

## **Part II – Reports from the Executive**

### **COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**

#### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

We are virtually half way through the quadrennium of our term in office so this is a good time to review our achievements as an administration.

I do believe we can fairly claim to have achieved, or have in place, arrangements to fulfil all of our manifesto achievements. Of these the notable ones are;

- Alterations to Station Road/Priory Bridge Road junction
- Completion and opening of the Wellsprings leisure centre
- Reinstatement of free parking for the registered disabled.
- Working closely with County Council to improve traffic flow in Taunton
- Using taxpayers money more efficiently so we need less.
- Minimising Council Tax increases and use of reserves to support current spending.
- Ensuring we deliver excellent front line services to the public.
- Evaluating our assets to ensure they provide best value and action accordingly.

The first three items were delivered within the first year of office and I feel it has to be acknowledged that the alterations to Station Road/Priory Bridge Road brought immediate relief from unacceptable congestion in the immediate locality and for a large area around, a huge success, which in the main, has been welcomed by all.

The Wellsprings Leisure Centre has been an outstanding success since opening its doors to the public in January 2004. It has become recognised as an excellent multi-functional centre which provides a wide range of leisure and recreational activities as well as being the largest hall in Taunton Deane. It is capable of hosting many alternative uses with excellent catering facilities readily available.

We are working closely with the Highway Authority to reduce congestion at peak hours, seeking measures that attempt to maximise the use of the existing road space and pressing for new measures to be implemented. We are fully supportive of the Silk Mills project with its park and ride scheme and particularly so when threatened with withdrawal of funding by central Government, this project is now well under way and should be operational later this year. Generally, the lack of investment in the infrastructure of Taunton Deane has been recognised and steps are being taken to try and address the problem. Years of neglect cannot be rectified overnight but at least there is a will to address it realistically and confront the difficult decisions that have to be made.

We are an “Excellent Council” this is not just me saying it, we have received accolades from various external organisations such as, Investors in People, Business Britain Local Authority of the Year 2004/05 and through the CPA process we were classified as an Excellent Council following rigorous evaluation of our performance through a wide range of services. To achieve this we have demonstrated an ability to run services efficiently, by examining how we deliver them and taking measures to improve. We are conveying the clear message that business is welcome and we are seeing an upsurge of interest in Taunton Deane as a result with the improvement to our economy this brings. We have maintained a low rate of Council Tax increase which is absolutely essential to assist those on low or fixed income such as pensioners who have been penalised badly in the past by consistently high average tax increases. In addition we have reversed what I consider to be the wholly unacceptable practice of drawing from our reserves to fund day to day spending. It was a sham to say a balanced budget had been achieved when supported by huge amounts withdrawn from reserves, in the period from 1998 to 2003 an enormous total of £2,737,000 or average per year of £450,166. In contrast, in our first budget last year we only used £17,000 and this year we have returned circa £300,000 to the reserves to allow future capital investment for the good of Taunton Deane residents and visitors.

In achieving this we have not forgotten the need to invest for the future and we have increased much needed investment in economic development, leisure facilities, environmental services and waste recycling. Within Economic Development we have £500,000 allocated to the Blackdown Business Park development in Wellington, £150,000 to bring forward much needed employment land in Wiveliscombe and £100,000 to assist with business space in Taunton. This has been funded by the turning over and reinvestment of poorly performing assets and is not a charge to the taxpayer in Taunton Deane. Wellington is also benefiting from the long overdue replacement of the North Street toilet at a cost of £130,000 which I have to say, it can only be regarded as shameful such an eyesore was not replaced earlier! We are investing substantially in the street scene to ensure a clean and acceptable environment together with proactive steps against the people that cause the litter by the introduction of fixed penalties. In respect of leisure there is a huge programme ongoing which includes our Green Spaces strategy which identifies a considerable shortfall in recreational land within Taunton, our Vivary Park management strategy with the much needed replacement building housing new toilets and changing facilities and investment in tennis facilities. This latter scheme is an excellent example of partnership working as it levers in substantial funding to provide what should become a “Centre of Excellence” for tennis in Taunton.

As can be seen from this we are fully committed to the promise to the people of Taunton Deane at the beginning of our administration that, “we are a Council for the whole of the Deane, not just Taunton”.

On issues of current topical interest I report as follows;

### **Vision For Taunton**

Progress on this huge project for regeneration of Taunton remains very much on track, at a recent meeting of the Vision Advisory Board under the Chairmanship of John Clothier, who was recently appointed, and I am delighted to welcome, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed which is a three year agreement between all major partners for the promotion and execution of the project. The major partners are TDBC, SWRDA, SCC and the Environment Agency with our Chief Executive, Penny James, taking the lead role and TDBC being the responsible authority for the day to day promotion and direction. Funding has been committed by all partners to provide dedicated staff to implement the huge development programme ahead of us. We are also working with the Somerset County Cricket Club to assist with their imaginative and challenging redevelopment plans which are certainly complimentary to our own proposals.

We are also appointing our own Taunton Vision Steering Group to ensure that all Members, cross party, are kept fully informed of the various strands that have to be considered in order to ensure a successful future of these exciting proposals.

I believe this adequately demonstrates the unequivocal commitment of this administration and its partners towards achieving the successful regeneration of Taunton Town centre and the riverside.

### **Relocation of the Livestock Market Site**

The application for planning consent has been with us for some time and consultation with statutory consultees has been ongoing. From the latest advice it is likely to be submitted for consideration by the Planning Committee at the May 2005 meeting. Considerable concern has been expressed that an alternative scheme is being considered by Sedgemoor District Council in parallel with the Taunton Deane market but in my view it is comparing chalk and cheese. The Sedgemoor scheme proposes an agricultural business centre which encompasses with the livestock market site 30 to 50 acres of employment land and the whole is sited on land in the open countryside which is not scheduled for development. The Taunton Deane scheme is purely for a livestock market which although situated outside the normal development area is wholly related to agriculture. In my view, therefore, the two schemes are not comparable.

### **Sub-Regional and Regional Spatial Strategy**

I can only reiterate my abhorrence about the method and timing dictated to us for consideration of such fundamental and important development proposals for Taunton. The timetable was imposed upon us by Central Government via the Regional Assembly and only serves to demonstrate the Governments contempt for local democracy by removing the District and County Council's from a statutory role and relegating us to nothing more than consultees. Equally I convey my greatest thanks to our officers for the tremendous effort put in to respond so thoroughly in such a short space of time and to our colleague Cllr Bishop for his tireless efforts in presenting our case at many

meetings. Our case has now been presented and we must await the final deliberations as to likely numbers and locations. As I have often said the numbers and locations are determined by the Regional Assembly or Deputy Prime Minister and the County Council in respect of infrastructure requirements. Only then can Taunton Deane commence preparation of the required Local Development Framework plans which can go out for full public consultation.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Issues**

We have been issuing a very informative regular newsletter to residents in the North Curry area and is available to all that request it, it has been well received by recipients and avoids all the misinformation that is prone to circulate in such difficult circumstances. In essence we are now in a waiting period for the appeal to be heard against the enforcement order which is scheduled for the 7 June 2005. The site is monitored on a regular basis by our Enforcement Officers and although testing of the boundaries appears to occur no serious transgressions that would lead to prosecution have occurred. I believe this is to a large extent testament to the commitment and vigilance of our officers who maintain regular inspections.

We are increasingly being approached by individuals or Parish Councils to take pre-emptive action on land that is being offered for sale within Taunton Deane. It is claimed that as the District Council we have powers to take this pre-emptive action which is a possibility only if a breach of planning regulations can reasonably be apprehended. The burden of proof required by the Courts when applying for such an order is strictly defined and the land merely being for sale in no way meets this requirement. Even if purchased we would need to prove the intention was to occupy in breach of Planning Regulations which, like it or not, is extremely difficult to prove until such time as the breach physically occurs. We are a democracy and as a public body we cannot deny anybody access to their own land or land they have permission to occupy because of suspicion. To address this, we do need are far more rigorous laws that allow us to act quickly against flagrant and pre-meditated breaches of planning regulations, this will preserve our democracy but send a clear message to the wrongdoers that their unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. Until this occurs regrettably the present discrimination against the settled population will continue unabated.

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

## **COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**

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

#### **Bus Users Surgery**

I attended the surgery, outside the Market House in Taunton Town Centre and took written submissions from members of the public who were unhappy about some of the services, the quality of the buses, the reliability, the lack of suitable bus shelters and the overcrowding resulting in some passengers being unable to get on the bus, particularly in locations close to Taunton.

The surgery, organised by Bus Users UK was attended by a representative from Bus Users UK, staff from First, Officers from Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and myself.

It is estimated that in excess of 100 people attended and 75 individuals provided comments. A small number of individuals called to state that they were happy with the service provided..

#### **Meeting with First Great Western and Bus**

I attended a meeting at Bath on 6<sup>th</sup> April to listen to their proposals for the future of bus and rail travel in Bristol, Bath and Somerset. Although First is committed to providing the people of Bristol, Bath and Somerset with a high quality, reliable, safe bus network it is apparent that new buses will be mainly provided in the Bath and Bristol area and that if we are lucky we might get some of the surplus second hand buses in our area..They have invested heavily in 90 new buses for Bath to provide customers with easy access,, low floor, low emission vehicles.

It is obvious that we need to remove the causes for some of the operational difficulties for buses and to persuade more people to use the services provided before there will be any possibility of First investing heavily in our area..

During question time I pleaded for the fleet of buses serving our area to be updated and I gained an admission from First Great Western that there is a gap in some of the services operating from Taunton and that this gap will be addressed in the next timetable.

#### **Planning Delivery Grant**

We have received confirmation that our grant for 2005/06 is £471,475 and we expect to receive a further £50,000 for submitting our Local Development Scheme to ODPM on time.

Our grant this year is less than the £533,000 last year because our improvement in Development Control performance is less dramatic. Last year we started from a much lower base and so our relative improvement was high. This year we have sustained generally high performance but starting from a higher base. Much of the grant is awarded on improved performance, but also on planning application numbers and therefore a large authority with a big improvement in performance qualifies for a high award..

I would like to congratulate all the staff involved in planning for their combined efforts in achieving the results that were necessary to qualify for this grant.

The ODPM has just announced that a total of £2 million has to be repaid by 49 councils providing incorrect information on their development control performance. Planning Minister Keith Hill said in Parliament last month that one of the conditions of the 2004-05 tranche was that the ODPM could ask for money back “where there are concerns over the accuracy or proven inaccuracies in the information on which allocations were made”.

### **Planning Fees**

Details have been received of the new planning fees payable from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005. Major developments will have to pay a lot more with the maximum fee for outline applications increasing from £5,500 to £25,000 and full submissions increasing from £13,000 to £50,000. Minor applications will increase from £220 to £285, and Householder applications from £110 to £135.

### **The Neroche Project**

The Neroche Project area is a 15 mile long, two mile wide, section of the northern Blackdown Hills which overlooks Taunton Vale. It runs from Culmstock Beacon in the West to Ashill in the East and covers an area of 10,000 hectares. A population of 283,000 people live within the ten-mile catchment surrounding the project area.

The £2.7 million project is being funded by 12 partner organisations that share a vision for the future of the Blackdowns. Nerys Watts – Heritage Lottery Fund Regional Manager for the South West stated “This intricate and tranquil area is very special and has a wealth of heritage. It's great news that we will be supporting a scheme that helps so many people come together to connect with the landscape and help conserve it”

Many of the 30 separate activity schemes within the project will require volunteers to assist with the project and anyone wishing to register their interest should write to David West, Neroche Project Development Officer, Forestry Commission, Bullers Hill, Kennford, Exeter, EX6 7XR

### **Planning Policy Statement 6 Planning for Town Centres**

The policies in this statement focus on a range of issues relating to the planning for the future of town centres and the main issues that relate to them

Regional Spatial Strategies should set out a vision and strategy for the regions growth particularly for higher level centres in the region and their role as the focus for major retail, leisure, offices and other main town centre development of more than local importance, and provide a strategic framework for planning at local level.

Local Planning Authorities should prepare planning policies to help manage the evening and night-time economy in appropriate centres. These policies should encourage a range of complimentary evening and night-time economy uses which appeal to a wide range of age, and social groups , ensuring that provision is made for a range of leisure , cultural and tourism activities.

In drawing up their policies and proposals, local planning authorities should consider the scale of leisure developments they wish to encourage and their likely impact, including the cumulative impact on the character and function of the centre, anti-social behaviour, crime and the amenities of nearby residents

Local Authorities should ensure that there is an integrated approach to the evening and night-time economy, so that their planning policies and proposals take account of and complement their Statement of Licensing Policy and the promotion of the licensing objectives under the Licensing Act 2003. The emphasis has shifted to managing the evening and night-time economy, with reference to the ODPM's "How To" programme.

In selecting appropriate sites for allocation, local authorities should have regard to :

- a. Whether the site is or will be accessible and well served by a choice of means of Transport, especially public transport, walking and cycling as well as by car and
- b. the impact on car use, traffic and congestion.

The statement takes on board and strengthens the advice set out in PPG6 (now replaced) and it supports development in town centres over that in other locations. .The plan led approach for town centres and the sequential approach to site selection are at the heart of the policy. An Edge of Centre site is now defined as a location that is well connected to and within easy walking distance ( i.e. up to 300 metres) of the primary shopping area.

The Planning Minister, Keith Hill, when launching the policy update recognised that out of town development has led to the erosion of central areas and stressed that PPS6 aims to drive the renaissance of towns and cities of all sizes.

Best Practice guidance on need and impact assessments, sequential testing and dealing with smaller centres to support PPS6 are due later this year.

**Councillor Cliff Bishop**



## **COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**

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

#### **PARKS**

##### **Green Spaces**

Following an assessment of the Local Plan by planning and leisure consultants, work is underway on the audit and assessment of need for contributions towards providing or improving provision of village/community halls, outdoor play, indoor and outdoor sport, allotments, open space and parks. The intention is to develop a draft Supplementary Planning Document for consideration and adoption.

An agreement has been reached between the Somerset District Councils and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership which will see a standardised approach across Somerset to collecting developer contributions for sports provision. A pilot in South Somerset has proved successful and the consultants (Knight Kavannah and Page) will now assist the other districts to ensure developers make adequate contributions for play, sport and open space. Work will begin in May 2005.

##### **Tennis Centre**

Expressions of interest have been invited from suitably qualified companies to construct a 'framed fabric' structure over 2 existing tennis courts at Blackbrook Tennis Centre. The company will also be contracted to resurface the courts. Planning permission will now be sought and if successful it is anticipated that the new facilities will be in place for the winter of 2005. This will increase by 50% the number of indoor tennis courts at the site to 6. The project is a partnership between TDBC, Richard Huish College, the Taunton Tennis Club and the LTA.

##### **Green Flag Award**

Three applications for the Green Flag Award have been submitted this year: re-applications for Vivary and Wellington Parks and a first application for Victoria Park. Green Flag is the government's acknowledged standard for parks managements and covers all aspects of a park including maintenance, access, safety, conservation, community involvement, marketing and management.

##### **Vivary Park building**

Work has been ongoing on this project and planning permission has now been granted. At this stage final details are still being worked through with a contractor but it is hoped that work will start on site in the late summer of 2005. The facility will provide changing for pay & play golfers, a cafe, the golf sales shop and public toilets (to replace those adjacent to the Fons George Car Park).

##### **Vivary Park Management Plan**

Work on the development of the recent proposals for managing Vivary Park is continuing with a further report to Members planned for June. The proposals include a park-based manager, allowing gardeners time to liaise with the public, extending the car park, introducing pay and display parking on Ash Meadows Lane, better event management and promotion, a new building for toilets, golf changing and putting/refreshment sales and improved play facilities.

##### **Mini Motorbike Circuit**

With the help of TDBC the group wishing to use the Wellington Basins open space area for this activity have now found a more suitable base on a local farm. It appears from a recent press report that they are going from strength to strength

### **Victoria Park Play Area**

Contracts are currently out for pricing to four contractors including the Council's DLO for the construction of a multi-use games area and neighbourhood equipped area for play in Victoria Park, off East Reach, Taunton.

The design and build contract aims to achieve an accessible and inclusive play design. Local children, parents and residents will be asked to compare schemes once they have been submitted. Tenders are due back on 11 April.

The plans will be subject to Planning Consent and will hopefully be completed during the summer school holidays. The old play areas will be removed after the new area is complete.

### **Wellington Greenspace Forum**

A forum will be set up in April to provide an opportunity for various ward councillors, residents, users, council officers, police, youth service and others to come together to discuss and explore ways of enhancing our greenspaces in Wellington.

The forum aims to identify improvements to Wellington's green spaces and collaborate on issues and initiatives to improve these spaces and meet the needs of the community. The forum will also consider the money available and allocate funds to fill the gaps of provision around Wellington for young people and be involved in funding applications to outside organisations.

### **Events in the park**

A full programme of community run events, some part-funded by the Council, is being organised this summer. Details of the extensive programmes will be displayed in the Vivary, Victoria and Wellington Park notice boards.

Events organised by the Council in **Vivary Park** this summer include:

**Sunday bandstand concerts** commence on June 5 and continue until August 28.

Wednesday 29 June: The West Country Theatre Company who are renowned for lively, vibrant and accessible open air productions, will be giving a performance of **The Taming of the Shrew** in Vivary Park

Saturday 13 August: **Get Back!** - a tribute to both the music of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones featuring two of the country's top tribute bands takes place on Saturday night hosted by disc jockey Mike Read.

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August: **Proms in the Park** - a classical concert featuring Jane Gilchrist, a local soloist who recently won the "Operatunity" TV competition, and the Bath Philharmonia Orchestra. The programme will have a nautical theme to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar

13 – 18 September: the world-renowned **Moscow State Circus**, regarded by many as the world's greatest circus will put up its "big-top" in the park

### **Village Halls.**

Bathealton and Combe Florey Village Halls have both been successful in their applications for grant aid to the Somerset Joint Committee for Voluntary Village Halls and Community Centres. This matches the grants already approved from this Council.

Bathealton has been awarded a total of £27,500.00 towards essential refurbishment works that will permit the hall to remain in use.

Combe Florey Village Hall has been awarded a total £19,671.00 towards works that include new toilet facilities, an entrance porch, and improvements to the insulation of the building.

### **Deano**

The Easter edition of the Deano has been sent to all primary school aged children in Taunton Deane and the summer edition will be issued at the beginning of June.

This

Publication gives details of childrens' activities for the school holidays.

### **STONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES**

#### **Health Development Update**

The pilot of an Exercise Referral Scheme for individuals with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) has started at Wellsprings Leisure Centre. Eleven referrals were received and so far five have started an eight week gym-based programme under supervision. Referrals have come from Musgrove Park Hospital, Blackbrook Surgery and Warwick House Medical Centre. It is hoped that, following completion of their course, the clients will remain using Stone Leisure facilities. An evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness will be completed.

#### **New Stone Leisure 'Branding' and Pricing**

New prices within leisure facilities were introduced on 1st April, 2005. A number of significant changes were introduced, including: charging for racquet sports on a per head basis (as opposed to by the court); increased benefits in memberships (including unlimited racquet sports), new and changed children's memberships and changes to peak indoor tennis court bookings.

Stone Leisure will also be unveiling its new 'brands' over the next few weeks. The aim is to improve clarity of communication and set distinguishing features in the services provided.

#### **"Better Play" Funding Ends**

As of 31st March, 2005 Stone Leisure's "Better Play" funding has ended. This funding paid for one to one specialist support for children with individual needs during school holiday activity programmes in local leisure centres. Currently Stone Leisure is seeking further funding from other sources.

#### **Optika Wheelchair Tennis Tournament - Tennis Centre**

This tournament was held over the weekend of 2nd and 3rd April and attracted over 20 wheelchair tennis players from across the country. The highlight of the weekend from a local point of view was the triumph of Taunton player Shaun Reagan in the A Division singles tournament. Shaun is now ranked 82nd in the world.

#### **Children's Activities**

The Easter holiday camps attracted large numbers of children at Wellsprings Leisure Centre, Blackbrook Pavilion and Wellington Sports Centre, drawn by a range of new

activities including a health and beauty camp, a DJ mixing session and an inflatable assault course.

### **Premier League Darts**

The largest event to date at Wellsprings attracted over 700 people to watch a premier league darts match, televised by Sky Sports

**Soroptimists Swimathon.** This annual event took place over the weekend of 5th and 6th February. The balcony area at St. James Street Baths was re-opened in time for this major event, which saw teams competing for a number of trophies across the weekend.

### **Forthcoming Events**

Mini Golf Launch at Vivary Park

National Association of Majorettes Competition

South West Schools Gymnastics Competition

Launch of FITPRO – wonderful world of fitness children's programme

### ARTS

**The Arts and Rural Regeneration Conference** took place on 6<sup>th</sup> April at SCAT. Creative industries are one of the fastest growing sectors in the region and offer potential to diversify the rural economy and tackle social exclusion. This year the conference explored accessing finance, business support and mentoring for rural arts enterprises, art farms, cultural tourism, digital media, marketing initiatives, countryside as a creative classroom.

**The Somerset Art Gallery Trust (SAGT)** continues to develop relationships with the County Museum Service, Somerset Art Week, Somerset College of Art and Technology and The Brewhouse Theatre to provide exhibitions, talks and outings. SAGT are also exploring opportunities for a permanent venue capable of accommodating national touring exhibitions.

**The Taunton Cultural Consortium** has made recommendations on the development of the Cultural Quarter, with a full report due within the month.

**The Second Ten Parishes Festival** will run from 10-18 September 2005 and promises to be even more imaginative than the last. There will be many more "hands-on" workshops for people to make their own piece of art; children and young people will be involved at all levels and as before, and artists will be opening u their studios and galleries to display and sell their work.

**Community Radio:** the New 10radio station has applied for a temporary radio licence to broadcast from Kingsmead School during this Festival. They are holding a launch meeting on Thursday 21 April at Wiveliscombe Community Centre for everyone – young people and children included – who want to be involved in some way.

**Arts Funding** through partnership agreements. The Council supports key arts organizations in partnership with the other Somerset local authorities and ARTlife to deliver arts facilities, services and opportunities within Taunton Deane and Somerset.

**Community Arts Grants** over the past year achieved a great deal with a little support from the Deane. These grants support voluntary and non-profit making organisations to provide arts opportunities in the community, They also lever in other funds and in 2004/5 supported the Somerset Rural music School, Art for Life!, People with learning difficulties, their carers and supports staff and various other activities.

In 2002/03 Taunton Deane was one of the more generous local authorities according to the ACE report on Local Authority Expenditure, investing between £1 and £0.55 per person in that year. The Arts Council England (ACE) expenditure per capital in the county is another story and we are working with ACE and other Somerset authorities to address these issues.

At present our Arts Officer is working on a Creative Industries Development Strategy which will shortly be presented to the Health and Leisure Panel.

In the meantime I would refer my fellow councillors to the most recent issue of Deane Arts Update of April 2005 which covers a most extensive range of activities and projects.

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**Councillor Mrs D Bradley**

## **COUNCIL MEETING 19<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2005**

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

#### **Tourism**

There has been a considerable amount of interest in our 'Heart of Somerset' tourism guide. To date, 31,000 have been requested, as compared with 22,000 this time last year. Many of our providers are reporting that bookings through the guide have increased substantially. The hits on our web-site and responses to adverts are also considerably up. All this bodes well for this year's trade.

I would like to up date you on the 'Towards 2015' strategy formulated by South West Tourism. Meetings have been held with all our partners in Somerset to discuss the best way forward. David Lewis, from South West Tourism is the new head of the partnerships, and will assist in setting up either destination marketing or management organisations partnerships, aiming to pool tourism resources to benefit the businesses of a given destination. There is also a drive to improve the quality of everything offered and to push forward the sustainable tourism agenda.

Neroche project, the stage one award, of £100,000 has been guaranteed. This will enable them to work up their business plan over the next year and apply for stage two. Hopefully they will be successful and achieve their target of £2 million, which will be a huge boost to the area.

#### **TIC**

The TIC is now comes totally under the aegis of Taunton Deane Borough Council. Last year saw a good improvement in turn over, and franchises. This year, with the re-launch, and the new 'Condor' agency, has seen a further improvement. Our aim would be to achieve as much self-funding as is possible.

#### **Asset Management**

The successful sale of the long-term lease at Bedford House has enabled a number of projects to proceed: reinvestment of £500,000 in the Blackdown Business Park development, £150,000 plus the same from SCC to give a £300,000 joint investment in Wiveliscombe. Other projects such as that in Frobisher Way will be started in the near future.

Discussions with the SCC continue over the proposed use of the OMB for the Registrar's office.

#### **DDA**

Many schemes are being designed, and some have gone out for quotation. Work will shortly begin in the Deane House, Wellington Sports Centre, the Market House in Taunton, the Crematorium and of course the OMB. It is

particularly good to see that planning consent for an external ramp for Roman Road Post Office has been obtained, and quotations are being sought.

### **Economic Development**

In conjunction with the Town Centre Manager, a presentation of the Vision for Taunton was tailored to the particular needs of agents and was well received. It was good to have John Clothier as the Chairman, and Ian Franklin (RDA) in attendance.

A Business Fair was held recently, in Wellington, which resulted in a very busy three hours for the those manning the stands, and three excellent seminars were given. All in all, the event was very well received and regarded as worth while by stall-holders and attendees alike.

### **Town Centre Management**

This is shortly to become a business under the Chairmanship of Francis Cornish. Lucy Ball will continue as our Town Centre manager and has organised a number of events for the year. In conjunction with the Carnival Committee there will be a May Fair on 14<sup>th</sup> May in Vivary Park. A continental market has been booked for 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June. Working with the Ec Dev unit and Defra, and with Rural Enterprise Scheme funding, we plan to run a 'Celebrate Somerset' weekend on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September, building on the success of last year.

### **Councillor Norman Cavill**



## COUNCIL MEETING – 19 APRIL 2005

### REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

#### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING

##### General

##### **1. New Chief Environmental Health Officer**

Gill Kneller our Chief Environmental Health Officer has recently left the authority to take up a Head of Service post in East Hampshire. I would like to congratulate her on this promotion and formally record my thanks for the efficient and professional manner in which Gill carried out her duties during her time with the Council. James Barrah has been recruited from Bristol and will be our new Chief Environmental Health Officer starting from May 16<sup>th</sup>.

##### Environmental Protection Team

##### **1. Seagull Control**

A preliminary survey has been carried out to estimate the extent of the seagull problem in Taunton town centre.

A full Survey will be undertaken in mid-April, by which time the breeding pairs will all have returned from their winter migration. This Survey, which will be done by an acknowledged expert in this field, will result in a report detailing nesting sites. Contractors will use the information to begin a programme of egg oiling.

Eggs are oiled to prevent them from hatching. If the eggs were simply removed, a second batch would be laid.

Experience elsewhere indicates that this is the most acceptable approach to the problem but it will not lead to any appreciable decline in seagull numbers, unless repeated over a period of years.

The purpose is to reduce the possibility of seagull attacks on people, as the birds only become aggressive in defence of chicks, and not nests or eggs.

##### **2. Rat Problem**

The Team was praised by the media for its swift, effective and sensitive response to an unusual rat problem affecting a property in Cann Street. Investigations began after the occupiers heard noises coming from beneath the floorboards.

Baiting showed that rats were active in the drainage system under the property. Contact was made with Wessex Water who have responsibility for the drainage system and they identified defective disused pipework under the pavement at the front of the property which was allowing rats to access the under floor area of the property. The pipe work was excavated and sealed off.

Some weeks later, further noises were reported under the floor of the property and officers suspected that the drainage was still the source of the rats. Wessex Water carried out further investigations and found more disused pipe work, this time located

several metres below the floor in the front room. This pipe work was excavated and sealed. As the occupiers were very distressed at the presence of rats in the property and due to the upheaval of excavations within the house, Wessex Water arranged alternative accommodation for the duration of the problem.

The Pest Control Officer visited and began treatment within 90 minutes of being notified, on each occasion.

### **3. Dog Bins**

Following the approval of a Development Bid for ten new dog bins, Ward Councillors and Parish Councils were invited to submit suggestions for areas, which could benefit from a dog bin.

The response was very positive and almost 60 applications were received. Each will be assessed and, after a site visit, will be scored using a simple, fair and established process. The ten highest scoring sites will be provided with a bin by the end of April.

### Food Safety Team

#### **1. New Staff**

A newly recruited replacement District Environmental Health Officer will start on 1 August.

#### **2. Routine Inspections**

The Team has achieved 100% of the scheduled routine inspections for the year putting us among the Country's top performers.

#### **3. Work with Schools**

Four schools have been visited to demonstrate good hand washing techniques using 'globox' technology. This involves the use of ultra-violet light to indicate areas of the hands that have not been thoroughly washed.

#### **4. Sudan 1 Food Alert**

The Team's response to the Sudan 1 Food Alert, affecting 580 product lines, was completed within 48 hours of notification.

### Health and Safety Team

#### **1. Health & Safety in Town Centre Store**

Concerns relating to health and safety following a visit by a Food Control Officer to a Town Centre Food Store prompted an officer from the Health and Safety team to visit. As a result, the Officer took evidence relating to the operation of an unsafe piece of bakery equipment and an unfenced area of mezzanine within the warehouse. The Officer served two Prohibition Notices in order to control the immediate risk of electrocution from faulty bakery equipment and the risk of falling from the mezzanine floor.

### Licensing Unit

#### **1. New Licensing Act**

a) There is concern that Licence applications under the new Act have got off to a very slow start. Applications must be made between 7 February and 6 August; they are likely to come into effect in November 2005. To date the Council has received 8 Personal licence applications out of an expected 750. No applications for a premises

licence have been made, it is expected that there are 500 premises that will need a licence.

There are a number of reasons for the lack of applications, including the complexity of the nationally prescribed application forms, the documents that must accompany the form and in particular the fact that the annual fee for a licence will be due a year after the licence is determined not a year after the licence comes into effect.

Applicants are clearly put off from applying early because they would be paying the full fee for a licence that will not be valid for the full 12 month period. Therefore the nearer to the cut of date that an applicant applies the greater the period of time when the licence is valid. This system clearly encourages later applications which could lead to a last minute rush which will exceed the capacity of the Licensing Unit and the Licensing panel to carry out the necessary work. This is such a concern that Adrian Flook M.P has written to Tessa Jowell who is the Secretary of State in charge of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). All Somerset Chief Executives have also agreed add their names to a letter from the Assistant Chief Constable to Richard Caborn M.P the minister responsible for licensing. The letter urges DCMS to change the date when the annual fee becomes payable to the anniversary of the date the licence comes into effect.

The licensing Unit has actively encouraged all Licensees, both in writing and by using the media, to submit Applications sooner rather than later, in an effort to avoid a last minute rush. In the letter sent to all premises believed to need a licence under the Licensing Act 2003 it details that there is a very real possibility that late applications that are not properly submitted may result in some premises not being allowed to trade, from November.

b) In an effort to make the application process as easy as possible considerable work has gone into developing the Licensing Act webpage which is on Taunton Deane's website. Applicants have also been allocated specific days where they can come to the Deane House and speak to a licensing officer who will guide them through the application forms.

c) There has also been concern that Somerset's Carnivals will require a licence in accordance with the Act if that is the case then the fee for Taunton's Carnival will be £24,000. The Licensing Manager is meeting with a representative from DCMS to ask if carnivals do need to be licensed. The Licensing Manager will also ask if Licensing Authorities could be given the power to reduce or waive the licensing fees if the Licensing Authority feels it would be appropriate. The Council are also considering other options to ensure that carnivals continue, one option includes giving the carnival committee a grant of a sum of money that is equal to the licence fee. At the same meeting questions will be asked to try and make the Licensing Act work better for Village Halls and Community Premises, in particular to increase the number of temporary events (occasional events) from 12 to 24.

## WASTE SERVICES

### Waste Collection and Recycling

The SORT IT! services were launched on 21 March to widespread media interest.

Information packs were sent out to the first 3000 properties to be included in the new services over Easter and already a stream of applications for the various types of service have been received.

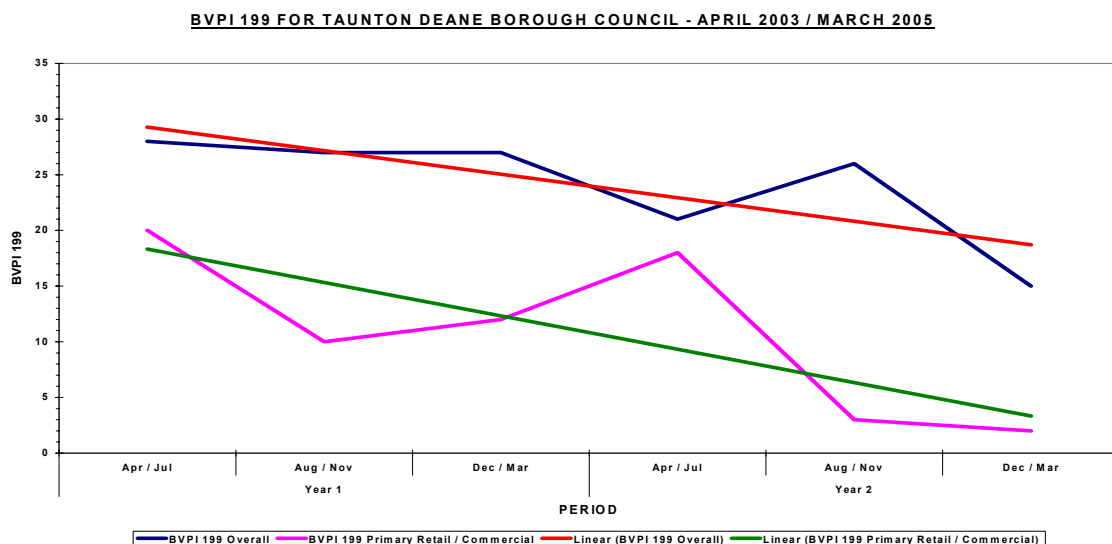
Local promotions are taking place in each of the collection areas next week to help people understand the new services and make the right choices for them.

The first bins will be delivered over the next few weeks and the first collections will take place on 23 May.

### Street Cleansing

The latest monitoring for BVPI 199 was completed in March and shows a continuing trend of decline (*that's good!*) in the cleansing index for the Borough. The monitoring covers ten standard land use types and in all areas improvements have been made over the two years the monitoring regime has been in place.

The graph below shows the continuing improvement in the overall index as well as the primary retail areas:



The cleansing service has also been modified as a response to the monitoring as a means of reducing the amount of silt and detritus. A small mechanical precinct sweeper is being hired to remove this material and to clean restricted areas.

### Public Conveniences

It is now nearly a year since the public convenience cleansing service was brought in house. This has resulted in a clear improvement in the quality of cleaning.

### River Tone Partnership

The first of what will be regular cleans of the River Tone and its banks took place over the Easter weekend by a specialist contractor Ecology Works. The cleans are funded by the Deane, the County and the Environment Agency but local firm Wyvern Waste Services provided skips and removed the collected waste.

**Councillor Mark Edwards**

**COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

**Key Performance Indicators – Housing 2004/05**

2003/04	2003/04		2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	Comment
Last Est	Actual		Budget	Q2 Rev	Actual	Bud v Act	
	1	No's in Bed & Breakfast – Families > 6 weeks			0		64 families placed
	32	No's in Bed & Breakfast - Singles			23		170 placed
£293k	£234k	Bed & Breakfast Expenditure (£000's)	£263.9k	£340.9k	£378.5k	£-37.6k	
	22	No.of temporary hostels	22		22		

**Homelessness**

**Housing**

2003/04	2003/04		2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	Comment
Last Est	Actual		Budget	Q2 Rev	Actual	Bud v Act	
131 )	19	New Homes completed – Houses	131 )		25	-95	180 in the pipeline 2005/06
)	24	New Homes completed - Flats	)		11		
	5	Private leasing properties	0		0		5 pending
	5	New lets above shops	0		0		7 pending

**RTB**

2003/04	2003/04		2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	2004/05	Comment
Last Est	Actual		Budget	Q2 Rev	Actual	Bud v Act	
90	135	Properties sold - Number	90	90	86	-4	
£3,764k	£7,457k	Properties sold – Value (£000,s)	£5,420k	£5,420k	£5,310k	-£110k	

Note: The Council can use 25% of RTB receipts



**COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL- RESOURCES**

**1 MEMBERS SERVICES**

**Broadband for Councillors**

Members have already been notified that in July last year the Resources Review Panel considered the possibility of the Council meeting the cost of Councillors subscribing to Broadband. It was accepted that the use of this Technology would help Councillors become more efficient and effective and Assist in the delivery of services.

It was agreed the Council should be prepared to pay up to £20 per month towards the cost of subscribing to Broadband. Any initial cost of upgrading to Broadband would be met by the Councillor (in the same way as we do now for second telephone lines). It is recommended that Councillors should compare service packages to identify, which provide free connection, filters and modem, transmission speeds of at least 512 kps and minimum of 1MB storage.

It is anticipated that adequate funds exist in the 2005/06 estimates to meet this expenditure. It was agreed that members would be expected to use electronic transmissions as far as practicable for dealings with the Council and that the number of second telephone lines would reduce.

**Attendance by Councillors at Conferences**

At its meeting in August last year the Review Board considered establishing a protocol for attendance by councillors at conferences. Most of the small conferences budget (£6,000) was taken up with sending 4 representatives to the annual Local Government Association Conference. The amount left over was then used, in a fairly arbitrary way, to send other Councillors on seminars and conferences.

The Board looked at finding a way to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of the budget. They favoured a suggestion that once the LGA Annual Conference had been funded (£3,200 last year), the remaining sum be divided between the political groups on the basis of proportionality. Any requests from individual Councillors for attendance at conferences and seminars would then need to be approved by the relevant Group.

Working on the 2004/05 figures the balance (£2,800) would be applied as follows:

Conservatives (57%)	£1,596
Liberal Democrats (28%)	£784
Labour (9%)	£252



Independents (6%)        £168

This protocol for attendance by Councillors at conferences will be introduced in the new financial year. Group Leaders will be advised what the overall budget for 2005/06 is and what the cost of sending delegates to the LGA Conference will be.

## **2 FINANCIAL SERVICES**

With the start of the new financial year the Financial Services Unit has started on the closedown of the Council's accounts for the 2004/05 year. During June both the final year- end position and the 2004/05 Annual Statement of Accounts will be presented to Members.

In addition work is progressing on developing the Council's Annual Efficiency Statement, which is a summary of the efficiencies secured by the Council over the last two years. This has to be submitted to Central Government during April.

Work has also recently been carried out on the financial arrangements relating to the new Audit Partnership (South Somerset, Mendip and Taunton Deane), and fundamentally changing the accounting method employed by Deane DLO, both of which started on 1 April 2005. We expect this latter change to provide the Council with much better management information on the DLO, this is particularly important when the DLO face increased competition for the work they currently do.

## **3 BENEFITS SERVICE**

The Benefits Service have received new Performance Standards from the Department for Work and Pensions that will be used in future Comprehensive Performance Assessments. The old standards included 641 targets, while the new standards have been rationalised to 19 Performance Measures and 64 enablers.

While the best the Benefits Service could hope for was 94% compliance, under the old scoring methodology was only a "Fair to Good" result, the new standards should mean an "Excellent" score in future.

Preliminary results for performance against BVPIs show improvement from the previous year against all indicators. The service will be working in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau in the coming year to maximise benefit take up from some of the most needy members of our community. Between now and the end of June, there will be a targeted Council Tax Benefit Take Up campaign to encourage claims from all liable people over pensionable age who receive Pension Credit.

## **4 REVENUE SERVICES**

- The new year billing process has been successfully completed for both Council Tax & Business Rates. All bills were issued on schedule with the Council Tax bills being printed and packed by an external contractor. This made the process far less time consuming at our end.
- The rents year-end function has been successfully completed with all new year rent notifications being issued on schedule. This is the last time that the rents year-end function will be conducted by Revenues as the rents administration function has now been passed over to Housing.
- A mail-shot was issued in early February 2005 to all Council Tax & Business Rate payers not paying by direct debit. This exercise proved extremely useful and resulted in approximately 1,000 taxpayers moving over to direct debit.
- Payment kiosks have now been installed at both the Taunton and Wellington cash offices. These are not operational as yet, as software programming is still in the process of being undertaken in order to link the machines to our cash receipting system. It is anticipated that the machines will 'go-live' in May.
- Small Business Relief – we canvassed all relevant small businesses in February. We have received approximately 1,500 applications and have been able to award relief in the majority of cases.
- Revenues & Benefits IT Replacement Project – work on the project has started and Paul Harding, the Collection Manager, has been seconded to project manage the project.
- Initial indications suggest that we have met our target for Council Tax (98%) and only fallen slightly short of our Business Rates target (99%).

## **5 CUSTOMER SERVICES**

As expected, March saw an increase in calls offered of approximately 29%; this was the result of extra calls regarding new Council Tax bills, new Rent and Benefit assessments.

The abandonment rate was 16.22%, but would have been much higher were it not for the hard work of the team. 61.48% of all calls were dealt within Customer Services. Progress is ahead of our target to achieve 80% within two years

Customer Services moved offices on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March. The team were able to continue taking calls and managing the service for the authority whilst the move took place around them as they were moved during office hours.

Work on the "Sort It!" campaign has started and we are providing both telephone and administrative support for this waste scheme. We are monitoring all forms back into the authority and dealing with cheque payments and the sending out of "caddy liners".

Our first actual year of taking calls through the MacFarlane telephone system was on 15<sup>th</sup> March, and the anniversary of the commencement of Customer Services took place on 1<sup>st</sup> April.

The enhanced revenues and benefits service went live after the end of the financial year (available to staff from 5<sup>th</sup> April 2005) and work has started on developing Environmental Health Services for Northgate

## **6 OFFICE SERVICES**

The GIS (Geographic Information Systems) team has just lost its technician. To maintain momentum on the two key projects, digitising Land Charges documentation and preparation of the Local Land & Property Gazette we have brought in agency staff for a few weeks. The team has purchased Gazetteer management software that will simplify preparation and maintenance of the LLPG and also enable integration with other systems. The E-Govt budget is funding both items.

The work done in conjunction with Members Services on electronic agenda distribution has borne fruit, and is helping to reduce the volume of paper the Council produces.

Detailed negotiations are ongoing with the County Council over the possible use of the Old Municipal Buildings as a new home for the Registration Service.

**Councillor Terry Hall**

**COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON - COMMUNICATIONS**

**COMMUNICATIONS**

**Informing Ward Members**

There has been much debate on the issue of keeping Members informed about what is happening in their wards. A Communications Project Group has been set up to review and improve internal communication amongst staff and between staff and Elected Members. Members will have the opportunity to explore different communication methods and give examples of the kind of detail they wish to be informed about at the Review Board meeting this Wednesday evening, 21 April. I would encourage all members to attend this meeting and contribute to the discussion.

**The Plain English Project**

This month we see the start of the roll out of this ongoing project. Staff will receive *Stylewriter* software and training. Hopefully we will start to see and read the difference.

**Media and Public Relations**

It is planned to provide **Media Training** to the Executive, SMT and key managers this summer – most likely during June. The Communications team is developing a Public Relations Toolkit and will be looking at the Media Protocol later in the year.

The **Press Office** receives numerous enquiries from the media on all aspects of the Council's services and issues in general and is being more proactive in feeding information to the media such as; the recycling press briefing, announcing John Clothier the new Chairman of the Taunton Advisory Board (TAB) for the Vision for Taunton, sheltered housing and we are seeing results. We must continue to sustain this momentum and ensure regular coverage on Corporate Priorities.

**A Guide to the Vision for Taunton** has now been developed in conjunction with our partners – Somerset County Council, South West of England Regional Development Agency and the Environment Agency. This is a useful and practical tool for communicating the Vision. It contains key facts and figures and includes endorsements from TDBC & SCC Council Leaders and Chief Executives; local businesses; Lucy Ball on behalf of the Town Centre Partnership; John Clothier, Chairman of the TAB and Adrian Flook, MP and will soon be available for use by Members and Officers.

Comments from a member of the public made recent meeting of the Strategic Planning & Transportation Review Panel held at St Andrews Church hall in March to debate the Taunton Sub Area Study gave us a clear example of how people rely on our local papers for information and thus support the importance of what we are trying to do. We were specifically asked for information to be put in the Taunton times and the Gazette as proof that we were listening to the feedback. A press release and statement on this very sensitive subject was issued and comments made at this meeting have been posted on the Council's web site.

The Press Office/Public Relations team continues to support the planning and legal teams and speak to the press regularly about the Gypsy site at **Oxen Lane, North Curry**. We still receive a great deal of media interest and anticipate there will be increased attention from both local and national media when the Enforcement Enquiry begins on 7 June.

### **Deane Dispatch**

The next issue will be published in June and we envisage there will be lots of positive, people friendly stories to promote our Corporate Priorities.

**Councillor Gwyneth Leighton**

**COUNCIL MEETING 19 APRIL 2005**  
**REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS –COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

**CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)**

The March meeting of the Partnership looked at the outcomes from the spending plans for 2004/05 and the draft spending plans for 2005/06.

Many of the schemes allocated funding from the CDRP this year focus on preventative work with young people.

The Youth Offending Team will receive funding for its Prevent and Deter Strand, which targets young people at risk of offending.

Vibe Sport, a new project funded by the CDRP last year and delivered by Tone Leisure in conjunction with the Youth Service, has been very successful in attracting young people into a programme of sports and activities at Wellsprings Sports Centre on Friday evenings. It is very good news that this scheme has been granted £25,000 from the CDRP for this current year and is now looking to expand to Blackbrook.

Night Hoops and the Blackbrook Youth Gym also will also receive funding to provide sporting activities for young people.

Other schemes funded include: Validate UK which provides proof of age cards to all new year 11 and sixth form students and the Promise mentoring scheme, which provides support for volunteer mentors who work with young people who are at risk.

The Home Improvement Agency will receive £15,000 for anti-crime measures in the home and funding will also support the PCT in providing a co-ordinator to link the different agencies that may visit people's homes to give advice on safety and security.

The Drugs Action Team will receive funding for further drugs treatment provision and £20,000 is allocated to improve the monitoring of CCTV at the control centre in Paul Street.

Full details of the proposed Partnership spending for 2005/06 can be obtained from the Community Safety Team.

As reported to the Community Leadership Panel last week, I am also pleased to say that a relocatable CCTV camera has been purchased with CDRP funds. It can be fixed to a building or a pole and needs a power source. The aim is to help identify and tackle anti-social behaviour and it is proposed to make it available to Parish Council or Community Groups where there is evidence of anti-social behaviour. A protocol for its use is currently being worked up. Meanwhile, I have suggested that a trial could be run at

Wellington Sports Centre where it would be possible to give the camera a thorough test.

## LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP)

You may have seen in the press that I recently handed over the chairmanship of the LSP to David Smith, Chief Executive of the Community Council. I see this as an important step in the development of the partnership which establishes the principle of a rotating chairmanship. I am very pleased that David, who has been a member of the LSP since it was formed in 2000, has agreed to take it on and wish him every success in this challenging role. I have assured him that I will continue to support the partnership in every way I can.

There is a possibility that Somerset Strategic Partnership will be negotiating a Local Area Agreement with the Government Office for the South West during the course of the year. This agreement 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. It is important that the district wide partnerships have a genuine voice in this process.

It is worth noting here that the funding for the Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Partnership that I referred to above will, as from next year, be channelled through the Somerset Strategic Partnership Safer and Stronger Communities Fund

## COUNCILLOR REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight an issue that came up in the Community Leadership Panel last week. The panel looked at the list of outside bodies on which the council has a representative and also at how links between the council and those bodies can be improved. There is concern that at the moment there is very little feedback from meetings of outside bodies. The panel recommended that councillors should be asked to submit reports at least annually for inclusion in the Weekly Bulletin on the activities of outside organisations on which they represent the council. This would have the benefit of raising awareness of the activities of the many admirable organisations with which we have links, and I would ask councillors to make every effort to do this.

**Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris**