

**COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

At this time of year with the budget setting process nearing completion it is a very busy time and there is much to be considered when finalizing the budget before us tonight for approval. This besides the other major issues facing the Council such as Vision for Taunton, unauthorized development of Gipsy camp, the sub-regional studies for potential housing development and of course maintaining the efficient front line services for which we have been adjudged excellent in our CPA inspection.

**Budget Setting**

I commend our proposals to you as being very carefully framed to create and encourage growth in the local economy but, at the same time, addressing some of the fundamental underlying structural problems that have been evident for many years now. In previous years substantial sums have had to be drawn from our reserves to create a balanced budget and support our day to day spending. Last year we drew only a minimal amount from reserves and this year we have in fact reversed the trend and contributed in excess of £300,000 to capital for vital future development projects. This is the clearest indication possible that we honoured our pledge to spend money wisely and provide the best value possible when delivering Council services. I am also pleased to report that we have well and truly commenced the process of addressing the underlying structural problems with the budget which has to be good news for next year.

I refer to assisting the local economy and here we have exciting and imaginative plans to invest large sums in new employment space. New projects are scheduled for Wellington, Wiveliscombe and Taunton which will provide much needed employment space and provide a strong boost for the local economy in these areas.

**Gypsy and Traveller Issues**

The unauthorised encampment at North Curry remains but the Stop and Enforcement Notices as issued have prevented further development or occupation. Papers have now been lodged with the Court seeking an injunction for reinstatement of the site, a date for this hearing has yet to be set. This unauthorised encampment is one of many that have been established in similar circumstances across the country and form part of a worrying trend. Not least because there does not appear to be any consistency in how these flagrant, premeditated blatant breaches of Planning Regulations are viewed by higher authorities when appeals are mounted. In a lot of cases it appears to be direct discrimination against the settled community when Appeal Inspectors or the Courts allow development in open countryside where it is absolutely forbidden for this same settled population.

My message is loud and clear, deliberate infringement of strict planning policy and regulations is totally unacceptable and will be robustly resisted using all means at our disposal. There is only one set of planning policy and regulation which apply equally to all sections of the community, settled or itinerant. It will be a bad day for the English countryside, and those that enjoy it, if central Government allow the basic policy of fairness and equality applying to all, to be set aside and corrupted because people of itinerant life style are given precedence in terms of planning treatment.

In this latter respect I would draw all Members attention to a consultation document issued by ODPM, 28 December 2004, entitled Gypsy and Traveller Planning Guide.

The document, if implemented is iniquitous in my view, it has to be complete discrimination against the settled community and virtually no rural land will be safe. There are no checks and balances against applications on virtually any land and it completely overturns the fundamentals of Planning Regulations as we have known them for years, with a presumption against development in the open countryside. In my view as presently framed, it is not guidance, it is direction. We will have to provide sites, the numbers to be dictated by the Regional Assembly, but even if sites are vacant and Gypsies or Travellers choose to buy land in open countryside we are more or less directed to grant planning consent. Within the document there is no reference to existing provision of sites being allowed as a means of defending applications and Gypsies and Travellers no longer have different definitions in respect of provision. How therefore, can an Authority resist an application from anybody that has just bought an old bus or similar and call themselves a "traveller". In addition the new policy will direct that the new rules will apply to anybody applying, they need not show any local connection or need. The complete document can be accessed via the ODPM web site;

[www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_planning/documents/page/odpm\\_plan\\_033598.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_planning/documents/page/odpm_plan_033598.pdf).

I urge all Members to read it and to make formal comment, in my view the implementation of this document must be robustly resisted.

### **Taunton Sub-Regional Study**

Much heat and light has been expressed recently on this subject with our administration being vilified as the main proponents and partners in crime recommending wholesale destruction of large swathes of our lovely countryside.

This could not be further from the truth, and I assume can only be linked with happenings that are likely next May! For the record I set out the truth of the matter;

- Taunton was identified as a Principal Urban Area in 2001 when the borough council was under Liberal Democrat control, in accepting this, housing growth was an essential part.
- Developing the Vision for Taunton was an all-party initiative promoted by the previous ruling group and supported by all other parties.

- The current proposals for housing growth were commissioned by the South West Regional Assembly and have been developed on their behalf by Somerset County Council
- The Regional Assembly, on which Taunton Deane has one vote out of a total of 117, will make the decision on the numbers of houses that Taunton must accommodate.
- Out of these 117 there are 31 Conservatives, 28 LibDems & 13 Labour. The rest are independents or unelected appointees. Hardly a controlling majority.

As I clearly stated at the recent meeting to explain these proposals to Parish Council representatives at a joint meeting with Somerset County Council, the people of Taunton Deane have generally accepted growth as part of our overall economic redevelopment. This does not, however, mean acceptance of an explosion in housing numbers to meet the requirements of the larger developments being tested. The message also has to be clearly articulated that we cannot endure housing growth without the necessary infrastructure to fully support it.

For the avoidance of doubt, this Council does not have a formal voice in these proceedings, yes we are at the table to monitor but we have no power of veto over what has been laid down for consideration by the Regional Assembly. The formal consideration of potential size and areas of development is being carried out by Somerset County Council on behalf of the Regional Assembly which is an unelected, undemocratic and unaccountable body to the electorate of the South West.

The instruction from central Government is quite clear in this respect, we will be advised of the housing numbers we will have to accommodate and have no formal input into the determination of those numbers. The actual numbers will be determined by the Regional Assembly and subject to agreement by the Secretary of State.

### **Vision For Taunton**

It is heartening to note that since our December meeting positive news has been announced about the commencement of development at the East Goods Yard, Firepool. This has to be great news as after all the talking and consultation we are about to see action bringing the hard work of many, one step further towards reality. Not only will this see the commencement of regeneration works for a derelict and underutilized town centre site, but it will bring economic development to an area listed as suffering the worst social deprivation in the whole of Somerset. The development will include new housing, commercial and business units and substantial investment in the waterfront with provision of leisure and recreation facilities.

Work will also start on the new access road to the development off Station Road, later this year, an important prerequisite for this development.

Obviously key to continuing the redevelopment of this area is the relocation of the Agricultural Livestock Market from its present site. This will unlock a very important and

large site for redevelopment which will also be very prominent visually, and represent a major step forward in our endeavours to regenerate Taunton. Key to freeing up the site will be the final outcome of the planning application for relocation of the Livestock Market to the proposed site at Chelston. This application should be brought forward for determination by the Planning Committee within the next few months.

I was fortunate to be included on a fact finding visit to Birmingham recently and how they had dealt with regeneration of their city following a disastrous loss of manufacturing jobs mainly in the car industry during the early eighties. I have to acknowledge that what I saw was a marvel to behold, regenerated waterways (Birmingham has circa 30 miles of inland canals) forming the focal point for regeneration with new, exciting buildings co-existing with wonderful old architecturally important refurbished buildings. Means of accommodating the car had been devised but ensuring it did not take precedence over all else, many streets were returned to pedestrian prominence, walking through the centre was important and interesting, particularly direct pedestrian access to the main railway station. I believe all that attended could not fail to be impressed and my thanks to the SWRDA for arranging this and the time given by representatives of Birmingham City Council to explain the many trials and tribulations experienced to date and indeed, ongoing, as the programme is not yet complete.

One issue that has always privately concerned me is our designers reference to yet more bars, cafes and restaurants along the riverside developments proposed for Taunton. I am now completely reassured following my visit to Birmingham that such establishments are both wanted and viable. Every corner I turned during my visit provided yet another refreshment house of varying types and size which appeared well patronized and successful. This brought life and vitality to the streets, a vital ingredient for any successful development.

### **Economic Development**

I mentioned above the Council's intention to promote economical employment space and we have plans for new developments of industrial work space at Wellington, Wiveliscombe and Taunton totalling £650,000. This will assist greatly in meeting an unmet demand for such space on easy in, easy out lease terms. We are also proposing investment in further tennis facilities of £90,000 that will lever in much greater amounts from our partners in order to create a "tennis centre of excellence" which will place Taunton on the map as a tennis centre.

We also have £40,000 set aside as a contribution towards the Neroche Project which if successful, will lever in around £2m of grant aid to provide improved access facilities particularly for the disabled, to large areas of the Neroche Forest.

The new Cornhill working party as established by Cllr Bowrah in conjunction with Wellington Town Council is working well and already making a difference, improvements have been made and I am delighted to hear that the owner of the

dilapidated properties is now seriously addressing redevelopment of the these sites. According to local reports plans are now in the course of preparation and will be issued for consideration shortly. I do hope these proposals will be satisfactory and acceptable as progress towards total regeneration of the area is urgently needed.

Could I conclude by sincerely thanking all staff for the huge commitment they give to ensuring we operate as an efficient and excellent Council. I do appreciate the concerns for individuals when we are forced to review all services and how we deliver them. This in no way detracts from the appreciation of your efforts but is a necessity of life if we are to maintain our excellent position with costs rising and income shrinking. No organisation, private or public, can sustain such debilitating pressures unless they rise to the challenge and meet it with efficiency savings in order to remain viable.

**Councillor John Williams**  
**Leader of the Council**

## **COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP** **PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION**

#### **Bus Users Surgery**

Arrangements have now been made for a Bus Users Surgery to take place on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2005 from 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. ...The event will take place in the town centre ( by the Market House ). Bus Users UK will provide a specially converted 12 metre single decker Volvo Bus as the focus for the event.

In attendance there will be representatives of First Bus ( hopefully other operators ), officers from Somerset County and Taunton Deane B.C. and Bus Users UK.

Arrangements will be made to publicise this event nearer the time.

#### **Linking The Local Development Framework to the Community Strategy**

The Government requires that the Local Development Framework should act as the delivery mechanism for the spatial elements of the Community Strategy.

For this to occur, it is essential that effective linkages are forged between the LDF and the Community Strategy. An iterative process is required, whereby the community identifies its needs and aspirations, and these are then reflected in the LDF, with appropriate policy mechanisms to assist delivery.

The issue of how to link the two processes has been the subject to investigation over the course of the past four months. The matter has been considered by the Strategic Planning Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel and the Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership..The following actions have been agreed :-

The terms of reference for the existing TDBC Community Planning Working

Group be expanded to include consideration of LDF items.This will enable issues

to be discussed at an early stage, and linkages developed with appropriate community planning exercises and other relevant strategies (e.g. housing)

An LSP sub group be created, entitled the LSP Spatial Planning Working Group

(SPWG). The core membership of this group will consist of representation from the

LSP Core Group, each of the area based partnerships, the Community Council,

TDBC Community Project Officer and Forward Plan Unit, The group will Consider all LDF material (and other “spatial” proposals e.g. Vision related Items) and will be a forum for creating effective linkages and identifying enhanced techniques for community consultation.

The first meeting of the Spatial Planning Working Group will take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2005. The group will consider its terms of reference, the Local Development Scheme ( the timetable for LDF production ) and proposals for a statement of Community Involvement.

It is envisaged that the group will meet every two to three months, and will report direct to the LSP. The Borough Council, as Local Planning Authority will have regard to the views when considering the preparation of LDF documents.

**Application for the demolition of some existing buildings, repair, refurbishment, and conversion of retained existing buildings into 25 self-contained dwellings, restoration of the Parkland and erection of 45 dwellings, Sandhill Park, Bishops Lydeard.**

The First Secretary of State has directed under his powers in section 77 of the 1990 Act, that the above application shall be referred to him instead of being dealt with by the Council. As a result of the “Call In” an inquiry will be held and the First Secretary of State has indicated the matters he particularly wishes to be informed about for the purposes of his consideration of the applications.

### **Planning Delivery Grant**

We have received an ODPM consultation document identifying the proposed criteria for the 2005/6 grant and we are broadly happy to accept the proposed criteria. Assuming that our calculations are reasonably accurate and the criteria for the award are not changed it is likely that we shall receive a substantial amount but not quite as much as the £533000 received last year.

### **THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (RESIDENTIAL DENSITY) (LONDON, SOUTH EAST ENGLAND, SOUTH WEST ENGLAND, EAST OF ENGLAND AND NORTHAMPTONSHIRE) DIRECTION 2005**

The Government’s publication of “Sustainable Communities: Homes for All” on 24 January 2005 announced the extension of the Density Direction to include all the areas quoted above and the Direction will come into force on 28 February 2005.

Any planning application, received on or after 28<sup>th</sup> February, which comprises or includes the provision of houses or flats on sites of 1 hectare or more and where the residential density is either not provided in the application or will be less than 30 dwellings per hectare, must be referred to the First Secretary of State if the local planning authority does not propose to refuse the application.

The area of land used in the calculations includes the area of land occupied by the houses or flats, the access roads within the site, private garden space, car parking areas, incidental open space and landscaping, and children's play areas which are directly associated with the use and enjoyment of those houses or flats.

For the avoidance of doubt, in calculating the areas, land used in providing major distributor roads, primary schools, open spaces serving a wider area and significant landscape buffer strips are not included.

## **THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK : THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

The Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Review Panel will have considered this report at its meeting on 15 February 2005 and I hope that all members will take note of its contents. Consultations have taken place with GOSW and it will also be taken to the Local Strategic Planning Working Group for consideration of its content and relationship with the Community Strategy initiatives.

The document may therefore require amendment before consideration by the Executive in March 2005.

The Act requires that the LDS be submitted to the Secretary of State within six months of commencement of the Act (i.e. by 28 March 2005).-

It is important that that we meet the target date for the production of the LDS as the Planning Delivery Grant will include an amount for plan-making in relation to producing Local Development Schemes.

## **TAUNTON SUB-AREA CONSULTATION**

A special meeting of the Strategic Planning, Transportation and Economic Development Panel has been arranged to take place on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2005 at St Andrews Hall, Taunton commencing at 7.0 p.m. in order that members can consider a report on the consultation and have the opportunity to put forward their views and enter into the debate

## **THE LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN**

The Somerset County Council has recommended that two major relief roads in Taunton should be included in its bids for Government funding.

The Northern Inner Relief Road and the "Third Way" are considered to be the most likely schemes in Somerset to attract financial backing from government.

**Councillor Cliff Bishop**



## **COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**

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

#### **PARKS**

##### **Victoria Park Play Area and MUGA**

Expressions of interest are being sought from contractors to design and build two play areas and one multi-use games area in Victoria Park - ready for the summer. £100K of housing development money brings the first phase of the ten year Development Plan to fruition.

##### **Green Flag Applications 2005**

The Parks Service is busy preparing reapplications for Vivary and Wellington Park for Green Flag, a national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. A management plan is currently underway for Victoria Park to enable it to be put forward for the award for the first time this year. Judging will take place over the summer on all three sites.

##### **Park Summer Events Programme**

The Friends of Wellington Park, Friends of Vivary Park and Victoria Park Action Group are working up their summer programmes in their respective parks for the summer to attract more visitors and provide events for their members. Victoria Park Action Group are working with Barnardo's, the local school, and Somerset County Council to encourage young people to become proficient cyclists.

#### **ARTS**

##### **West Deane Way mobile stage and projection equipment**

We are working with Kingsmead, Adult Learning and Leisure, and other local groups on encouraging young people to access this equipment through spring and summer activities, such as a community radio station and film making, that will lead into the 10 Parishes Festival.

Taunton Deane Borough Council owns mobile stage, sound and projection equipment available for hire by community groups. Administered by the caretaker, Dave Evans, at Kingsmead School, the current subscription rate of £50 covers training and brings unlimited usage in a promotional offer to community groups. The equipment includes stage lights, a projector and a screen, microphones and sound system

##### **Leisure and Disability projects**

Following the leisure and disability conference in 2003, three projects supported by the council have come to fruition. Adults with learning difficulties at Six Acres have had regular music and dance sessions over the past year with two local artists. These have led to performances at The Tacchi Morris and Bridgwater Arts Centre. An exhibition at Taunton Library this January resulted from an artist working with patients who suffered from genetic disorder. On the wards, a musician cheered up the children and taught the long stay inmates to play some music.

The Local Authority Arts Council Partnership supports a part time disability arts co-ordinator for 2 years. Penny Goater has been fundraising for these and other disability projects to continue.

### **‘Breaking the Sound Barrier’**

This is a youth music project run by Take Art! The council’s and ArtLife’s contributions of £5,000 has levered in £40,000 from Youth Music and £10,000 from Somerset County Council, bringing world musicians to schools and youth groups in Wellington and West Deane. They are also supporting young people in acoustic ensembles as well as burgeoning bands through mentoring, music writing, recording and gigs.

### **Rural Renaissance**

A Rural Renaissance bid has been made for a Creative Industries Resource Centre and South West Information Technology Creative Hub in the Cultural Quarter of Taunton. A decision is expected by the end of February. This is one element of the proposed Creative Industries Strategy going to the Review Board on 24 February.

## **TONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES**

### **Mini Golf Plans**

An 18 hole Mini Golf Course is to be built in Vivary Park, alongside the current Vivary Park Golf Course. The project is being funded by Tone Leisure and will be located the grass putting area. The Mini Golf will utilize a recognised vandal resistant course, which is of the highest quality and eligible for national Mini Golf tournaments.

### **Lottery Funding Application**

Tone Leisure have submitted a Lottery application for £75,000 to develop the currently under-utilized bar and balcony areas at Blackbrook Pavilion into a “Young Persons’ Activity Zone” incorporating specialist fitness equipment designed specially for 6 to 16 year olds. The Lottery application focuses on the project aims of crime and disorder reduction and childhood obesity.

Applications for funding the project have also been submitted to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Somerset Partnership Fund. Tone Leisure will also contribute £65,000 worth of staffing costs into the three-year funding programme.

### **Vibe Sport Consultation**

The Vibe Sport project continues to grow in popularity. There are now 113 young people registered with Vibe and sessions are regularly attracting 40+ per week.

Consultation with young people is taking place on Friday, 18th February at Wellsprings Leisure Centre from 5 pm to 7 pm. The consultation is aimed at 13-19 year olds and those who have been involved in summer holiday Connexions programmes, Vibe Sport sessions on Friday nights and those living in North Taunton. There will be activity sessions run by Tone Leisure and various topics for consultation co-ordinated by Somerset County Youth Service and Connexions.

### **Inclusive Holiday Activities**

After one full year's funding via "Better Play", Tone Leisure is seeking future funding to continue provision of one-to-one support workers to deliver play programmes for children with individual needs. In the last 12 months over 150 children have benefited from places on these holiday activity sessions. Better Play funding finishes at the end of March.

### **Play Association**

Alison Cottey is currently planning an Environmental Play Day at Huish Woods for all playworkers in Taunton Deane, to be held on Saturday, 19th March.

### **St. James Street Baths Balcony**

After a period of closure, remedial works have been carried out to the balcony at St. James Street Baths which has now re-opened in time for the Soroptimist Swimathon on Saturday, 5th February.

### **Swimskool Awards**

A number of Tone Leisure Swimskool swimmers have completed the British Olympic Award challenge, which covers ten swimming skills including water polo, diving and synchronised swimming. Jonathan Rawlings who competes in the British Group Triathlon team presented the swimmers with their awards.

### **Trampolining**

Demand for trampolining courses continues to grow with extra courses such as toddler bounce classes being run at Wellsprings and Wellington. To cope with the demand six staff have recently qualified as Trampoline Coaches.

### **Investors in People Re-accreditation**

Tone Leisure was re-assessed in October 2004 and continues to maintain the Investors in People Standard.

### **SPAG Re-recognition**

Wellington Sports Centre has successfully maintained its GP Referral recognition status, following a thorough assessment of staffing and procedures.

### **Forthcoming Events**

Events coming up include:

- Premier League Darts on Thursday, 17th February (televised live on Sky Sports).
- The 70s Story - The Brotherhood of Man on Saturday, 26th February.
- County and regional trampoline and gymnastics competitions.
- National Association of Majorettes competition.

## **NETWORKING**

I attended an Arts Council get-together at Yeovil Football Club to receive an update on the current research on the creative industries and their economic impact.

I travelled with fellow councillors and officers from the Deane and county to Birmingham to learn and see on the ground how the City has gone about regeneration. We walked miles through the centre without sight of a car to be told that the theme was Learning, technology and heritage NOT shopping.

I attended the quarterly meeting of the Quantock JAC and subsequently a most stimulating workshop on their service plan.

At the Cultural Quarter Consortium we discussed the preliminary draft of the report prepared by Max Hebditch and others on the elements of the Cultural Quarter that stakeholders and other interested parties want to see implemented through the Vision for Taunton. This draft report subsequently received in principle backing at the meeting of the Somerset Cultural Forum Executive.

With our Arts Officer Caroline Corfe I was shown round the Cothelstone Barns complex which is shortly to be the subject of a planning application for art gallery, restaurant, delicatessen and craft workshops. It offers a most interesting concept in farm diversification in a unique venue.

I also attended the workshop on the Taunton Deane Homelessness Strategy.

**Councillor Dilly Bradley**

## **COUNCIL MEETING 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY 2005**

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

#### **Taunton Town Centre Partnership**

In November a decision was taken, for the Partnership to change its legal status, and to become a Company limited by Guarantee. There will be a Board of Directors and an Advisory Board. Planning will need to take place in the near future of how this new company will work, whether through joint membership schemes or joint projects (e.g. BIDS), for the greater benefit of Taunton and Taunton businesses.

Following the success of last year's May Fair, another is being planned for May 14<sup>th</sup> in Vivary Park. Once again, it will be in conjunction with the Carnival Committee.

#### **Lyons Review**

Again, work has continued in conjunction with the Government, to supply information to those Departments who are expressing an interest in re-location. A recent directive from the ODPM indicates that for those Departments who are slightly reticent in their moves towards relocation, they would be directed to the areas of highest 20% deprivation. This assists our case, as Firepool sadly qualifies, but has the benefit of a wonderful location in Taunton!

#### **Business Survey**

Much of the information from the survey of local businesses has now been analysed. The survey was undertaken to assess the anticipated land and premises requirements for the next five years. The survey results give a clear indication of the anticipated business needs over the next five years. These results support investment decisions that we are taking in Blackdown Business Park, Frobisher Way and other areas where we aim to secure and bring forward employment land.

#### **Incubation Centre**

There is a clear need for small business units of approx 500 sq ft, with good support and services, to assist those who wish to take the first step on the ladder of running their own business. To that end we are looking at possible areas in close proximity to the Town centre.

#### **Wellington and Area Community Planning Process**

Following a successful consultation programme, the Wellington and Area Steering Group have been working together to collate and analyse the information and comments from the involvement of local people across the communities of Wellington and adjoining areas. This process has not only had input from the Council but also Partner Organisations to assist us in how we can best work together to address the priority issues identified. The response has been excellent and very supportive.

The Steering Group has developed a Vision for the area - as follows:

- To support people to play a full part in Community life and support the vibrancy of communities
- To attract a diverse range of new businesses through improved integrated transport links whilst supporting existing businesses and enterprises
- To provide services and facilities for all to enjoy when in the area
- To protect and enhance the built and natural environment.

The priorities for the area have been organised around key themes which have added community life to our own ETCHED, so the priorities mirror the work contained within our own community strategy.

### **Supporting Area Partnerships**

The LSP allocated £15,500 to support three active community planning areas, £5000 has been awarded to each area partnership. The Blackdown Hills have allocated funding towards the key areas of strategy that need support:

- A youth challenge encouraging the involvement of young people
- Identifying young people's aspirations
- Community involvement, local distinctiveness
- Supporting the voluntary sector and network.

### **Sure Start Partnership**

The Sure Start Partnership has started work on building the long-awaited children's/family centre in North Taunton. This is a £1million project and it is hoping to be open to serve families across the area by end of September.

### **Taunton East Development Trust**

This is run by the Community for the Community and has worked hard to provide advice and information at the Link Centre and beyond. External funding has been applied for from the Eismee Fairbairn Trust to enable this excellent work to continue and to secure the services of their development officer. The outcome should be known in May of this year.

### **Tourism**

The new 'Heart of Somerset 2005' brochure has been launched with over 18000 copies sent out to date, a much higher figure than this time last year and the hits on our web page are up also.

The advertising in Christmas TV magazines and other publications appear to have been very successful. Our Tourism Officer, in conjunction with South West Tourism, has been assisting in overseas marketing, the main object being to try and attract more people from the USA to visit Somerset, via Bristol Airport.

The TIC is in the process of being taken completely under the wing of Taunton Deane, as the County funding has ceased. The TIC has had its most successful year to date.

**Councillor Norman Cavill**

## **COUNCIL MEETING – 22 February 2005**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING**

##### Health and Safety Team

#### **1. Childrens Play Equipment**

A press release covering a health and safety project undertaken last year was put out on 26 January 2005 and received good coverage in the Wellington Weekly.

The press release detailed a series of inspections undertaken in the latter half of last year looking at children's play equipment (swings, slides, climbing frames etc) in commercial premises such as pub beer gardens and motorway services. Eighteen visits were carried out in total.

Inspectors found that most of the play areas were well located and secure and that equipment was set out in such a way as to minimise the risk of accidents. Equipment had generally been manufactured and installed by reputable companies to the relevant standards.

In many cases, play equipment had not received the recommended daily and 3 monthly checks by the business owner or manager to ensure that the equipment and play area remained safe.

#### **2. Special projects**

The health and safety team are currently carrying out inspections at a number of retail premises in the Taunton and Wellington area focusing on known high risk areas including workplace transport, slips and trips and stock movement.

A similar initiative was successfully carried out approximately two years ago resulting in significant improvements in health and safety standards in the targeted premises.

##### **Environmental Protection Team**

#### **1. Noise Abatement**

- a) A Council tenant who persistently played loud music late at night, in defiance of a Noise Abatement Notice, was successfully prosecuted on five counts.

He was fined £50, ordered to pay costs, to fit a noise limiter to his stereo system and work with neighbours to agree times that he could play amplified music, without causing nuisance.

Despite the disappointingly low level of the fine, the other measures ordered by the Court should prove effective in preventing further problems.

b) A Noise Abatement Notice has been served on the owner of a dog whose constant barking resulted in a statutory nuisance to neighbours. Since the Notice was served, no breaches have been reported, so it is hoped that our formal intervention has solved the problem.

**2. Odour Nuisance** An Abatement Notice has been served on the operator of a fish and chip shop for odours resulting from frying. This has been a long-standing investigation in which the gathering of evidence called for a number of ‘out of hours’ visits to complainants’ premises.

### **Food Safety Team**

**1. Inspection Programme** The Team is on target to achieve 100% of our inspections this year.

**2. New Code of Practice** A new CoP (which is mandatory) from the Food Standards Agency has significant implications for the inspection programme, such as the requirement to do inspections within 28 days of the due date (not earlier or later). Also under the new CoP we no longer need to inspect the lowest risk premises, but do need to devise an alternative to inspections strategy. The CoP also requires an even more stringent inspection regime for the highest risk premises, which includes additional visits.

**3. Food Safety Education** The “Foodo” game, an educational tool based around a food poisoning outbreak and funded by a £10,000 grant from the FSA, has suffered from a production delay but our commercial partner assures us it will be ready to distribute to schools by the end of March this year.

### **Licensing Unit**

**1. Licensing Policy** The Statement of Licensing Policy was adopted at the Full Council meeting in December 2004.

**2. First Appointed Day** From the 7<sup>th</sup> of February the Licensing Authority can start receiving applications in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003; any licences issued will not come into effect until November 2005.

The Licensing Unit has liaised extensively with other departments both within and external to the Council to ensure the smooth transition of the Licensing Act.

**3. Website Access** Taunton Deane Borough Council’s website now has a page dedicated to Licensing Act 2003 and provides guidance to licensees and to others

persons who might wish to object to an application for a premises licence.

## **WASTE SERVICES**

### **1. Waste collection services**

It is now possible to proceed with the planning of the new waste collection services following unavoidable delays due to the capacity of the contractors involved in delivering the services in other parts of the County. While these delays are regrettable it is more important to get the services right first time than to rush in and put the contractors and support services under strain

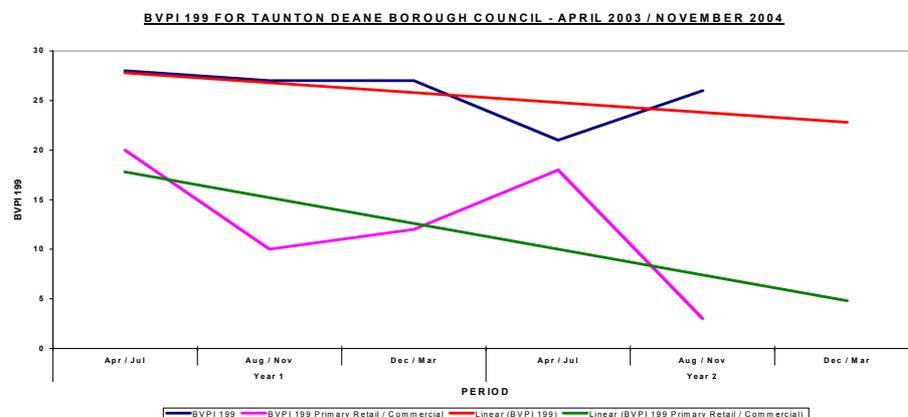
We are fortunate to have the services of Dave Mansell to assist the Waste Services Unit in planning and implementing the new services. David has many years experience in kerbside recycling and although being employed by SCC he is currently sharing his expertise with both SSDC and TDBC through secondments.

The latest plan is to introduce households to the new services through a rolling programme commencing in May. Those households affected will receive direct communication informing them of the changes. The areas will be selected on a strictly operational basis. Ward Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors will all be fully involved in the public information program.

### **2. Street Cleansing**

The latest monitoring for BVPI 199 shows a continuing trend of improvement in the cleansing index for the Borough although the results vary over different land use areas. The monitoring in primary retail and commercial areas shows a steep decline that indicates the success of the town centre cleansing arrangements in Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe.

The graph below shows the overall index as well as the primary retail areas trends:



The Taunton “Food on the Go” pilot has achieved national recognition by being published as a case study in the government’s Code of Practice on fast food litter. The Waste Services Manager in partnership with the Town Centre

Manager and Colin Barrell of McDonalds jointly presented details of the pilot scheme to a conference hosted by DEFRA and ENCAMS earlier in the month.

## **TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM**

1. Crematorium Organ. Work to repair and renovate the crematorium organ has begun. The crematorium is very fortunate to have such a quality instrument in it's chapel. Having been installed when the building was built in 1963 this is it's first major renovation, remarkable considering that it has been used also daily over such a long period of time.
2. Cremator Brickwork This year one cremator has been completely re-bricked and the other two have had relatively minor repairs, a complete re-brick of these is anticipated during 2005/06.
3. Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting. Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. This lighting will be installed during 2005/06 and paid for by income generated by the crematorium.
4. DEFRA has issued additional guidance to PG5/2(04) on the 10<sup>th</sup> January which has significant implications for crematoria.

Cremation authorities now have until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005 to consider options for achieving a 50% reduction in the emissions of mercury and to inform their relevant local authority regulator.

The options available include the following that have been confirmed by DEFRA:-

Operators may either upgrade their existing crematoria or trade or a combination of both to achieve 50% reduction of mercury emissions.

A single crematorium can abate 50% of its cremations and not trade.

Local authorities with 2 or more crematoria can trade internally provided they can provide evidence of achieving 50% reduction in mercury emissions.

Two or more operators could form their own trading arrangement provided that they can provide evidence of achieving 50% reduction in mercury emissions.

Clause 5 of the additional guidance states:-

“Operators of all crematoria should notify their relevant local authority regulator by no later than 31 December 2005 whether they will opt for fitting abatement, or whether they will be sharing cost of abatement fitted by other crematoria, or whether they will choose a combination of these two approaches”.

The deadline for this upgrading to be completed is 31 December 2012.

5. Crematorium Waiting Room Extension & Office Refurbishment. Work is planned to begin during April on this listed building, with great care being taken to cause as little disruption as possible to the public.
6. Wellington Cemetery Extension. For several years now both the estates and planning sections of Taunton Deane have been looking for suitable land at Wellington to use as future burial ground. As yet no land has been identified. The proposal put forward to use part of the existing car park for burial is advantageous because it continues to provide burial space where the deceased can be laid to rest alongside relatives previously buried. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken during 2006/07.
7. Taunton Deane Cemetery Extension The Council owns land at the crematorium which will be used for future burial. This land requires developing for the service. An entrance road, paths, drainage, planting etc have to be in place before its use can commence. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken during 2006/07.

**Councillor Mark Edwards**

**COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

This report will focus on three areas within the Housing Portfolio. The first is to provide an update on Housing Stock Options and the second will be to make members aware of the current situation in respect to the Wessex Reinvestment Trust. I will also comment on the Home Improvement agency that we are working on in conjunction with South Somerset District Council.

**Housing Stock Options**

Further to the update in December, the following provides Members with an update on the past three months work and proposed activity for the next quarter.

Past three months:

- On the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2004, the Head of Housing received a letter from the Director of Local Government, Housing and Planning for the Government Office South West (GOSW), advising that Taunton Deane's Stock Option Appraisal had been "Signed Off." GOSW complimented this Authority on the work undertaken.
- On the 12<sup>th</sup> January the Executive considered the final report of DOME – the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) on the preferred choice of landlord should tenants vote in favour of a stock transfer. Those tenants who have expressed an interest have chosen a Stand Alone – Free Standing Registered Social Landlord (RSL). This was also the view of those partners, staff and Members who had returned a questionnaire.
- On the same evening, the Executive considered a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) on the financial differences between a Stand Alone option or merging with an existing Group. The report concluded that there were no significant financial benefits to be gained from being part of an existing group over a Stand Alone RSL. PWC also provided an update on the Prudential Code concluding that this financial mechanism would not enable the Authority to choose the option of Retention over Stock Transfer.
- The Executive also considered the views of the Tenants Forum and the Housing Review Panel, who had discussed the same information on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December 2004 respectively and who had recommended that a Stand Alone type of Transfer be the preferred option should a stock transfer take place. The Executive also came to the same conclusion and requested Officers, led by the Head of Housing to formally apply to the Office Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme.
- On the 28<sup>th</sup> January a formal application was made to the ODPM to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme.

- During January, discussions took place amongst members of the Corporate Management Team concerning the next phase of work required up to and including the ballot of tenants in 2006. This will involve forming a dedicated project team to manage this process.

Next three months:

- It is intended to formalise the exact nature and composition of the dedicated project team by the end of March, ready to progress to the next phase from April of this year. Firstly, this team will visit other Authorities and Housing Associations to look at how others have managed such a major piece of work and then formalise tenders to recruit:
  - i) A Specialist Help – a role PWC have undertaken to date
  - ii) Assisting tenants to appoint an ITA – a role DOME have undertaken to date. For clarity, the appointment of the ITA will be driven by tenants and the appointment made by tenants
  - iii) Legal Advisors
  - iv) Public Relations Advisors
- In May of this year, Authorities who have applied to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme will be notified whether or not the application has been successful. Members will naturally be kept advised

### **Wessex Reinvestment Trust (WRT)**

The Government has stated that the responsibility for home maintenance lies principally with individual homeowners. Through the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 the government is encouraging Council's to act in partnership to develop "Community Development Financial Institutions" with the intention that Councils move away from giving grants, to enabling elderly, disabled and low income residents obtain low interest and equity release loans to fund essential repairs to their homes.

The Private Sector Survey carried out in 2002 indicated that a sum of over £90m would be required to carry out all necessary repairs to privately owned properties in Taunton Deane. In addition, the Decent Homes Standard will be applicable to the homes of vulnerable owner-occupiers and the requirement to modernise kitchens and bathrooms and increase the thermal comfort (heating and insulation) will increase this figure significantly. The Council would be unable to fund this from existing budgets even if expenditure was spread over many years. This means that the Council must attract additional private funding to address this obligation.

The WRT is a pioneering innovation a "not for profit" Trust that was established in 2002 to address disadvantage amongst homeowners and businesses in the South West. One of the main objectives of the WRT is to provide "low cost" loans to assist homeowners on low income to carry out essential repairs and maintenance works to their property. The WRT is working with a Consortium of 10 Local Authorities in the South West who have been successful in bidding for £2.6M from the South West Housing Body to establish a loans fund. A total of £1.3 million will be transferred to the WRT in 2004/05 and a similar amount will be transferred in the next financial year. The

intention is to match fund this sum with a similar amount of commercial funding but this is being delayed due to "State Aid " issues that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working hard to resolve with a European Union exemption submission.

TDBC is not only an active participant it is also one of the key architects of the scheme that initially started life 18 months ago when the Council bid on behalf of the 10 Councils for the £2.6M which has enabled the low cost loan scheme to be implemented.

One of the key aspects of the scheme is that the Council will subsidise 50% of the interest of each loan making it affordable to low income applicants. This interest subsidy is significantly less in financial terms than would be the case if a grant had been given so the Council should be able to assist more home owners with essential repairs and modernisation of their homes.

Because there are 10 Authorities involved in the scheme, initial decisions and legal checks etc had to be undertaken by all authorities with the Councils signing both a Consortium Agreement (between the local authority partners) and a Funding Agreement between the local authority Consortium partners and the Wessex Reinvestment Trust.

The 10 Authorities in the scheme are:

Bath & North East Somerset Council  
Mendip District Council  
North Somerset District Council  
Sedgemoor District Council  
South Glos. District Council  
South Somerset District Council  
City Council of Bristol  
West Dorset District Council  
West Somerset District Council  
Taunton Deane District Council

All 10 members have now obtained full democratic approval for the loans scheme and the bulk of the 2004/05 allocation of monies have been passed over to WRT. (TDBC contribution being £70k, Bristol's contribution is £440k).

A full meeting of the consortium met at Deane House at the end of January during which a number of final technical issues were resolved and a training schedule for officers agreed. Training is planned for February and March with the intention of going live with the loans scheme in April 2005.

### **The Home Aid Partnership**

This is a new initiative with Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council working together to develop "The Home Aid Partnership" a Home Improvement Agency providing services to vulnerable residents in both Council areas.

The purpose of this service (sometimes referred to as “Care and Repair”) is to provide an affordable repair, maintenance and adaptation service for vulnerable client groups and these include:

- Vulnerable homeowners/private tenants over the age of 60 years.
- Disabled homeowners/private tenants.
- Low income homeowners/private tenants.

Other function of the HIA will include:

- To plan future development of the HomeAid service in line with national developments and local priorities.
- To seek and take advantage of future funding opportunities to develop additional services such as a “Handyman Service” and to ensure that HomeAid is a sustainable organisation with appropriate funding and staffing levels.
- To promote the service amongst service users, and statutory/voluntary organisations in an appropriate manner.

The HIA is currently managed by a steering group of 12, comprising Officers from both Councils, stakeholder agencies and elected members. The Somerset Social Services Assistant Area Manager chairs the steering group which has met several times since it was established in September 2004.

The management of this scheme is initially being funded from a combination of Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funding, Supporting People funding and match funding from both South Somerset District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council. The Councils are providing seconded staff, office accommodation and many of the support services (legal, financial and IT etc) for the new agency

It is a requirement of the Central Government and Supporting People funding that the Councils sign a Contract with a detailed supporting service specification, the Devon Contract model is being adopted and amended. The intention is to have an interim contract for one year from April 2005 then to allow all of the Somerset agencies to come into line (3 in Somerset ) with a 3 year contract following which there will probably be a move to one independent HIA for Somerset with local delivery points in each District.

The new Home Aid partnership was established in September 2004 with the agency scheduled to become fully operational in April 2005 once the additional staff have been recruited.

**Councillor Greg Garner**

**COUNCIL MEETING – 22 FEBRUARY 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL - RESOURCES**

**MEMBERS SERVICES**

**Councillor websites**

Members know that as part of the e-Government programme we are now able to offer Councillors the facility to have their own pages on the TDBC web site. The take up from Councillors has so far been very slow. I would encourage members to take advantage of this very effective method of communicating with local citizens.

**Electronic agendas**

Much work has been undertaken on providing electronic agendas and reports. Councillors can now receive agendas in whichever format they have requested. Hard copies will, of course, continue to be provided for members attending a particular meeting. This method of circulating information has many advantages. It is quicker and reduces considerably the amount of paper used, the cost of printing and the cost of postage. It also complies very much with the aims of the e-Government programme. I would encourage all members to try the new system, which is extremely easy to use.

**ELECTORAL REGISTRATION**

**Elections**

“Spin” is in the air. Preparations are well advanced for Election(s) on the 5<sup>th</sup> May

**Boundary Review**

All members should have received details of the Boundary review planned for later in this year.

**Voter Participation**

We are trying to be proactive with regard to Voter Participation in young people. With this in mind we have written to educational establishments with pupils over 16, within the Deane asking if they would like someone to come along and talk to the students about the electoral process. This is especially relevant with the elections coming up in May.

So far David Greig, who will be giving the talks, has visited one school to discuss how this can be done. Later in the year we plan to extend this offer to all secondary establishments within the Deane and talk to younger students.

## **FINANCIAL SERVICES**

### **Budget**

"The Financial Services unit have now largely concluded their work on the budget, the only areas remaining are the completion of the budget book and the production of parts of the Council tax Booklet. Work is now focussing on the production of the timetable, which will be used for the closure of the 2004/05 Accounts. A task, which will occupy the Unit from now until the end of June 2005.

### **New Financial Management System**

In addition we are still working on the implementation of the new Financial Management System, and we have reached a stage whereby prospective tenderers are submitting information to enable us to shortlist them."

## **REVENUES**

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

- **Council Tax New Year Billing** – much work is currently being undertaken to prepare for the production and issue of the bills for 2005/06. This year the bills will be printed and packed offsite by a company called Formpro based in Cheddar. We are currently in the process of providing them with test data and undertaking detailed checking of the bills that they produce. The bills are timetabled to be issued on 15 Mar 2005.
- **Non-Domestic Rates New Year Billing** – this is complicated this year by the re-valuation of all business properties and the introduction of new transitional and small business relief schemes. Consequently we have to re-programme the computer system with the new calculations. The re-programming is currently undergoing detailed testing. Bills will be issued on 4 March 2005.
- **Rents New Year Rent Notifications** – the rent notifications for next year will be issued during the last week of February. This process is complicated this year by the fact that we will be ceasing to provide a doorstep rent collection service from the end of June 2005. Consequently we are in the process of writing to all rent payer affected by this change to ask them to nominate an alternative method of payment,
- **Direct Debit Mail-shot** – a mail-shot will be issued during the week commencing 7 Feb to all Council Tax and Business Rate payers not

currently paying by direct debit. Approximately 17,000 letters will be issued. This should help to boost the take-up of direct debit.

- **Small Business Relief** – we have identified all of the cases where there may be an underlying entitlement to relief. Application forms have been issued to all of these cases, approximately 1,700 in total. To date 700 have been returned.
- **Cash Deposit Machines Implementation** – provisional installation dates have now been agreed for these for late March.
- **Revenues Operation Plan for 2005/06** – we have now drawn up a draft plan for next year. This is in the process of being refined in order to produce a completed plan by mid-March.

## **OFFICE SERVICES**

### **Old Municipal Building**

Detailed discussions are ongoing as to the future use of Old Municipal Buildings. Agreement has been reached on rehanging two doors in the Hall to open outwards to allow greater numbers to be accommodated under the Fire Risk Assessment.

### **GIS**

On the GIS (Geographic Information Systems) front work continues on digitising Land Charges documentation and preparation of the Local Land & Property Gazette to meet e-government targets. The team will also be involved in the Boundary Commissions review of Ward boundaries in the coming months.

### **Freedom of Information Act**

The Freedom of Information Act came into force at the beginning of January. Whilst the number of formal requests for information has been few, the FOI team has been providing advice across the Council in dealing with the less straightforward enquiries. I would remind Councillors that the Act covers all information that they hold in any form in relation to their activities as Elected Members.

### **INTERNAL AUDIT**

The section has finished the system-based audits during the last quarter and is now concentrating on preparations for the forthcoming audit partnership.

Highlights from some of the non-audit duties and other areas of audit the section gets involved with include: -

- Data Protection – Continued provision of general advice and guidance on data protection issues (Dealing with subject access requests, providing guidance to staff on disclosures).
- Risk Management – Facilitation of Risk Management sessions and ongoing involvement in the creation of new risk registers for individual Council services.
- Partnering – Provision of advice on the Council's future partnering arrangements regarding the awarding gas maintenance contracts.

## **INFORMATION SYSTEMS**

The new storage area network was fully implemented over Christmas, and what was a major change to our network configuration went very smoothly. The ICT strategy is in final draft now and will be published very shortly.

### **Web Site**

A couple of projects working with the Communications unit are about to start. Firstly, the Consultant's report on the content of the web site was delivered last week, and from that we are working on a project to overhaul the current site and define the roles and responsibilities we need in place to ensure the web site achieves its full potential in the future. Secondly we are looking at a major revamp of the corporate intranet and a project board to run this has just been set up. This project represents a great opportunity to change the way information and documents are communicated within TDBC.

### **Priority Outcomes**

Work on E-government projects continues as we strive to meet our targets. We are still on course to have 100% of applicable services available electronically by the end of 2005. We have changed our web site's connection to the Internet to one shared with Somerset County Council. This gives the site a much higher bandwidth connection and users of the site should notice significantly improved performance, particularly downloading large documents.

## **CUSTOMER SERVICES**

Over the last four months our abandonment rate has shown an improvement from 16.47% in October to 11.9% in January. The no of calls answered in that time has shown an increase from 11331 to 12247. This is still too high and we aim to settle at an economic level of 8-10%

The number of calls answered within 30 seconds has also increased from 6214 to 7109 an increase of almost 5%. The number of customers who have needed to leave messages on the answer system for a call back have reduced from 172 in October to 114 in January. Finally the number of calls we are able to deal with directly in Customer Services without onward referral of the customer to the back office has increased from 50.8% to 53.6%. Members will recall the target is to achieve 80% within two years

The picture is one of steady improvement, due in part to the result of recruiting extra staff into vacant posts (just under 2FTE posts still vacant – recruitment currently underway) and staff becoming more conversant with the services and system. We have built on the depth of some of the services we provide (e.g., waste and parking services) and have also expanded to include the new alcohol licensing service and running front-line activities for Revenues, Benefits, Parking and Alcohol Licensing.

In the next few months we expect to deepen Council Tax and Benefits, we are looking at developing new services (based on environmental health areas) and to resolve our accommodation issues.

## **PERSONNEL**

### **Health and Safety**

Work is currently nearing completion, in conjunction with TDBC's Health and Safety Adviser on a scheme to help ensure, and promote the health and well being of staff at work. In November 2004 the HSE launched a set of management standards aimed at reducing, and managing stress in the workplace and these standards are being incorporated into the TDBC scheme.

A training programme to support the introduction of this scheme, and also the Council's new Health and Safety Management System has been programmed to take place over the coming months.

### **Retention and Recruitment**

We have, over the last two months been working closely with all other Somerset District Councils and the County Council on a joint strategy to address our shared recruitment and retention difficulties. This approach has led to a joint bid to the ODPM office for funding to support this activity, but has also led to a number of joint ventures in both recruitment and retention initiatives, regardless of whether this bid is successful.

### **Core Values**

We are also beginning to help the Council develop a set of core values which will underpin the way that staff work in the organisation, how we interact with customers, and will set out what staff can expect from TDBC and what TDBC can expect from its staff. This work is being done in conjunction with the Communications Team.

## **BENEFITS**

### **Quality of Service**

Performance against targets for accuracy and claim processing is encouraging with improvement in all areas when compared with last year.

## **Overpaid Housing Benefit**

The transfer of recovering overpaid Housing Benefit to the unit following the recommendations of the Best Value Review is proving to be effective. In the last quarter alone, we obtained 35 judgements and agreed repayment arrangements with an additional 133 debtors.

## **Benefit Take Up**

We continue to increase take-up of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. We will be including a Department for Work & Pensions "flyer" with all Council Tax bills to target take-up of Council Tax Benefit. In March we will be meeting with the Citizens Advice Bureau to explore joint working in take-up activities. Data matching will help to target people of pensionable age in a take-up campaign in the next quarter.

## **Fraud Investigation**

Our Investigation Team continues to tackle fraudsters and sentencing is expected shortly following another successful prosecution.

Councillor Terry Hall

**COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON - COMMUNICATIONS**

**COMMUNICATIONS**

In March the Corporate Communications team will be consulting staff on a new corporate style guide. This guide tightens up the use of our existing logo. The hope is that the new **Style Guide** will be in use and monitored from April. It is not only how our documents look which is important, how they are written affects our ability to communicate.

We are all working hard to improve our services and to make them accessible to the people of Taunton Deane. For many users their only contact with us is in writing. It is therefore important for us to write to local people in a way they can understand. Research shows that more people understand writing if it is written in plain English. To help us achieve a plain English standard, we have invested in some software, **StyleWriter**, which will 'score' your writing for you and offer help to simplify your writing.

Starting in April, 'Stylewriter' will be introduced over the next twelve months starting with key front line services. The aim is for all documents written for and available to the public, including reports for Council meetings, to reach a plain English standard by April 2006.

**Media and Public Relations**

As part of the proactive and open approach that this administration is taking with the media we held a Budget Briefing for the local press in January. The press welcomed this approach. Both Somerset County Gazette and the Taunton Times published prominently placed and well balanced articles in their respective newspapers. They reported that Taunton was facing similar budget problems as other councils nationwide and explained to the public the key elements of the Executive's budget proposals.

Our public relations team is building a good platform of trust with the media and will continue with media briefings on complex issues to ensure that the reasoning behind our decisions is fairly reported to the public.

*North Curry – Oxen Lane*

We are still receiving a high level of local and national media interest. A project group was set up to deal with all the operational contact between the Council and local residents and North Curry Parish Council. The communications challenge was significant and the project group has spent a great deal of time meeting this challenge by linking with people through phone calls, emails, meetings, site visits and via letters. The Council has now agreed with the Parish Council to send out weekly updates of the situation to around 130 local people in order to keep them as fully informed as possible.

**Councillor Gwyneth Leighton**

**COUNCIL MEETING 22 FEBRUARY 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

**CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)**

**New Anti-Social Behaviour Coordinator**

Annie Borlace, the new Anti-Social Behaviour Coordinator for the CDRP, has started work at Taunton Deane Borough Council. Annie, who is a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) started working as one of our original Parish Wardens back in 2001. Last year all Wardens were transferred across to the new PCSO role. I am very pleased to welcome Annie to Taunton Deane Borough Council.

This two-year post has been funded through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership money ring fenced specifically for work to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB). It means that we now have the resources to respond proactively to complaints from members of the public about anti-social behaviour and I know that Annie has already been out visiting people who have reported problems.

She will also be involved in joint work with licensing with the new drugs testing machine and under age drinking checks, as well as being the Taunton Deane point of contact for the Deane wide ASB steering group and liaison with the legal team over Anti Social Behaviour Contracts and Orders. Further, she will be a point of contact for Local Action Teams.

I am confident that Annie's background and practical experience make her ideally suited to this role and that with her in this post, we will be able to really make a difference in one of our high priority areas.

**CDPR Audit**

As I mentioned in my last report, the comprehensive 3 year Crime and Disorder Audit has now been completed. This was submitted, as required, to Government Office for the South West, and has received very positive comments from their internal audit team who refer to "a well presented and comprehensive audit".

The Audit document amounts to some 250 pages of intensive analytical data, some of which is sensitive and not for publication. If members wish to view the full document, they should contact the Community Safety Team in the Deane House. Meanwhile a summary document is being produced for wider distribution.

The audit is now being used to formulate the new Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, 2005-2008, which will be coming to a meeting of the Review Board later this month..

**LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP)**

The LSP held an away day for members and associate members at Wellsprings in January. In all 20 people attended, representing a wide range of partners and community planning areas. The main aims of the day were to review how the LSP has performed against its terms of reference, how it is adding value and how best to move forward.

It is always easy to say that an event was “very successful”! In this case, judging by the feedback forms received, I would genuinely claim this to be the case. The feedback forms made it clear that those who attended had both enjoyed the day and found it worthwhile.

Quite a few action points were worked up, which will be taken forward by the officer management group. These included an agreement to focus efforts next year on support for Local Action Teams and on developing much better ways of sharing information between partners in the LSP. A full set of notes can be obtained from Jane Smythe, Community Initiatives Tel 01823 356568.

I have always wanted to move away from the notion that the LSP belongs to and is driven by Taunton Deane Borough Council. To that end it is proposed to rotate the chairmanship on a fixed term basis and I anticipate that a change of chairman will take place later this year.

## **LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS**

There is new thinking from Government in the way that Local Strategic Partnerships might develop and some pilot Local Area Agreements are being trialled this year.

It is not as yet clear quite how these will work, particularly in two-tier areas, but it seems likely that a local area agreement for Somerset will be negotiated between the Somerset Strategic Partnership and Government Office of the South West and it will consist of a set of agreed priorities for the area under the headings of Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities and Healthier Communities and Older People. Clear outcomes will be identified and simplified funding streams will follow the set priorities.

The immediate challenge for Taunton Deane’s LSP in this process is to be sure that Taunton Deane has a genuine input into decisions on priorities and outcomes to be agreed at the County level and that Taunton’s voice is heard.

Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris

