

COUNCIL MEETING 22 APRIL 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HORSLEY

Taunton Deane Borough Council continues to be one of the best rated councils according to the Key Performance Indicators that went before the Review Board in March. This augurs well for the Comparative Performance Assessment exercise that we are obliged to undergo now brought forward to early 2004 from the autumn.

1. ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Fact Sheet (Myth Buster) on Asylum Seekers has been produced by ourselves in conjunction with Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and Clearsprings themselves. I have asked the Director of Community Services to distribute it to all those who attended the meeting in March held in the Principal Committee Room as well as all the candidates fighting the forthcoming election. It is time the record was put straight about the implications of their arrival in Somerset in the summer. Did you know that the asylum seeker gets only 70% in cash of that which someone on full income support enjoys from this country? That is reverse discrimination and not what I stand for when I came into politics.

2. WELLSPRINGS SPORTS CENTRE

Wellsprings is subject of another report and therefore I will not comment on it in this one. Frustration is the main problem we are experiencing in light of the delays that are coming from Sport England – that is not a criticism of Sport England because we want the decision to be technically assessed, impartially considered and reasons given for it to be transparent – but a desire to know the result regardless of the outcome.

Taunton Deane Borough Council remains committed to completing the project a) as quickly as possible and b) without recourse to the tax payer again, using our adequate reserves if there would be by any chance a negative decision from Sport England.

3. VISION FOR TAUNTON

The consultants O'Rourkes have been appointed jointly by SWRDA, Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council to undertake the Master Plan and the Urban Extension Study at a cost of £300,000 of which TDBC is bearing £50,000. The first report will be available by the end of the year we hope to guide us into the best way to utilise land to meet our aspirations.

In conjunction with the Somerset Strategic Partnership, we remain on course to becoming the Regional Capital of the South West as Somerset begins to address the question of its own identity. We think that our aspirations will help a great deal towards the county getting its own "branding". This is probably a source of weakness at this stage on its part. Collaboration is very important in this matter.

4. BUDGET AND MEMBERS FACILITIES

One of the manifesto commitments of the Liberal Democrats if returned to office will be to bring wholesale improvement to the new council and particularly to members. I am already in discussion with the Chief Executive about the secondment to the Leader and members of the Executive of a full time secretary to assist with the increasing work load that has fallen on senior members with the Modernisation Agenda.

This important pledge will mean considerable change to the support that we enjoy and it will of course be available to all 54 members.

JEFFERSON HORSLEY