provides for a 2.5% year on year saving on the cost of providing these services back to the Council. Since the Southwest One contract started in November/December 2007 the savings so far have been:-

2007/2008 = £40,000;
2008/2009 (full year) = £136,000;
Total = £176,000.

For 2009/2010 we estimate there will be a further saving of £96,000. Over the life of the Southwest One contract this equates to total savings of over £5.4m.

The South West Audit Partnership also provides better quality audit services to the Council at the same cost of the former in house service.

- (10) Dependent on the rough cumulative outturn of the above set of questions, should we be wise to give notice that such new schemes such as Somerset Waste, which I seem to recall to be between £190,000 and £240,000 may have to be put on ice until the financial climate changes?

Response: The roll-out of further waste services, such as plastic and cardboard collections, was fully supported. The public expected this to happen.

8. **Recommendations to Council from the Executive**

(a) **Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The Executive had closely considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy which contained the current policy and financial issues facing Taunton Deane.

The Council was accountable for the stewardship and use of public money and for ensuring its plans delivered financial stability and sustainability in the future towards achieving the aims of the overall Corporate Strategy. The Financial Strategy set out these plans in detail.

Resolved that the Financial Strategy be approved.

(b) **Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and Design Code Supplementary Planning Document**

The Action Plan would help to deliver Project Taunton and it explained the strategy for the regeneration of Taunton Town Centre. It provided the policy framework to guide the redevelopment of a number of important sites, such as Firepool, the Cricket Club, Coal Orchard, Morrisons, Tangier, Wood Street, Tesco, Goodland Gardens, Castle Green, High Street and East Street.

The Action Plan explained how the various proposals would be implemented, including the roles and responsibilities of partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors and also identified how the regeneration of the town centre could deliver important community priorities including opportunities for training and skills, better connections to the town centre from disadvantaged communities and tackling Climate Change.

The Taunton Town Centre Design Code Supplementary Planning Document, had been prepared in parallel with the Action Plan. The Code was a set of requirements to guide the physical development of an area. The aim was to define acceptable design quality and thereby assist the delivery of good quality new development. The Design Code would act as a tool to guide the implementation of the town centre redevelopment and a point of reference in the development control process.

Both the Action Plan and the Design Code had been the subject of extensive public consultation, including an Examination in Public by a Government appointed Inspector who had concluded that the Action Plan was “sound”.

To comply with the relevant legislation, it had been recommended that the Action Plan and the Design Code should be adopted by the Council.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan; and
- (2) the Taunton Town Centre Design Code Supplementary Planning Document,

be both formally adopted.

9. **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 Henley)**

Councillor Henley's report covered the following topics:-

- Britain in Bloom;
- Response Bus Services;
- Rowbarton Allotments, Taunton;
- Free Swimming;

- Pioneer Somerset;
- Greg Dyke;
- Fuel Poverty Day.

(ii) **Resources (Councillor Mrs Smith)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Smith provided information on the following areas within her portfolio:-

- Democratic Services;
- Personnel;
- Southwest One;
- Corporate Support Services;
- Customer Services;
- Corporate Administration/Word Processing;
- Revenues and Benefits Service Unit;
- Financial Services;
- Performance Management.

(iii) **Community Leadership (Councillor A Wedderkopp)**

Councillor A Wedderkopp's report focused on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Community Partnerships;
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB);
- Local Area Agreement (LAA);
- Safer Somerset West Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership;
- The Restorative Justice Project;
- Protection from Abuse;
- Phoenix House, Belmont Road, Taunton.

(iv) **Communications (Councillor Brooks)**

Councillor Brooks' report covered the following topics:-

- Public Relations;
- Website Update;
- Place Survey;
- A-Z of Services.

(v) **Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Coles)**

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

- Southwest One;
- Forward Planning;

- Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and the Design Code Supplementary Planning Document;
- Core Strategy Community Engagement;
- Monkton Heathfield;
- Staffing Levels;
- Residents' Parking;
- Greg Dyke.

(vi) **Economic Development, Asset Management and Tourism (Councillor Horsley)**

The report from Councillor Horsley covered:-

- Project Taunton;
- Changing Economic Circumstances;
- Inward Investment;
- Culture;
- Pioneer Somerset;
- Economic Development;
- Community Development, Deprivation and Regeneration.

(vii) **Leisure, Arts and Culture (Councillor R Lees)**

The report from Councillor R Lees dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

- Britain in Bloom;
- Community Leisure;
- Sport;
- Play;
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities;
- In-Bloom.

(viii) **Environmental Services (Councillor Mullins)**

The Report from Councillor Mullins drew attention to developments in the following areas:-

- Environmental Health;
- Environmental Protection.

(ix) **Housing Services (Councillor Prior-Sankey)**

Councillor Prior-Sankey submitted her report which drew attention to the following:-

- Tenants' Forum Annual General Meeting;
- Review of Council Housing Finance;
- Housing Strategy Event;
- Holyoake Street, Wellington – Proposed Development;
- Choice-Based Lettings (CBL);
- Progress at Norie House, Taunton;
- Fuel Poverty.

(The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.)

Appendix to the Minutes

Changes to the Council's Constitution

ARTICLE 16

16.0 Suspension of the Constitution

(c) Rules capable of suspension

The following rules may be suspended in accordance with the above provision:

The council's procedure rules apart from SO22 and SO26 and financial procedure rules

PART I REPORTS OF EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS

8. (1) An Executive Councillor shall submit a report to each Full Council meeting. The report shall be in two parts.
- (2) Part I shall contain recommendations and Part II shall contain reports as to current and future business for the information of and comment from the Council.
- (3) Each recommendation shall be proposed separately by the Executive Councillor, or, in his/her absence, by the Leader of the Executive; it shall not need to be seconded before being discussed.
- (4) The normal rules of debate will apply to the recommendations contained in Part I

PART II OF EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS' REPORTS

9. (1) When Part II of an Executive Councillor's report is being considered, Councillors may, upon items referred to in that report :-

- (a) submit written questions to be received by the Democratic Services Manager by 4pm 2 working days before the Council meeting;
- (b) Responses will be given to these questions and 1 further supplementary question will be allowed related to the question arising from the answer to seek further clarification;

Comment [11]: As per amendment at full council 15/07/08

(c) Verbal questions will be allowed which may be answered verbally or in writing within 5 working days.

Comment [I2]: As per amendment agreed at full council on 15/09/08

- (2) Part II items are for information, discussion and comment only and no motion shall be put to the meeting as to any such item - other than those closure motions described in Standing Order 13.
- (3) A councillor may not speak on Part II of a report if a recommendation relating to that same item has already appeared in Part I of a report submitted at that meeting.
- (4) The Executive Councillor may introduce Part II of his report and update the Council on developments that have taken place since the report was dispatched.

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 15** (1) At a Full Council meeting any Councillor, upon giving 5 working days written notice to the Democratic Services Manager, may ask the Mayor a question on a matter which concerns the Council's functions, powers, duties and which affects the borough.
- (2) Any Councillor, upon giving 2 working days written notice to the Democratic Services Manager, may ask the Leader of the Council, a portfolio holder, chairman of a committee or another member who has been appointed to an outside body, a question which concerns the Executive's or committee's functions, powers and duties or the work of the outside body and which affects the borough.
 - (3) The leader, portfolio holder, or committee chair may direct the question to be answered by the Chairman of the appointed sub-committee which has been delegated the subject matter of the question.
 - (4) The member asking the question may ask a supplementary question related to the question or arising from the answer to seek further clarification.
 - (5) Questions are to be asked and answered without further discussion by other members present. The Leader of the Council or a committee chairman to whom the question has been addressed may ask another member or officer to answer it if they are of the opinion that a discussion is required or they may refer it to another relevant meeting of the Executive or Committee.

TIME LIMITS FOR ALL MEETINGS*

- 29.** (1) A meeting of full council or other committees/panels including Overview and Scrutiny committees shall not exceed three hours in duration except in accordance with SO 30 below.
- (2) If the business of the meeting has not been completed within that time the Mayor or Chairman will interrupt the debate to announce the time and call for a vote to be taken immediately on the item under discussion.
- (3) No member will be able to address the meeting after the Mayor's or Chairman's interruption on any item appearing on the agenda.
- (4) Any items remaining on the agenda, which have not been considered, will be adjourned to the next scheduled meeting or a date to be fixed before the meeting adjourns.

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES*

- 30.** (1) A motion to suspend a particular procedural rule shall state the particular purpose and require a majority of at least half the total number of members appointed to that Council Meeting or Committee.
- (2) on occasions that rule 29(1) (guillotine) is being waived, the duration of the suspension shall not exceed 30 minutes and shall, if seconded, be put to the vote without discussion.
- (3) Rule 29(1) can only be suspended once per meeting. However the Mayor, Chairman of Planning Committee or Chairman of the Licensing Committee may decide otherwise in respect of the meeting they are chairing. This will generally only occur in exceptional circumstances.
- (4) Rules 22 and 26 cannot be suspended. But section 13 still applies.

Part IV – Public Question Time

- 16.** (1) Subject to paragraph (10) of this Standing Order, questions from Taunton Deane electors shall be taken in accordance with the procedure in this Standing Order at the beginning of each meeting.
- (2) The period allowed for questions and answers shall not exceed

15 minutes except with the consent of the Mayor; each individual questioner shall be restricted to speaking for a total of four minutes.

- (3) Questions shall be directed to the Mayor, who may request the appropriate member or officer to reply.
- (4) Every question shall relate to matters over which the Council has powers or duties and which particularly affect the Borough and shall be put and answered without discussion.
- (5) However, if a question relates to a ward-based issue, the Mayor shall invite a contribution from one councillor representing that ward before calling for the formal reply.
- (6) Questions shall not be disallowed merely because advance notice in writing has not been given. Such questions may not be answered immediately but later in writing. However it is always preferred that questions are put in writing in order to assist members and officers to be able give answers at the meeting.
- (7) An answer may take the form of:-
 - (a) an immediate oral answer; or
 - (b) a written answer where the necessary information is not readily available.
- (8) Subject to the time limit in paragraph (2) above, and to the discretion of the Mayor, the questioner shall be permitted to ask one supplementary question relating to the issue raised.
- (9) Any question shall be disallowed which the Mayor believes to be scurrilous, offensive, improper, repetitious, capricious, irrelevant or otherwise objectionable.
 - (10) The procedure for taking questions or statements from members of the public at meetings of the Planning Committee shall follow such pattern as agreed from time to time by that Committee to best take account of its needs for public involvement.

Comment [I3]: Discussed and agreed at Constitutional Sub committee 4/09/08

- 19.** (1) All motions and amendments, unless the law otherwise requires, shall be decided by affirmation or by a show of hands, as the Mayor shall choose.

- (2) If before the Mayor calls for the vote, either,
- (a) the mover and seconder of the motion - or of the amendment, or,
 - (b) any councillor supported by the votes of at least a quarter of the councillors present,

request that a Recorded Vote be taken, then votes shall be publicly declared, and recorded in the minutes.

- (3) In addition to the option under SO 19(2), any member may require - immediately after a vote is taken - that the manner in which that member's vote was cast (for, against or abstaining) shall be recorded in the minutes.
- (4) Where a vote is taken upon the choice of more than two candidates for an appointment and there is not an absolute majority in favour of one candidate, the candidates receiving the least number of votes shall be excluded and a further vote taken, the procedure being continued until there is an absolute majority in favour of one candidate.

(5) (a) in the case of an equality of votes, the Mayor shall have a second or casting vote.

(b) The Mayor shall have unfettered discretion as to its use for or against the proposition.

Comment [14]: 5(a) has been amended to clarify the position with second and casting vote for the mayor.

PART I – MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. At meetings of the Council, the order of business shall be as follows:-
- (1) To elect a councillor to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are absent;
 - (2) To transact any business required by statute to be done before any other business;
 - (3) To receive the minutes of the preceding meeting and, if agreed, to order that they be signed as a correct record;
 - (4) To receive any communications;

- (5) To deal with questions from Taunton Deane electors under Standing Order 16;
- (6) To receive petitions or deputations from Taunton Deane electors under Standing Orders 17 & 18;
- (7) To transact any business adjourned from previous meetings;
- (8) To consider Motions received under Standing Order 4;
- (9) To consider reports from Executive Councillors;
- (10) To consider any reports submitted by the Review Board, a Review Panel, Standards Committee or from an Officer;
- (11) To deal with questions asked under Standing Order 15(2);
- (12) To transact any other business which the Mayor is prepared to certify as of such urgency that it must be disposed of at this meeting.

Comment [I5]: O&S committees?

Comment [I6]: Agreed at Constitutional sub committee 4/09/08

MOTIONS DURING A DEBATE *

- 5. (1)** The only proposals which may be moved during a debate are:-
- (a) to amend the motion;
 - (b) to postpone consideration of the motion;
 - (c) to adjourn the meeting;
 - (d) to adjourn the debate;
 - (e) to proceed to the next business;
 - (f) that the question be now put;
 - (g) that Councillor _____ be not further heard;
 - (h) that Councillor _____ do leave the meeting;
 - (i) that the (identified) recommendation be referred back for further consideration;
 - (j) that the press and public be excluded;
 - (k) to suspend any one or more Standing Orders during all or part of the meeting;
 - (l) to refer a petition which has been presented to a meeting of the Council to a Panel for consideration;
- 5 (2) A councillor who has not previously spoken in the debate may, at the conclusion of a speech of another councillor, move without comment one of the following closure motions:-
- (a) "that the meeting do now adjourn
 - (a) "that the debate be adjourned",

- (b) "that the meeting do now proceed to the next business", or
- (d) "that the question be now put".

(3) If the closure motion is seconded then (subject to the proviso set out in (c) below) the Mayor shall proceed as follows:-

- (a) the closure motion shall be put to the vote forthwith and without discussion;
- (b) then - subject only to the right of reply of the councillor who either presented the report or who proposed the original motion - the closure motion shall be immediately acted upon;
- (c) The Mayor shall have the discretion not to accept such a closure motion when of the opinion that the matter before the meeting has not yet been sufficiently discussed.

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Recommendations to Council from John Dewdney, Chairman, Independent Members' Allowances Panel and Councillor Ken Hayward, Chairman of the Strategy and Performance Panel

Members' Allowances

(a) Recommendations from the Members' Allowances Panel

- 1.1 For the past couple of years, it has been a requirement of the Council's Constitution for Members' Allowances to be independently reviewed on an annual basis.
- 1.2 The Members' Allowances Panel, which comprises five independent members appointed following public advertisement, has recently completed its annual review and submitted its report and recommendations to the Strategy and Performance Panel. The Panel considered our recommendations at its meeting on 11 November 2008.
- 1.3 The full details of the Panel's terms of reference, the methodology used and the research undertaken are contained in our report.
- 1.4 From the research we have undertaken and from the information provided to us we feel we have gained an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the modern day Councillor. We have again requested information and looked in detail at the Overview and Scrutiny requirements of the Council, particularly the pilot scheme which is currently operating.
- 1.5 The comparative data received this year has allowed us to identify the trends that are continuing to develop in respect of the payment of allowances.
- 1.6 As well as the comparative data from other Local Authorities on the level of allowances, we obtained information, again from members of the Council's "family group" and other Local Authorities, regarding payment of the Carer's Allowance, and levels of travel and subsistence allowances.
- 1.7 We have also given Councillors the opportunity to come and speak to the Members' Allowances Panel with any suggestions they might have or representations they might want to make.
- 1.8 We reached the following conclusions:-

Carers Allowance

There is little evidence that this is an issue with many of the current members of the Council. However, we are firmly 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 continues to reflect the National Minimum Wage.

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

We would like to emphasise that in our opinion the Basic Allowance is not a full and proper recompense for the duties performed by a Councillor. It does not reflect a similar level of responsibility in the private sector. The recommendations reflect the fact that a proportion of any Councillor's work continues to be voluntary.

We believe that the Basic Allowance should continue to reflect the commitment in time necessary to be an effective local Councillor. We feel that the level of increase made last year resulted in a Basic Allowance that continued to match that paid by other, similar sized Local Authorities.

We are very mindful of the requirement for Councillors to work in their communities and spend less time in formal meeting situations. The Basic Allowance we are recommending we feel acknowledges the demands placed on front line Councillors. However, we are also mindful of the general economic climate within the country as a whole and how a particularly generous recommended increase might be viewed by the public.

In the past couple of years the increase recommended by the Panel reflected the current Retail Price Index rate of inflation. This rate is currently 5% - well ahead of any public sector pay increases agreed this year. Accordingly, we consider that an increase of 3% is justified for 2009/2010. Such a limited increase had also been suggested by a Councillor.

Special Responsibility Allowances

This was an area we spent some time on, particularly bearing in mind the pilot Overview and Scrutiny arrangements that the Council had been operating over the past year and the discussions that had taken place at the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 13 October 2008.

If the proposals which were approved at this meeting are ultimately accepted by Full Council, this will lead to the establishment of two new Scrutiny Committees to replace the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Strategy and Performance Panel. These Committees, one of which will deal with Corporate topics, the other Community topics, will have an equal standing. The Chairman of each Committee will therefore have equal responsibility and therefore receive an equal Responsibility Allowance.

The Panel recognised that the overall level of responsibility currently held by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board would be reduced if this new Scrutiny Committee arrangement comes into effect.

Although our recommendation was not accepted last year, we continue to recognise the important role that the Task and Finish Groups play in enabling Councillors to make a difference within their communities. We therefore feel that there is a special responsibility on the Chairmen of these Groups to ensure that the Task and Finish Reviews are meaningful. In the circumstances we again recommend that a small Special Responsibility Allowance should be paid to Chairmen of the Task and Finish Groups for the duration of their reviews. We hope that this will go some way to reflect the added value that the Groups do provide.

We considered a request from a Councillor to include the Constitutional Sub-Committee within the same bracket as Task and Finish Groups. We decided however, that the level of responsibility held by the Chairman of this Sub-Committee was not sufficient to warrant a payment.

We 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 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 should also be increased by 3%. We also feel the amount recommended, accurately compensates Councillors for these important and time consuming duties, which now form such an integral part of administering a modern local authority.

One of the Members expressed the view that the Council's recognition for carrying out the full range of duties within any of the Executive portfolios was set too low compared with the allowance paid to County Council Executive Members. The Panel felt that the comparisons made with similar sized District Councils showed that the Special Responsibility Allowance paid by Taunton Deane was at the right level.

We also looked again at the level of allowance for the Chairmen of the Regulatory Committees and feel these should also be increased by 3%.

Mayor and Deputy Mayor Allowance

Although it does not form part of the Members' Allowances Scheme the Council are entitled, by virtue of Sections 3 and 5 of the Local Government Act 1972 to pay an allowance which enables the Mayor to meet the expenses of his/her office. We are satisfied that the overall level of allowance paid to the Borough's First Citizen and the deputy accurately reflects the duties of those roles and we recommend an increase of 3%.

Approved Duties

We have taken a detailed look at the current list of approved duties and we are happy that this list is satisfactory.

We were again made aware of Members' views as to the non-payment of expenses for attending political group meetings. We are of the view that there is no evidence which would make the Panel recommend a change in the Members' Allowances Regulations. These 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. This is a Government Regulation which means that we are unable to recommend any change even if we were convinced of the need to do so.

Our suggested list of Approved Duties is set out in the 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 this 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'. The advice we have received from the Parish Liaison Officer is that Parish Councils within Taunton Deane are currently not seeking any kind of allowance. 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 agreed with the deliberations of the Panel last year and came to the conclusion that:

- (a) 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;
- (b) allowances for travelling and subsistence should be identical to those payable to Borough Councillors and that the same level of such allowances should apply for all Parishes throughout Taunton Deane; and
- (c) it would be in order for Parish Councillors to seek the reimbursement of the actual cost of items used for Parish Council business, such as computer

consumables, or a nominal sum, provided such payments were approved by the Parish Council.

Travel and Subsistence Allowances

The Regulations allow Local Authorities to determine their own travel and subsistence allowances after having regard to the recommendation of their independent Members' Allowances 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 feel that the subsistence rates should be the same as those paid to the Council's officers. These have recently been reviewed nationally and the level of subsistence allowances payable to Councillors should be revised accordingly.

Pensions for Councillors

The Government have given Local Authorities the power to admit Councillors to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

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

The independent Panel can 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.

Our view remains unchanged from that of the previous Panel. We acknowledge that the current level of Basic Allowance might not make membership of the Scheme worthwhile for many 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. We do not intend to make any change to our previous recommendation.

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.

Co-optees

The Regulations also make allowance for the payment by the Council of allowances for persons co-opted onto the Council. The only category of person this would affect currently would be the Council's Standards Committee. A number of Councils have already set allowances for the Independent Members of their Standards Committees. In the past the position at Taunton Deane has always been that Members of the Standards Committee are voluntary – although they are, of course, entitled to claim appropriate expenses.

However, new guidance received from the Standards Board for England states that Local Authorities must introduce an annual scheme for the payment of a Basic Allowance to their Independent Members. This is due in part to the introduction during May 2008 of the Local Assessment Scheme which requires all complaints made against Borough and Parish Councillors to be investigated and determined by Members of the Standards Committee.

Based on comparative information from other Local Authorities, the Panel recommends that a Basic Allowance is paid to the seven Independent Members who serve on the Standards Committee with an additional Special Responsibility Allowance being payable to the Chairman.

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 2009 (The current scheme for 2008/2009 is in brackets).

Basic Allowance (payable to all members (£4,176)	£4,301
Leader (£11,746)	£12,098
Executive Councillors (8) (£4,568)	£4,705
Chairman, Planning Committee (£4,568)	£4,705
Chairman, Licensing Committee (£1,305)	£1,344
Chairman, Corporate Governance Committee (£1,305)	£1,344
Chairman, Corporate Scrutiny Committee	£2,700
Chairman, Community Scrutiny Committee	£2,700
Chairmen of Task and Finish Groups	£250
Chairman, Standards Committee	£500
Independent Members, Standards Committee	£300

Mayor (£8,736)	£8,998
Deputy Mayor (£1,596)	£1,644

2. (i) Travelling and subsistence allowances shall be payable to councillors when 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 for cars, motorcycles and bicycles be set at the upper limit which the Inland Revenue would not impose taxation. At present, the rate for cars is 40p per mile, motorcycles is 24p per mile and bicycles is 20p per mile.

(iii) Subsistence rates as set out below:

Breakfast	£6.48
Lunch	£8.91
Tea	£3.51
Evening Meal	£11.04

3. Payment for the care of Councillors' Dependents be increased to £5.73 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 was 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.

John Dewdney
Chairman
on behalf of the Members' Allowances Review Panel

(b) Recommendations of the Strategy and Performance Panel

The Strategy and Performance Panel at its meeting on 11 November 2008 considered the report on the annual review of Members' Allowances undertaken by the independent Members' Allowances Panel.

Although the report and recommendations of the Independent Members' Allowances Panel were noted, the Strategy and Performance Panel decided to recommend to Full Council that **no increases** should be made to either the Basic Allowance or the Special Responsibility Allowances for the 2009/2010 financial year.

Councillor Ken Hayward
Chairman, Strategy and Performance 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 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.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Proposal for exemption to Contract Standing Order 13 for the procurement of specialist Consultancy Services for Project Taunton

Report of Strategic Director (Joy Wishlade)

(This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Jefferson Horsley)

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2005 Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC), in partnership with Somerset County Council (SCC) and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), entered into a partnership arrangement to work together to deliver the objectives of the Taunton Vision. At the time we agreed that we had entered into a joint procurement arrangement with these two partners. Taunton Deane acted as “banker” for this project and in effect, the three partners were acting as an agency.
- 1.2 It was envisaged that much of the necessary work in developing the Taunton Vision (now Project Taunton) would be done through the commissioning of external consultants. Given the size of the respective contributions it was envisaged that the commissions issued would be in excess of Taunton Deane Standing Orders threshold 2 (when full tender procedures apply) and threshold 3 (when EU Procurement Rules apply).
- 1.3 It was proposed by the Vision Executive Group (now Project Taunton Executive) that the consultants should be drawn from the framework agreements already held by SWRDA and that this should be considered by the respective partners as being compliant with Contract Standing Orders.
- 1.4 All partners accepted this statement and agreed that the period it would cover was 2005 – 2008. We would now like to extend the period for a further three years 2009 – 2012.

2. Contract Standing Orders

- 2.3 Ordinarily, all contracts over threshold 3 must comply with EU Procurement Rules. However, for this work we wish to use the exemption under Standing Order 13 (c) and (d) but as one of the partners has already carried out this stage then we are exempt.
- 2.4 This exemption states that we are permitted to enter into a contract, other than in accordance with the usual procedures laid down in Standing Order 13 if any of the following apply:-

“14 (e) the contract to be entered into is to be dealt with in a prescribed manner under agency arrangements entered into by the Council with another authority.”

3. Advantages

- 3.1.1 The decision to use this exemption has been made because of the advantages that this will bring.
- 3.2 SWRDA has already complied with EU Regulations and therefore we do not have to consider an OJEU Notice at any time thus saving the necessary officer and lead-time to advertise plus associated costs in tendering. It will also allow us to commission work during this project as and when it is required without repeating this exercise. We can therefore demonstrate that the procurement has gone through a suitable process for both Standing Orders under 13 and European Law.
- 3.3 SWRDA's framework agreement is for three years and the rates are fixed for this period. This will provide known costs for budgeting purposes and will protect the partnership from inflationary pressures in later years.
- 3.4 SWRDA has already formed a judgement as to the quality of the possible consultants, ensuring they have suitable expertise in order to deliver the Project Taunton work.
- 3.5 The attraction of entering into a framework agreement for three years should have given external consultants maximum incentive to offer suitable rates for their engagement given that this is a larger and longer opportunity.
- 3.6 In deciding to proceed with an exception by use of an agency with other authorities we are obliged to consider the achievement of best value in our procurement. The advantages are as listed above. A large number of organisations in the public sector have taken advantage of similar arrangements.

4. Disadvantages

- 4.1 The only possible disadvantage would be that we could be seen to be limiting our external consultancy to those on the framework. However, this agreement does not limit the three partners to the framework agreement. If it proves impractical to use this arrangement for certain specialist work or because Taunton Deane is in some way dissatisfied with the consultancy being provided, we would reserve the right to reconsider our approach to procurement.

5. Southwest One Procurement Procedures

- 5.1 Southwest One is setting up new procurement procedures. The requirements of Project Taunton have been discussed with them and they are supportive of Project Taunton continuing to use the SWRDA framework contracts. They will add these to the relevant category plans so that the Southwest One procurement routes can be utilised. Consultants outside the SWRDA framework will also be on these category plans so Project Taunton will be able to use these if, for any reason, the SWRDA list is not satisfactory.

6. Recommendation

Full Council is asked to approve the exemption to Standing Orders as described above and to approve the procurement of Project Taunton Consultancy Work through the use of the SWRDA framework as outlined above under exemption 14 (e), this exemption to cover the three year period, 2009 - 2012.

Joy Wishlade
Strategic Director
Taunton Deane Borough Council

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Part 1

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

(i) Councillor Henley

Minimum Revenue Provision

The Government has introduced amended legislation to deal with the statutory requirement for authorities to make an annual provision from revenue, for the repayment of borrowing undertaken for the purposes of financing capital expenditure. This annual provision, known as Minimum Revenue Provision is a largely technical calculation.

Rather than prescribe an approach, the Government has offered the following four options - two for situations where borrowing is undertaken with support from Central Government and a further two options where borrowing is undertaken without this support:-

- For supported borrowing Councils can choose between **Option 1**, the technically demanding and cumbersome method in current use, or **Option 2**, a simple 4% on outstanding debt.
- For unsupported borrowing however, the options are **Option 3**, the Asset Life Method which is debt associated with assets purchased / created, divided by the expected life of the asset or **Option 4**, use depreciation as a proxy for the provision to be made.

When the Executive considered this matter back in October 2008, Options 2 and 3 were selected as the most appropriate methods for Taunton Deane given that they were the simplest to understand and calculate and that there would be no material impact on the Council's 'bottom line'.

It is **recommended** that with regard to the Minimum Revenue Provision, Options 2 and 3 (detailed above) be adopted.

(ii) Councillor Coles

(a) Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and Design Code Supplementary Planning Document

Members will recall that they agreed to adopt the Action Plan, which will help to deliver Project Taunton and the Design Code Supplementary Planning Document at the last meeting of the Council on 7 October 2008.

Due to an administrative error, a key date to formally advertise the adoption of these documents has been missed.

Rather than risk a legal challenge at a later date on the grounds that the procedure laid down by legislation has not been followed by Taunton Deane, the Council is requested to re-adopt the Action Plan and the Supplementary Planning Guidance. This will allow the formal advertisement to be placed within the required time limit.

It is therefore **recommended** that:-

- (1) the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan; and
- (2) the Taunton Town Centre Design Code Supplementary Planning Document,

be both re-adopted.

(b) Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document

This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been commissioned to provide guidance for securing contributions from developers towards the major town centre development proposals in Taunton.

Although a detailed policy on planning obligations is being developed in connection with the Taunton Deane Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy, the adoption of this Strategy is a couple of years away. In the meantime, particularly now that the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TTCAAP) has been adopted, the SPD is required to amplify what the Council expects from developers by way of contributions towards the infrastructure and services needed to support new development in the town.

The draft SPD document was published earlier in the year and was the subject of a six week statutory consultation period in June – July 2008.

A substantial number of replies were received during this consultation period. However, the issues raised fell under a number of main headings which were detailed in a report to the Executive together with the Council's responses thereto.

When the report was considered on 12 November 2008, the Executive agreed that many of the issues could be addressed by making suitable amendments to the SPD to enable it to proceed to adoption.

A copy of the SPD document, with all the amendments included, will be

circulated to all Members before the meeting of Full Council.

It is therefore **recommended** that the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document, as amended, be formally adopted.

Part II Reports from the Executive

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. The Budget

- 1.1 There is no doubt that Councils all across the country are facing the most difficult of budget rounds this year. The fair economic wind which helped Councils in the last five years or so has been totally replaced by an economic crunch which we have not seen for a generation.
- 1.2 If you had said 18 months ago that many of our banks would have been nationalised and household name retailers like Woolworths would be in administration then you probably would not have had many agreeing with you. On top of this we face huge increases in utility bills and a significant drop in interest rates, which has had an adverse affect on the Council finances, then you get an idea of the problems we face.
- 1.3 It is important that we all act sensibly at this time and put politics aside and work together at this budget time. No one political party has an exclusive right to all the right ideas and solutions and we are more than willing to include any sensible ideas that any Councillor has whatever the political party to ensure that Taunton Deane has a robust budget position for the coming council year.
- 1.4 The administration has already identified several new ways to sensibly reduce our costs and we are currently working on other potential efficiency savings which we will introduce in the very near future. However, it is not only incumbent on the ruling group to do this and I look to the main opposition party as well this year to do the same and work with us and help us through this period and set aside previous party political differences for the good of all residents in Taunton Deane.

2. Core Council Review

- 2.1 I believe it is right that we are now taking this process onwards to the February Full Council cycle. Much work is being done on this process and Members are very much involved in this as well via the Change Group. Briefings will have been provided to all political groups before this meeting to give all Members the opportunity to hear the latest news on this initiative and to ask questions as well.
- 2.2 It is vital that every single Member of this Council is engaged in this process and comes to the February Full Council having attended briefings and made themselves aware of all the relevant information to make a decision at that time. I do want to state at this time that the Senior Management Team have worked

extremely hard to get where we are with this review. There is still much to do but I am confident that we can complete this review on time.

3. Pioneer Somerset

- 3.1 A report which the Somerset Leaders Group of all Councils in Somerset have been working on is near completion and will be presented to all the Councils very early in the New Year.
- 3.2 Much work has been done by Members at all levels on this and our Chief Executive has done much work alongside the other Chief Executives looking at different alternatives and workstreams. I thank Penny for her commitment to Pioneer. The joint scrutiny meetings are yet another part of the Councils working together and can only be a good thing.

4. Telephone Boxes

- 4.1 We have heard from BT that they have accepted our objection to the removal of 14 phone boxes in Taunton Deane. This is a great success and shows that sometimes objections can be successful.
- 4.2 Shirlene Adam, Marc Hole and myself met BT two weeks ago and following this we sat down and considered the responses from Ward Councillors and Parish Councils. We have decided to continue to object to the removal of 24 out of 25 of the remaining boxes at risk. These are a public service and we will campaign to keep them in service.

5. New Gyms

- 5.1 It has been a great pleasure to open the new gyms at Blackbrook and Wellington Sports Centres. These new wonderful improved facilities are a credit to this Council and Tone Leisure and we should be celebrating their completion. I challenge Members to look at these new facilities and then say we have not made the right decision.

6. Ice Rink

- 6.1 The Taunton Ice Rink returned to the town on the 4 December 2008. This is a welcome return for a much loved part of Christmas in Taunton. This year of course it is here without a large subsidy from this Council and just shows as we always said that this could be delivered without the Council having to find money to underwrite the rink.

7. Wellington Monument

- 7.1 I met with the National Trust earlier this year to discuss the ongoing problem of the future of this iconic local landmark. A survey of the monument was carried out during the summer and I am awaiting the results of this. We will then meet the Trust again to discuss the way forward.

7.2 This is an important issue for many local people and I want to reassure residents that the Borough Council will continue to lobby the National Trust to ensure protection of this landmark

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

1. Choice-Based Lettings (CBL)

- 1.1 Homefinder Somerset goes live to the public on the 10 December 2008. All five District Councils are on target to implement the last Abrisas IT Module, called Choice Based Lettings.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane Borough Council have banded over 3,700 applicants who have re-registered.
- 1.3 All applicants who have re-registered have been notified of their banding together with a guidance leaflet explaining how to use the system.

Re Registration Applications as at 24 November 2008	Total
South Somerset District Council	3293
Taunton Deane Borough Council	3725
West Somerset Council	1121
Mendip District Council	1698
Sedgemoor District Council	2402
Total of Local Authority	12239

- 1.4 CBL training has been provided for landlords, and specialist training has been given to support agencies which assist vulnerable households. Surgeries have been held throughout the area to give advice and help.
- 1.5 The first set of properties will be advertised on the www.homefindersomerset.co.uk website on 10 December. No advertising will be posted for the holiday weeks of 24 December and 31 December 2008.

2. Affordable Housing

- 2.1 The proposed Holyoake Street development is progressing well and a Planning application will be submitted shortly.

- 2.2 The projected number of completions for 2008/2009 was 35, but the end result could be significantly higher because current financial difficulties in the market have helped increase the projected numbers. Two open market sites have been sold to Registered Social Landlords and will now provide 16 and 14 units respectively. Completion of one of the sites is expected in this financial year. Other sites which were expected to roll forward into 2009/2010 have the potential to be completed in this financial year. The Enabling Manager therefore anticipates that the projected completions for 2008/2009 could therefore approach 70.

3. Norie House, Taunton

- 3.1 I am pleased to confirm that the construction of Norie House, the new Rough Sleepers' Unit, has been completed on time and residents are now beginning to move in. The unit has emergency accommodation for six persons and also seven self-contained bed-sits. It is very pleasing that this additional facility is coming into operation as the winter sets in and temperatures drop.

4. Collection of Rent Arrears

- 4.1 The Estate Management team has been successful in reducing rent arrears by £70,000 in the past 12 months, and hope to reach their target of reducing arrears to £300,000 by the end of March 2009. Specialist debt and benefit advice is available to tenants who fall into arrears and every effort is made to reach installment arrangements with tenants in difficulty. In a very small number of cases homes may be repossessed, but as Housing Executive Member I have the final say and will ensure that repossession only happens as a last resort.

5. Tenant Consultation on the Core Council Review

- 5.1 I am pleased to report that 29 tenant representatives attended a consultation and information-giving session to hear the Director leading on the Core Council Review, Brendan Cleere, talk about progress with the review and the principles behind it. A further consultation with tenants' representatives will take place early in the New Year when more specific outcomes of the review should be known.

6. Lifetime Tenancies

- 6.1 I am pleased to hear that the new Housing Minister, Margaret Beckett, has distanced herself from reports that she is considering scrapping "lifetime tenancies". Mrs Beckett dismissed newspaper reports that her Department was drawing up proposals to make social tenancies subject to regular reviews of tenants' finances. The idea of forcing people into proving they are poor in order to remain in their home is morally repugnant.

7. Transfer Removal Grants to “Downsize”

- 7.1 The Council assists people who wish to move from family homes into smaller accommodation by the provision of Transfer Removal Grants. So far this financial year 15 under-occupied houses have been released by this method and re-let to families with children.

- 7.2 I have asked the Chief Housing Officer to look at improving and extending this scheme in order to make it even more attractive to those older people who wish to downsize.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith – Corporate Resources

1. Democratic Services

- 1.1 The Remembrance Civic Services and Parade were well attended. Thank you to everyone who put in such effort organising them.
- 1.2 The Member Development Charter status is well on track to being achieved. We have already passed several of the milestones and making good progress towards the others.
- 1.3 Tonya Meers will be attending Group Meetings over the next couple of months to explain further changes which are being proposed to the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.
- 1.4 We are in the process of recruiting a replacement for Alastair Higton, initially this is being done internally.

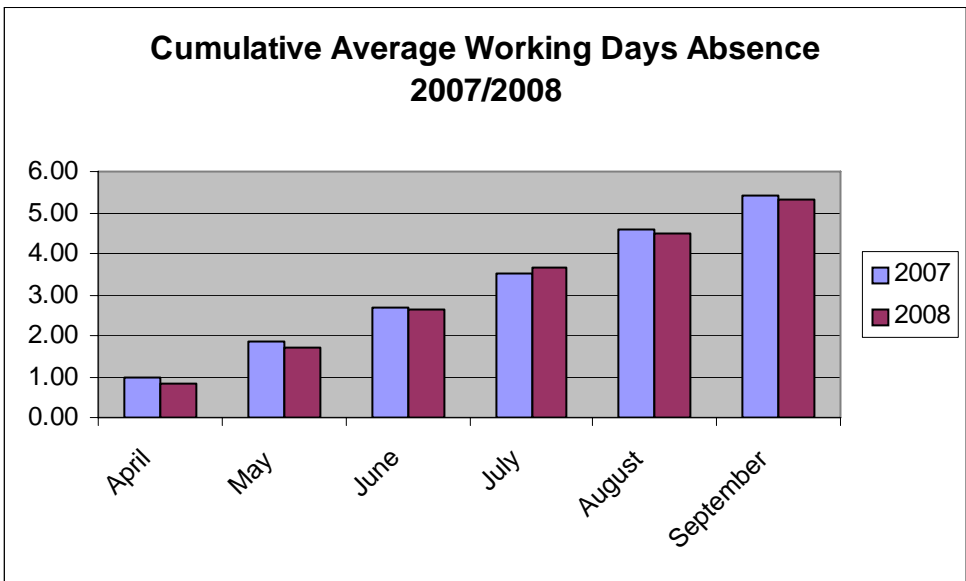
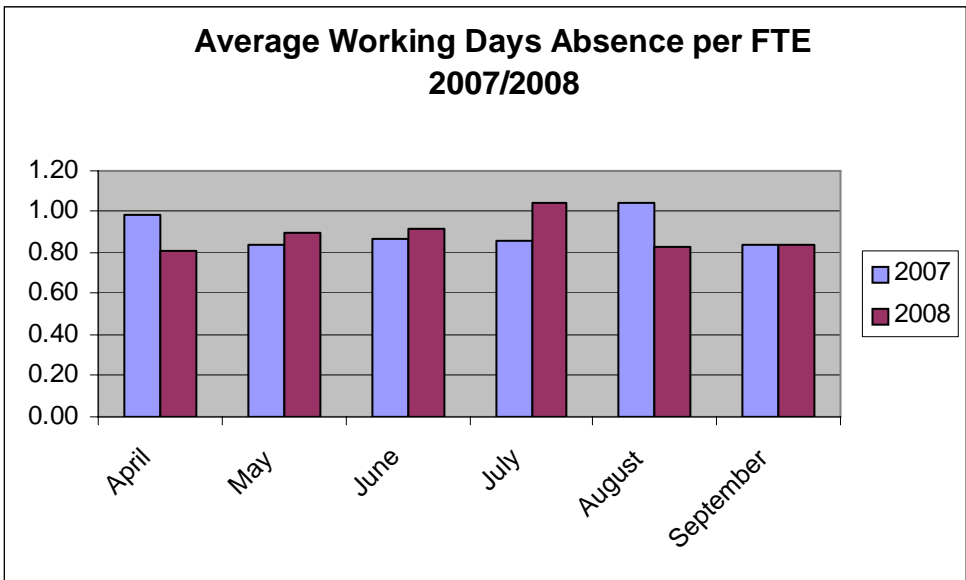
2. Personnel

- 2.1 Staff changes - We welcome Laura Holland who has joined the team to replace Karen Scott as HR Manager and Linda Kirchin (HR Officer) who has joined the team on a fixed term contract until 31 March 2009 to help with the Core Council Review.
- 2.2 Job Evaluation (JE) - The project to implement the new JE scheme is all but complete. There are still ongoing discussions with Unison to achieve a collective agreement. Due to the delay specific legal advice is being sought.
- 2.3 Sickness Absence - This month we have reviewed the monthly absence figures from previous months and have established that there has been a significant amount of late reporting each month. In future, we will recalculate the cumulative absence figures each month to take account of absence reported late. We have also highlighted the issue to managers and explained the need to report absence promptly in order to make sure that absence figures are as up-to-date and accurate.

The figures in this month's report have been fully reviewed and updated. Please find below the latest figures currently available which relate to August 2008, allowing comparisons for the period April - August. The comparisons for the figures to date for the current financial year are shown with comparisons for the same periods last year. These figures show that the cumulative figures for the current year are broadly similar to last year.

April – September

	Average Working Days Sickness Absence Per FTE		Cumulative Average Working Days Sickness Per FTE	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
April	0.99	0.81	0.99	0.81
May	0.84	0.90	1.83	1.70
June	0.87	0.92	2.70	2.61
July	0.86	1.04	3.53	3.65
August	1.04	0.83	4.57	4.49
September	0.84	0.84	5.40	5.33



- 2.4 SouthWest One - The HR Manager continues to be involved in regular meetings with IBM, Somerset County Council and the Police. The organisation design of the HR Services has now been finalised and is being communicated to those it affects. Once affected employees have been informed the structure will be communicated to the wider community. The HR team will be involved in testing the new SAP system for implementation in April 2009.
- 2.5 Core Council Review - The HR Team are working closely with the Retained HR Manager to prepare for Core Council Review.

3. Revenues and Benefits Service Unit

- 3.1 Against a backdrop of continuing economic decline, I am pleased to report that at 31 October 2008, the Revenues and Benefits Service were slightly ahead of their collection targets for Council Tax and Business Rates (NNDR). However, as reported to the Strategy and Performance Panel on 11 November 2008, we need to be mindful that currently collection performance is volatile. The Revenues and Benefits Service must balance the needs of customers facing financial difficulties against their statutory duty to collect local taxation. We will always be sensitive in agreeing realistic payment arrangements and we encourage customers to contact us quickly so we can offer advice and signpost relevant support.
- 3.2 As members will be aware from the Core Brief, we re-launched our Investigation Newsletter explaining how we are combating benefit fraud. This month we have been reviewing and updating our Anti-fraud Policy and Strategy and our Prosecution Policy. We will be asking for scrutiny of these updated documents through the appropriate panels/boards before final endorsement. It is important we develop an ever-stronger culture that benefit fraud is illegal, irresponsible and we will not tolerate it.
- 3.3 I told you in my last report that I hoped to provide some headline results from our customer survey for Benefits Administration. While we are still awaiting the return of the last few forms, I am delighted to say overall satisfaction with the service has slightly improved from last year's excellent results. We will conduct a full analysis and present a comprehensive report on the key findings early in the New Year.
- 3.4 Finally through our "Make a Difference" initiative (outlined in my last report), we have increased Housing Benefit for 26 customers providing extra benefit of £31,300 - average extra income for each customer of over £1,200 a year!

4. Financial Services

- 4.1 Financial Services have been concentrating on working with managers around pulling together the budget for 2009/2010 - this includes proposals for savings, fee increases and the detailed assumptions to be used for costing services. In addition we have been starting to look at some of the financial consequences of some of the Core Council Review proposals.

4.2 Financial Services have also been liaising with the SAP Team and the Procurement Team verifying procurement savings proposals. Finally work has started with the other Somerset Districts on the 2009/2010 Council Tax leaflet where we are looking to make the leaflet more user friendly across the county.

5. Performance Management

5.1 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) - the service has met with the Audit Commission's CAA Lead and External Auditor to further understand requirements and expectations. The Council responded to the Audit Commission's national CAA consultation. The service has now received draft 2007/2008 external audit reports in respect of Data Quality and Use of Resources and is currently finalising the content with the Auditor. Work will shortly start on identifying improvements resulting from the reports and the new guidance that has recently been issued in respect of Use of Resources for 2008/2009.

5.2 The Quarter 2 performance monitoring report is currently being produced for the Strategy and Performance Panel of 11 December 2008.

5.3 The Corporate Strategy is currently being refreshed for 2009-12. A special Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting is being convened to assist with the process. The updated strategy will need to take account of a number of items including the LAA indicators and targets, budget position and Councillors and community priorities.

5.4 SouthWest One - The shared services model is coming to fruition. The combined Somerset County Council/Taunton Deane Customer Contact Centre relocating to The Deane House will be operational from January 2009, slightly later than planned due to supplier delays. We now need to report our first Southwest One Key Performance indicator failure. This relates to Finance in respect of the following KPI - Statement of Accounts – Accuracy – Closing entries made in Compliance with agreed Accounting Treatments and Standards where these exist.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all staff and Members
a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

1. Community Safety

- 1.1 The Community Justice Panel (Restorative Justice) in Wellington continues to be well received. Following a lull in cases, agreements have been put in place with Taunton Deane Housing and Knightstone Housing to look at cases outside of Wellington on a pilot basis. It will be interesting to see how this develops and further news of progress will be given in due course. In the meantime, funding options are being explored to secure the future of the project beyond April 2009.
- 1.2 Somerset West Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership will be holding its next meeting in December. Items under discussion are likely to be projects supported by funding during 2008-2009, changes to the County Community Safety structure and progress against targets within the Local Area Agreement and against the Strategic Assessment priorities.
- 1.3 The Energize project continues to hold monthly discos in Taunton Town Centre, which attract in excess of 600 young people. In the lead up to Christmas, Energize has also put on free activities for young people in Goodlands Gardens on late night shopping Thursdays. Activities include climbing walls, a DJ and food stalls.

2. The Children's Champion

- 2.1 The new Hawthorn Play Area on Higher Holway Open Space, Taunton opened at half-term to great acclaim. It is the first of the new style of more natural and integrated play spaces that the Council has built. A film crew from Playbuilder came down from London last week, to record the success of the facility as the children arrived after school to be joined by two Play Rangers.
- 2.2 The children love the challenging equipment and the logs, rocks and hummocks and there is plenty for those with disabilities.
- 2.3 The planting is a mix of wildflower meadow grass, shrubs and bamboos that will provide sound, colour and texture for the children to enjoy. It has no hard surfacing, except for the paths - there is bark, gravel and a huge sand play area for under 5 years all of which provide more things for children to play with (which rubber and tarmac don't). We have retained the old play and basketball area at the top of the hill as an additional space for teenagers.

3. Community Partnerships

- 3.1 The Local Strategic Partnership took the difficult decision to cancel the latest round of Community Partnership meetings. There were some concerns over the buy in of all the required partners/agencies, along with agreement as to how the meetings should be run.
- 3.2 It was felt that without the above agreement/buy in, pressing ahead with the Community Partnerships would not be in the best interests of the public and would undermine their credibility more than cancelling them.
- 3.3 It had been intended to hold a multi-agency workshop to review the above issues prior to this round of Community Partnerships. However this did not prove possible and the Local Strategic Partnership would have been criticised for ploughing ahead with another round of meetings prior to addressing the above issues.
- 3.4 This workshop (to include Taunton Deane, Somerset County Council, the Police, Primary Care Trust and others) has now been arranged for mid December and will hopefully enable us to iron out the above issues and ensure the Community Partnerships move forward on a much stronger footing. I will endeavour to keep Members up to date and informed through the Weekly Bulletin.

4. Pioneer Somerset

- 4.1 Following on from the previous paragraphs, creating a “fit for purpose” management structure to deliver the Somerset Councils’ aspirations for all six Councils Local Strategic Partnership’s is a key consideration of the Pioneer Somerset discussions.
- 4.2 To have all the local government “family” working together in partnership with other key agencies and organisations would strongly support the delivery of services which matter most to residents, businesses and communities.

5. Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service

- 5.1 Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) continues to go from strength to strength. The move to Flook House has been a positive one and CVS are now seeing, on average, 30 new volunteers coming forward each month.
- 5.2 All the CVS’s in Somerset have come together to work collaboratively as an Alliance to bring added strength to all the CVS’s and improve the service to the voluntary sector. The Alliance has already secured over £430,000 from Capacity Builders, a public body set up in 2006 to improve the work of the voluntary sector.

6. Place Shaping Day

- 6.1 On the 5 November 2008, Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership held a Place Shaping Day, which was organised by Taunton Deane Borough Council.
- 6.2 As we all know the district is likely to undergo some major changes over the next two decades, particularly in light of Government-set targets for housing and employment growth, as well as the changing demographics of the district and the likely effects of climate change.
- 6.3 Students from the Somerset College of Arts and Technology used this information to put together a presentation that predicted how Taunton Deane could look in 20 years and their imaginative, time-travelling ideas spurred discussion among delegates.
- 6.4 The event pulled together a wide range of people from diverse organisations. The aim of the day was to strengthen partnership working in the district to shape Taunton Deane in a positive way in future and to provide delegates with a real understanding of the issues facing the district in the 21st century.

7. Regensw

- 7.1 I recently attended the Renewable Futures : Stepping up a Gear Conference in Bristol.
- 7.2 Among the many renewables discussed was a project recently completed by Bristol Port Authority who have built three Wind Turbines situated in a river basin, not on hills. In the first year they produced 17.5 GW of electricity.
- 7.3 Of course the sceptics will say they are inefficient, only work when the wind blows (it's free and creates no carbon). Goodness knows how many Gigawatts we will get if the wind starts to blow!
- 7.4 Wessex Water has three turbines at the planning stage, but what do these businesses and their shareholders know about economics and energy production?

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Steve Brooks – Communications

1 Public Relations

- 1.1 We are working on an increasing number of partnership projects: Somerset Fuel Poverty Partnership, Pioneer Somerset, Project Taunton, Taunton Association for the Homeless (TAH) and Somerset Waste Partnership.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane is the lead for communications on the Fuel Poverty Partnership which brings together Somerset's six local authorities, the Primary Care Trust, Age Concern, the Centre for Sustainable Energy and the Citizen's Advice Bureaux.
- 1.3 We are currently working on a leaflet that will be widely distributed throughout the County – in doctors' surgeries, libraries, community centres and Council Offices. The leaflet provides very basic information on what help is available and signposts people to useful sources – such as Warm Front and Warm Streets.
- 1.4 With TAH, we are working on the reopening of Norie House, the new rough sleepers' unit, while with Somerset County Council we will be promoting the Taunton Unparished Fund.
- 1.5 We continue to promote the new Council Nursery with a feature in the Western Daily Press on its importance to the Britain in Bloom campaign and its significance as one of the few remaining nurseries of its kind in the South West.
- 1.6 We are trying to establish stronger links with Parishes by ensuring all have a copy of Deane Dispatch – some have asked for multiple copies of the page – and through articles in Parish Magazines. We recently had success in promoting the free low energy light bulbs using Parish Newsletters.
- 1.7 If any Member is aware of any newsworthy stories they feel should be covered, please contact Debbie Rundle.

2. Website update

- 2.1 We are making good progress on the development of the new Council Website. We now have website authors in every service and they have all been trained in writing for the web. They are now in the process of rewriting their existing website content ready for the new website. Our aim is to complete the majority of this work by the end of January 2009. This is an ambitious timetable which everyone is committed to achieving.

2.2 We have now completed the designs for the new website and if any Members would like to have a look at the proposed design, please contact John-Mark Strange, Web Content Officer.

3. Place Survey

3.1 We have now exceeded the Government requirements for responses for the Place Survey which is very good news. So far, we have received 1209 replies back.

3.2 We are still expecting the final Report in early 2009 and will receive a detailed analysis on a County-wide basis as well as for each Somerset Council. We are currently working on a timetable for sharing those results with Members and Partners.

4. A-Z of services

4.1 We have now signed off the designs for the next A-Z of Services which will be distributed to all households in Taunton Deane in January 2009.

Councillor Steve Brooks

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Development Management

- 1.1 The key milestone for the operation of the Development Management Service over the last month has been the successful introduction of the ACOLAID IT system.
- 1.2 The transfer of the data and introduction of revised registration procedures have taken place with minimal interruption to the processing of applications. Whilst there have been issues relating to the speed of the application search facility on the website, we are confident that this has now been resolved.
- 1.3 Members may have also experienced problems opening images in recent weeks. However, this is not a problem linked to ACOLAID, but is one that South West One has been asked to address as a matter of urgency. There have been a number of changes to the consultation letters produced in association with applications as a result of the ACOLAID introduction. Any constructive feedback upon these changes will be welcomed.
- 1.4 The recent economic downturn has only reinforced the need to shift emphasis of the Development Management Service away from the traditional themes of negative control and regulation towards the management of the end to end development process to help deliver the sustainable growth we need as part of the Council's place shaping agenda.
- 1.5 A number of actions are in the process of being undertaken in support of this shift in emphasis:-
 - A Planning Support Officer post has been frozen as a result of an internal restructure of the teams. This is in response to the potential reduction in the number of householder applications as a result of recent legislative changes.
 - A Development Team is being set up to ensure earlier engagement with key stakeholders in relation to pre-application submissions. The initiation meeting for this group will have taken place on the 4 December 2008.
 - Our Development Manager, Tim Burton, is liaising with representatives of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to introduce Building for Life Standards as a means for both officers

and Members to assess the quality of all major residential developments, both as part of the Council's assessment and in its subsequent monitoring. Building for Life is a way to assess the design quality of homes and neighbourhoods. Its 20 criteria provide a practical framework which clearly demonstrates if you have a good housing scheme or not. Members will be given more guidance on how the scheme operates at the training session to be held on 8th January 2009.

- We are working with other Somerset authorities as part of the Pioneer Somerset Supporting Major Schemes and Regeneration Delivery Work Stream to standardise validation procedures and find better ways of delivering major developments. Ideas include the introduction of a countrywide protocol for the use of Planning Performance Agreements, sharing of expertise and standardising validation requirements.
- A review of Taunton Deane's approach to pre-application discussions is taking place to take into account recent Planning Advisory Service Guidance and also the need to focus our limited resources on those proposals that realise corporate ambitions and aspirations that deliver for partners and are locally important.
- In the current economic circumstances, it is inevitable that we will be approached by developers, agents, landowners and their friends all wanting to renegotiate schemes. The need for the Council to take on board a more positive approach to Development Management and to get the tools in place to respond positively and to continue to maximise the available benefits from new development is even more important than ever.

2. Forward Planning

- 2.1 Following consideration by the Local Development Framework Steering Group and Executive, the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document is coming to Council on 9 December 2008 for adoption.
- 2.2 The Community Engagement workshops facilitated by Bakers and 2MD are going well and will continue into early December. A number of rural parishes have also taken up the opportunity to use the toolkit. Stakeholder meetings are also taking place. The response from the workshops and stakeholders will make an important contribution to the content of the Core Strategy that will be subject to formal consultation next year.
- 2.3 The Strategic Housing Land Area Assessment work currently being undertaken by Bakers is now expected to be finished towards the end of the first quarter of 2009.

2.4 The Secretary of States final decision on the Regional Spatial Strategy is not now expected until probably the end of the first quarter of 2009. This is due to the unprecedented number of individual comments made, in excess of some 36,000 I believe.

2.5 The annual Retail Monitors have been published. The Annual Monitoring Report will be completed by the end of December.

3. Residents' Parking

3.1 The proposals for changes in Residents' Parking in Taunton have gone through the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Executive and will be advertised as part of changes to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in due course and will probably go forward to a TRO Panel for further consideration in the near future.

3.2 The success of the Ringo Parking System in our car parks continues unabated. I am pleased to report that more and more customers are signing up to use this system month by month.

4. SouthWest One

4.1 I am delighted to report that the Society of Procurement Officers in Local Government (SOPO) has recently awarded the prestigious "Outstanding Achievement Award" to SouthWest One recognising its work in saving considerable sums across the partnership.

4.2 In mid November a very successful Members Briefing was held which was an excellent opportunity for Councillors to meet SouthWest One's newly appointed Chairman, Sir Jay Tidmarsh who with colleagues was able to bring Members up to date with the progress of this very important partnership.

4.3 I am also pleased to report that under the "Kidsmart" programme two pre-school learning computers along with ongoing support and training packages have been given to schools in Yeovil and Bruton.

It just remains for me to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Safe, Prosperous and Happy 2009.

Councillor Simon Coles

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development and the Arts

Part 1

1. Project Taunton

1.1 Firepool

1.1.1 There is little more to report to Council since the Press Release made on Tuesday, 18 November 2008. We are working closely with one of the preferred developers to see if we can reach agreement which will ensure that headway is made despite the almost complete standstill in the construction and development industry.

1.1.2 Both the Steering Group and the Advisory Board are working hard with all the stakeholders to ensure that we procure the infrastructure funding and start work on this. The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and the County Council have reconfirmed their support for the project and are assisting us with submitting bids for both the river frontage and the entrance to the site.

1.1.3 When calmer and more propitious times return we may be able to move straight towards signing up companies to take advantage of what is an unique site for commercial development. There may well be an emphasis towards us undertaking a major part in the marketing of Phase 1 of the site alongside or independently from the preferred developer. The Member for Parliament has been briefed and is using his support to promote Project Taunton.

1.1.4 I will update the meeting verbally on any further developments on this matter.

1.2 Tangier, the Cultural Quarter and the Retail Area

1.2.1 Most of these are proceeding satisfactorily. The County Ground is making rapid headway as we can see for ourselves. The programme for the Museum and Castle Green is on schedule and there is progress on the future of the retail development.

1.3 Infrastructure

1.3.1 Work is likely to start on both the Third Way and the Northern Inner Distribution Road on schedule.

2. Culture

- 2.1 We are preparing our response to the draft Somerset Cultural Strategy. It fits in with our local requirements. Our emphasis is more likely to be about delivery than intentions but it is important that the overall policy is embedded in the Somerset Strategic Partnership.
- 2.2 On 21 October 2008 Gerry Sutcliffe M.P. Minister for Culture visited Taunton and met John Williams and myself. Taunton has been identified through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as a pilot scheme for "Living Places" with the prospect of further funding for development of the Brewhouse and to the widening of involvement with all sections of the community into the Arts. It is vital that we are seen to be playing our part in the cultural offer if we are to draw upon central funding for our projects in the future.

3. Into Somerset

- 3.1 I attended the Somerset in Business Conference held in Yeovil on 27 November 2008 sponsored by SWRDA and organised by the Somerset Chamber of Commerce. The theme was the progress made by the Into Somerset Board towards promoting inward investment in the County.
- 3.2 We are targeting carefully the following aspects to enhance economic activity in the county:-
- the 19 to 44 year olds
 - businesses employing from 5 to 20 people
 - the use of existing businesses to promote the Somerset Brand
 - the sectors within the industry as follows:-
 - (a) aeronautical and advanced engineering
 - (b) creative industries i.e. I.T, Communications and Media as well as the more traditional ones.
 - (c) Food and food related products
 - (d) Service Industries and niche markets.
- 3.3 This list is by no means exclusive and should not be interpreted as complete. There are significant local differences – for example West Somerset's inclination towards tourism.
- 3.4 There are still problems on the governance and structure of the way Into Somerset will operate and we have still to set targets for measuring its performance. I think it is fair to say that Taunton Deane will play a less active part in its operation and devote more time to using the Project Taunton Team to undertake our own inward investment programme in the near future especially with the difficulties of getting the Firepool site developed rapidly.

4. General Economic Climate

- 4.1 It is important that we monitor carefully the impact of the downturn in economic activity on the local economy. The Government Office of the South West (GOSW) has asked us to provide them with anecdotal evidence of this.
- 4.2 It is reflected in many ways. Our own budget preparations show that our Council Tax Base only grew at 0.6% against an anticipated 1.7% growth adding further to the budget gap we have to fill next year. It also reflects on our inability to build new homes.
- 4.3 The CAB figures show an alarming growth in the number of people in three areas which reflect the crisis:-

Number of enquiries 4 months to 31 October 2008

	2007	2008	%increase
Benefit Claims	1364	1699	24.7
Employment Issues	707	805	14.3
Debt Management	1469	1840	25.1

- 4.4 The picture is not all gloom and doom however. There is a belief that the town centre will not suffer unduly this Christmas from my attendance of the meeting of the Town Centre Company on 28 November last.
- 4.5 What we have to do is retain flexibility at all times to meet the needs of business and commerce to assist all in retaining the standard of living we have and come to expect.

Part 2

5. Employment and Skills

- 5.1 The remit of the Project Taunton Skills Group is being extended to form a Taunton Deane Employment and Skills Group, which will be a sub-group to a countywide Employment and Skills Board reporting to the Economic Leaders Group. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) chair the group.
- 5.2 Discussions are underway with Business Link to open an outreach service in The Deane House, which will also be supported by the Business Rates section and Environmental Health who will promote the new service to businesses in Taunton Deane.

6. Networks and Events

- 6.1 The Better Business Group held a discussion meeting on "point of sale promotion", and "improving the client experience", attracting 10 members.
- 6.2 The Quantock Sheep Group has held three meetings, in which:-
 - 1) Well-known national sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings came to give us a talk and farm walk looking at management of grazing systems and pasture disease control (23 members);
 - 2) The group visited Shearwell Data to find out more about electronic tagging and flock recording (soon to be arbitrarily imposed upon the industry at some considerable cost (13 members); and
 - 3) A practical workshop with a sheep vet looking at worm-burden assessments and accurate worm egg counting (15 members).
- 6.3 The annual winter series of workshops "I.T. for Farmers" has been arranged and all places sold - a "full-house" of 25 farmers in total, 11 weeks of 5 hour workshops per week, starting on 16 January 2009.

7. Local Action for Rural Communities

7.1 Blackdown Hills and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 7.1.1 The first meeting of the wider Local Action Group (LAG) has been held – an Executive Committee has also been formed and planning for 2009 and beyond is underway.

7.2 Western Somerset

- 7.2.1 The first LAG meeting has taken place.

- 7.2.2 A network meeting has been arranged for the 4 December 2008 at which all of the Somerset Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) groups can meet up to share lessons learned and discuss possibilities for collaboration.

8. Wellington

- 8.1 The Vision for Wellington has been launched with the Wellington Economic Partnership taking responsibility for delivering the Economy and Business related aspirations. The Town Council are due to adopt the plan (in the same way that Parish Councils adopt a Parish Plan) and Taunton Deane must now recognise the Vision for Wellington as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 8.2 Wellington is also making best use of its membership of the Somerset Market Towns Forum and will shortly be taking advantage of 'mentoring' sessions – a chance to learn from the towns who produced Vision documents some years ago and have now seen many of their project aspirations realised.

9. Ten Parishes

- 9.1 A 'Community Plan Review' has been completed – this looks back at the 2003 plan and evaluates progress made and the impact of the document.

10. Somerset Tourism Partnership (STP) Activities

- 10.1 Taunton Deane's Tourism Officer continues to coordinate the Somerset Tourism Partnership on behalf of all Somerset local authorities, including North Somerset.
- 10.2 Car free day-out itineraries have been produced, promoting 'car free' days out in Somerset. ('Willows, Walk and a Mump', 'Scrumptious Somerset' and 'Countryside, history and Coast' feature Taunton Deane and can be viewed at <http://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/site/things-to-do/days-out>) and a 'Cider Lovers Guide' has been produced.
- 10.3 To date over 120 pieces of national media coverage for Somerset have been generated by the Partnership, many including Taunton Deane.
- 10.4 The second annual tourism conference for Somerset Tourism businesses will be held on 26 February 2009 at Brean Leisure Park.

11. Tourist Information Centre

11.1 The team have refreshed the office to make it more 'customer friendly' and 'sales focused', and are preparing a business plan that is exploring ways to expand activities and introduce new services.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

As we near the end of 2008, I present my report herewith:-

1. Community Leisure

- 1.1 The Christmas edition of The Deano has been sent to every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane, plus libraries and sports centres. A copy has also been published on the Taunton Deane Website.

2. Play

- 2.1 Hawthorn Play Area in Holway - The Department for Children, Families and Schools has been filming this new play as an example of best practice for other Councils. The official opening was well attended and the play space is now being well used. My thanks to Councillor Alan Wedderkopp for going to this event in my absence and to all Taunton Deane Staff for the hard work they have put in.
- 2.2 Play Ranger Service - This service is now running every week from 4pm to 6pm in North Taunton at Taunton Green, in Higher Holway at the Hawthorn Play Space and in Halcon at Hamilton Gault Park. Despite the dark evenings attendances are still good with over 30 children and 8 parents attending the Holway session every week to climb trees, make dens, play games, get muddy and now light a fire. The Play Rangers are reporting a very positive response from both children and adults with parents welcoming the chance for their children to play outdoors.
- 2.3 French Weir Play Facilities - The contractor will commence work on the long awaited new play space at French Weir on 5 January 2009. Funded with developer contributions from a number of Section 106 Agreements, this scheme is actively supported by the Friends of French Weir Park. The Friends have been fundraising for other improvements to the park and undertaking small projects such as the recent bulb planting session.
- 2.4 Wellington Play Area - We are currently looking to provide a play area in Wellington under the same scheme as the Hawthorn Play Area in Taunton. The community and local schools are being consulted.
- 2.5 Skatepark - The Taunton Unparished Fund has awarded £23,000 towards the construction of a concrete wheels park at Hamilton Gault. This is the first step on the route to funding this facility with several other funding applications in the pipeline. Once sufficient funding is secured a tendering exercise for the project will be undertaken.
- 2.5 Free Swimming – As all Councillors know, this issue has been discussed

at both the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Executive. We are still looking to move this forward in the coming year.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

3.1 Health Development

3.1.1 Flexercise Leader Training took place on 12 November 2008 in Taunton. Tone Leisure is working in partnership with Age Concern Somerset's Fit as a Fiddle Initiative to deliver the training. Flexercise is fun, chair-based activity for older people that promotes mental well-being. Eleven individuals were trained and are now able to start delivering Flexercise activity sessions to older people in Taunton Deane.

3.1.2 MEND - Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!
Tone Leisure has been invited to contribute to a short film about Healthy Weight, which is being made to support the promotion of The Healthy Schools Programme in Somerset. The film, which is being made by Somerset Film and Video, on behalf of Somerset Primary Care Trust and Somerset County Council, will be shown to primary school teachers, parents and governors. The film will feature Tone Leisure's MEND Programme in action, an interview with Tone's Health Development Officer, and also a child and their family who have recently seen great success as a result of participating in the Taunton MEND programme.

3.1.3 Children and their families are now being recruited to take part in MEND when it starts again in January, at Blackbrook Pavilion in Taunton and Wellington Sports Centre, Wellington.

3.2 Fitness Development

3.2.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre has been extended with brand new equipment and a new area dedicated for weights. This new area has been created by removing the poorly utilised sauna/steam rooms and changing area. This work was completed at the end of September.

3.2.2 Wellington Sports Centre, have also extended their gym and put in new equipment, including a new weights area. A particular unique feature at Wellington is that much of the new cardiovascular equipment has individual personal viewing TV screens, so you can select your own channel and watch your favourite programme whilst you work out. Visits to the new gym facilities have been very strong in September.

3.2.3 At Blackbrook Pavilion, there is a brand new fitness gym with 75 items of equipment, a boxing fitness zone, new equipment throughout including new weights equipment area and new features such as Power Plates and Pilates type Gravity Machines.

- 3.2.4 The Power Plates and Gravity Machines are located in a dedicated private and quiet room away from the main gym. Power Plates are vibration training equipment. The Gravity Machines offer a fast and effective total body workout. This type of equipment is widely used in Pilates exercises and can benefit both the new and advanced user. The gentle controlled exercise programme is delivering great results particularly in America. Relatively new to the United Kingdom, Blackbrook Pavilion is one of the first facilities in the South West with these innovative solutions to improve fitness in a wide audience. The dedicated private studio opened on 28 November 2008.
- 3.2.5 The Blackbrook Gym also boasts a new six plasma screen TV and music entertainment system in the main gym to help those who find it difficult to motivate themselves to maintain an exercise routine (let's face it - that's most of us!)
- 3.2.6 There is also a new aerobics studio at Blackbrook, completed on 24 November 2008. The main gym development opened mid-October and in the first two weeks of opening, participation levels increased by 45%. Even with the declining usage as Christmas looms, levels of usage still continue to be up by over 30%.

3.3 Facility News

- 3.3.1 **Wellsprings Leisure Centre** - The activity programme at Wellsprings continues to grow, with Ballroom and Belly Dancing being added to the programme in November. These were launched with taster sessions and following very positive feedback have become a permanent fixture.
- 3.3.2 The series of successful events at Wellsprings Leisure Centre has continued into the Autumn with the third Tone Wedding Fair, held in September, attracting over 100 exhibitors and a good level of viewings, despite it being on one of the hottest weekends of the year.
- 3.3.3 Wellsprings is quickly developing a reputation for attracting top comedy acts. A full capacity audience saw Mock The Week's Frankie Boyle appearing at the Centre during October.
- 3.3.4 The staff and customers are now looking forward to a packed Christmas programme, which includes the performance of Mud and Slade and the legendary Big Christmas Parties, which will be catering for over 2,000 guests over 4 nights in December.
- 3.3.5 **Taunton Pool** - Due to the success of last year's Swimathon, Taunton Pool has been asked to be a 'host' site for next year's event. This will mean that the pool will receive greater recognition and publicity for the event and hopefully have more people enroll. Also, through Swimathon the Pool has been given the opportunity to put in a bid for some training funding which will go towards developing staff and improving their service.

3.3.6 **St. James Street** - Milestone at St. James Street Swimming Pool exceeding 1,500 swimmers on its "Learn to Swim" scheme. The Learn to Swim scheme is based on the Amateur Swimming Association's National Plan for Swimming. Swimmers can start on the programme from as early as a few months old right through to adult classes. The driving force behind this success has come from many months of dedicated focus from all departments within St. James Street in offering an exceptional high level of customer service. This balance has been achieved from creating a scheme of work balancing both stroke and skill development making child progression through the programme more streamlined.

3.3.7 **Blackbrook Pavilion** - Phase two of the exciting Health and Fitness development is now open. On Monday, 24 November 2008 the new GOgx Studio opened its doors to for the first time. The initial comments and feedback have been positive, here are just a few:-

- "It's bright and colourful; a real pleasure to exercise in this environment"
- "The air conditioning is fab"
- "Wow, what a music system and the head mic is loud and clear"
- "The sprung floor is great on the old joints"

3.3.8 The new Wellness Studio opens on Monday, 1 December, 2008. This will give members the opportunity of sampling the very latest in fitness equipment, ranging from Power Plates to Gravity System Machines.

3.3.9 **Wellington Sports Centre** - The newly extended and refurbished 'GO' Fitness Gym at Wellington Sports Centre has proved to be an instant success - usage of the facility has increased by an average of 15% (approx 100 more users per week).

3.3.10 Wellington Sports Centre is currently working on a funding application for the development of a permanent Young Person's Fitness/Activity facility within the building, and has successfully progressed to the second phase of this process. The Centre currently attracts approx 50 children to weekly fitness activity sessions and it is hoped that many more local children will be encouraged to participate in regular exercise by having a modern fully equipped facility run by specially trained instructors.

3.3.11 A new weekly Friday evening Youth activity session started in November and, due to external funding, the Sports Centre is able to offer this sports/fitness session free of charge for 12 months. Young people who are most at risk of being involved in crime or disorder are specifically invited to attend these sessions, and a regular 20-30 youngsters have participated each week so far.

3.3.12 On closing my report, I just want to say that on 8 December 2008, I will

be attending the official opening of the Blackbrook Pavilion GO fitness gym. May I offer my good wishes to you all for the forthcoming festive season.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Mel Mullins – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Health

1.1 General

1.1.1 Staff Training - A short Training session was held in mid-October for all Environmental Health staff. Subjects included important changes to the out of hours emergency service, fuel poverty, the implications of the new Enforcement Policy and safe lone working procedures. Staff were also updated on the situation regarding progress on the Transformation Projects and the Core Council Review.

1.1.2 Website Re-Write - Work has started on the re-write of the Environmental Health website pages. This is a major Project for which four staff members have received training to be able to migrate information to the entirely new format required.

1.2 Licensing

1.2.1 Taxi Licensing - Work is underway on a full review of the Council's arrangements and policies in relation to Taxi Licensing, which require some significant updates. Several meetings have been held with trade representatives and a consultation document has been produced and continues to be refined prior to formal proposals for change being created and then considered by Members, initially at the Licensing Committee.

2. Taunton Deane Cemeteries and Crematorium

2.1 Cremators

2.1.1 All three cremators have successfully undergone independent emissions testing. The triplicate testing demonstrated compliance with regulations by each of the three cremators.

2.1.2 A complete cremator re-bricking has been completed.

2.1.3 Tendering will begin shortly for Mercury Filtration equipment.

2.2 Book of Remembrance

2.2.1 Tenders are being sought for inscribing and digitally archiving the Book of Remembrance. The Book is available to view every day of the year with online inscriptions viewable through the service website.

2.3 Chapel Repairs

2.3.1 The Crematorium Chapel has successfully undergone roof repairs without disruption to funeral services. Scaffolding was erected over a weekend and the work accomplished outside of normal working time.

2.4 General

2.4.1 Taunton Deane Cemetery extension and Wellington Cemetery extension have yet to be progressed, as finance for these projects has not become available.

2.4.2 Two Remembrance services were held at the Crematorium during November - "A Time of Remembrance" on Saturday, 1 November 2008 and a Catholic Mass on Saturday, 8 November.

3. News on Recycling from the Somerset Waste Partnership

3.1.1. The release of the audited national recycling figures by The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has highlighted strong performances for Somerset and Taunton Deane in particular.

3.1.2 According to the figures Taunton Deane is now the highest recycling district in the County.

3.1.3 Somerset is No.1 in the list of County, Metropolitan and Unitary Disposal Authorities, and Taunton Deane has the highest district recycling rate in the County, with a figure of 49.3% of collected materials recycled. This places Taunton Deane 19th in the list of 273 collection authorities in England. Taunton Deane also performed strongly in tackling levels of residual waste (refuse that goes to landfill), placed 4th in England, with a residual waste per household figure of 375kg/hh. Previous figures from Defra have been based on recycling and residual waste per capita, rather than per household.

3.1.4 A review of the figures by our collection contractors suggests that had this year's figures been based on a per capita calculation Taunton Deane would have returned the highest recycling rate in the country.

3.1.5 Whichever way these figures are calculated it is clear that the roll out of the SORT IT recycling system has proved an unqualified success for Taunton Deane.

Councillor Mel Mullins