

Part II – Reports from the Executive

COUNCIL MEETING 19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

How the year slips by, the longest day has passed so the days are becoming shorter as is the time for the budget setting process for 2006/07 to commence. The first meetings are booked in order that we may review where we are and consider what we have to do. This will be building on the excellent work carried out last year which informed the 2005/06 budget setting in February. I mention this to illustrate how little time there is between setting of one budget and commencing the next, it is almost a continual cycle.

The process commences this year against the backdrop of informed predictions that Local Government finance will suffer a huge “black hole” of a £1.5 billion shortfall across the land in terms of revenue support grant. Should we not get any increase, or worse still, a decrease, this will make the process of providing a balanced budget even more challenging than usual. Whatever happens, maintaining the excellent services we presently provide with only a modest increase in Council Tax is an absolute priority of our administration.

Having recently attended the LGA Annual Conference in Harrogate the question of local government funding and our responsibilities were major topics and is, I feel, adequate illustration of the pressures all councils feel from the centralised command and control policies emanating from government. The LGA have carried out considerable research into the funding for Local Authorities and they are lobbying Government hard for solutions to the perceived £1.5 billion shortfall in funding which they feel will result in a very low increase in Revenue Support Grant of only 1.5% average. Based on previous settlements this has to be bad news for all local authorities hence my concern flagged up above that we may suffer a decrease in real terms as we have not previously been awarded the average quoted by Government.

As an indication of the possible cost pressures we may experience I set out below the increased cost pressures that we experienced when setting the 2005/06 budget which highlighted my concerns then. The figures may vary heading to heading but I have no doubts the overall sum could be similar.

Recycling revenue costs	£301K
Increase in wages and salaries	£350K
Inflationary price increases	£67K
Leisure support and debt repayment	£96K
Civil contingencies bill	£25K
Extra costs of pensions	<u>£164K</u>
Total	£1,003K

Obviously a lot of work is currently ongoing to provide the actual figures we will be working with but thought it worth flagging up based on the information gained

at Conference. Based on the uplift being predicted this would result in an increase only in the order of £102K.

Back to truly local issues which directly affect our community;

Gipsies and Travellers

The Inquiry into the appeal against an enforcement notice was conducted in early June and I compliment our officers on the huge amount of preparatory work carried out which allowed an extremely robust case to be presented to the Appeal Inspector. This was supported by a separate exercise running in parallel to set up a housing needs survey of itinerants, and searching for suitable sites to meet any need subsequently defined. This has already resulted in us negotiating with Somerset County Council to lease their Otterford camp site which has scope for an increase in size by six caravan pitches, a planning application has already been lodged and we await the final decision after the usual consultation process.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister consultation paper that we responded to recently has not yet been finalized or the results of the consultation process published. It is as a result of this document that we decided to act on the provision of sites although it has been a requirement of the Housing Act 2002 to carry out housing needs surveys on the itinerant population. It is becoming absolutely essential to be able to demonstrate reasonable provision of camp sites within the Deane, allied to a housing needs survey, if we are to stand any chance of preventing the unauthorised and premeditated occupation of land as occurred at North Curry.

As regards the Oxen Lane Inquiry the Inspector has been directed to report recommendations to the ODPM, not issue a decision letter direct as would be usual. This recommendation is expected to be made about mid to late July and we then await the final decision of the ODPM. Some positive news relates to Taunton Deane's refusal of the planning application last December for which, if an appeal were to be lodged, it had to be done within six months. An appeal was lodged with only three days to run before the deadline and the Inspector has decided that sufficient evidence has been collected during the Enforcement Inquiry recently held that will enable recommendations to be given on both the enforcement and planning appeal. This will avoid the need for yet another protracted and costly appeal process which has to be good news.

Wellington in Bloom

I was delighted to read that it is intended to tour the Cornhill area when the judges visit for their annual inspection of Wellington. Compared to the dreadful state of Cornhill only two years ago, after years of neglect, this clearly demonstrates the value of positive and constructive partnership working that was initiated in order to improve what had become an eyesore right in the middle of Wellington. Much remains to be done but a huge vote of thanks to the

working party and this must give them confidence to continue with what must be a very difficult task ahead.

Taunton Vision

The first tangible steps have been taken towards the physical implementation of our regeneration plans for Taunton. In my last report I commented on the establishment of the Taunton Advisory Board with John Clothier in the capacity of independent chairman. By the beginning of August we should have in place full time Project Director and Project Manager to carry forward the exciting project ahead of us. This team will be supplemented by additional staff as and when needed. On the ground we have seen the commencement of the approach road through the old station approach road to access the East goods yard in preparation for commencement of residential and employment development in that area.

To deal with Culture and Heritage a Sub Group to the Advisory Board has now been set up responsible for culture which met for the first time in June. Members of the Group are Ian Franklin, Anne Curtis (Chair), Tom Mayberry, Sebastian Petit, Juliette Dickinson and Peter Anderson. This has been born out of the Cultural Quarter Consortium Working Party. We are also discussing with the voluntary sector how best their needs and aspirations can be met within the whole Vision process.

The County Cricket Club are anticipating imminently, if not already done so, to be able to instruct consultants to commence a thorough evaluation of their plans to totally redevelop the existing ground and buildings so that one day international matches can be hosted. Besides this they wish to enhance their training and community facilities so they may improve income and secure their place as the jewel in Taunton's crown. In my view we must assist where reasonably possible to assist with their development aspirations to allow them to ensure their future on the existing site.

As is noted in Cllr Bishops report the market site planning application at J26, Chelston, has hopefully received a significant boost for its chances of success because the Highways Agency have removed their previous objection to the site on transport grounds. This now clears the way for final consideration by Government Office SW who hopefully will decide not to call in the application and allow us to determine in accordance with the Planning Committee recommendation of approval. Clearance of the existing livestock market site will bring forward the single most significant plot of land in the whole regeneration process to allow redevelopment to commence in earnest.

Joint Venture Studies With Somerset CC for Integrated Service Provision

We are just commencing in earnest the necessary studies to evaluate the feasibility and worth of entering into a joint venture agreement with SCC and an independent external partner for the provision of back office services which each authority carries on separately at present. I would stress, this is not

privatisation or unification by the back door, it is a genuine attempt to evaluate the benefits that will, or will not, accrue to each authority and of course the benefits that may flow from it for both our customers and staff. The object is to ascertain if substantial up front investment in information technology by a private partner can provide much more efficient services in the short term, at less cost in the longer term, thus repaying the very large up front investment that would be required. I would like to stress to all staff and Members, despite the rumours that abound, this is not a foregone conclusion and is yet to be fully evaluated which includes consultation with staff.

Communications and Public Relations

This is not normally my remit but having just attended the LGA Conference and attended a presentation by Ben Page, Director, MORI Social Research Institute, it was a fascinating and revealing insight. As some of you will know, I have for some time been very concerned that we are not properly promoting ourselves as a Council with the result that people are unaware of the services we carry out on their behalf. This also results in a total lack of awareness on the part of our customers of the different services carried out by SCC and TDBC and indeed who they approach and how to access the different services we offer. I have said for some time that different departments operate with a “silo” mentality, busy developing strategy or policy but not adequately sharing it across the organisation or externally. Considerable changes have occurred and are continuing, which I applaud and thank the departments concerned, but we still have a long way to go if we are to be recognised as a transparent and open organisation that allows the best two way communication with its customers, between departments and members.

Ben Page highlighted a great number of valid points with pointers how to do better which I summarize as follows.

- A 50% difference exists between the best and worst satisfaction ratings of District Councils which is unacceptable and unreasonable.
- We have many target audiences and we need to consider and identify an appropriate strategy for each, not to assume one size fits all.
- Good communications has to be embedded in an organisation and it is a long term process, but, if successful, worth it in the end.
- The public has a very low awareness of Local Government, 5% only which is a terrible indictment when you consider at least 4% of the population work for local authorities.
- The more the public know about what we do for them the higher regard they have for us.
- Implement direct communication and ensure high priority is given to the street scene, making it safe and liveable, these are essential drivers for increasing the regard for the Council and for greater awareness.
- Ensure we have a highly visible cleaning presence with strong links to the Council, ie ensuring the dust carts are kept clean and conspicuously branded as working for the Council.

- Know your “grot spots” around the Deane, establish why and take action to provide long term remedy.
- Deliver to the door of all an easy to read annual A to Z guide of Council services.
- Branding, provide an effective and consistent linkage of the Council brand to services provided.
- Last but not least, good internal communications are essential.

Not only must we have good internal communications but we must present ourselves externally to our target audiences in a manner that is meaningful and relevant. This will require effort on the part of all to fully support a process that is presently ongoing but if the above is to be achieved, has a long way to go.

Finally, I noted with great pleasure an article in the paper that Mrs Pearl Buttle who established amongst her many achievements, the Helping Hands organisation, Wellington, to help others, is to be formally recognised by the Police for her great work in the community. May I add my personal congratulations as I have long had the highest regard and respect for Pearl and her achievements despite great adversity by way of a lack of understanding from some and the personal sacrifice made because of her own ill health. An award justly earned, well done.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING 19 JULY 2005

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

Spatial Planning

Spatial planning is now proceeding speedily and the Regional Assembly has agreed a programme with the aim of agreeing a submission draft RSS by the end of the year..Six workshop events have been planned between June and August and they are seeking Formal 4/4 advice (advice from the County Council)

Local Authority members and planners face a difficult task over the next few years as they explore the role of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and Local Development Framework (LDF) in delivering the environmental, economic and community agenda .Lisa Simcock, an official of the ODPM recently stated that “Dialogue. Consensus and partnership are the keys to the success of the system”.

The timescale and the resources needed to respond to the requests from the Regional Assembly for information and comments, and to produce the LDF has lead to considerable increases in work for planners and this view has been given additional weight by the recently appointed planning minister, Yvette Cooper , who in a recent interview stated that she was aware of the importance of adequately funding the system. “We have increased resources for planning departments because they were under-resourced for many years”, she says. “We were right to do that. Nobody should be in any doubt about how critical planners are to all the aims of sustainable communities, whether it involves small town regeneration, the development of the Thames Gateway or inner city retail developments. In every case the work of planners is crucial,” she acknowledges.

The Planning Delivery Grant will assist in ensuring that we have sufficient funding for staff to carry out the additional duties, and funding for consultants to carry out studies necessary to support the LDF . Ministers cannot confirm that Planning Delivery Grant will become permanent as decisions are made through the comprehensive spending review but as the ODPM has stated that the progress in determining major planning applications has been one of its main successes of the past year it seems more that likely that it will continue – The report also states “Through incentivisation and funding, we have enabled local authorities to handle 40 per cent more applications than they did a decade ago and to process them faster”.

Taunton Sub Area Strategy

The County Council, as a statutory consultee, is required to prepare formal advice for the Regional Assembly as to the matters the RA ought to include in the Regional Spatial Strategy with respect to the Taunton sub area.

The County Council has also been commissioned by the RA to provide “First detailed proposals” with respect to the housing allocations that should be incorporated in the RSS for each District in Somerset, for the Taunton sub area and for Yeovil.

The Regional Assembly have prepared a Strategy document for discussion with regional stakeholders, and it proposes that the Taunton strategy area should include Bridgwater and Wellington. The Regional Assembly draft strategy proposes that a growth level of RPG 10 plus 25% should be adopted – The Taunton study proposed that a growth level of RPG 10 was appropriate. If it is finally decided that the appropriate growth level is RPG 10 plus 25% the number of additional homes to be provided by 2026 increases from 15000 to about 18000.

The proposed Taunton strategy in the Regional Assembly Document expressly deals with Taunton/Bridgwater/Wellington as a functional group of towns. However, in policy terms Taunton is listed as a “Strategically Significant” town under draft RSS Policy B, and Bridgwater as an “Other Town” under draft Policy C. Wellington is not specifically identified in any policy..

The County Council Executive Board, at its meeting on 13th July, is being recommended :-

To note the principal features of the Strategy document issued for discussion by the Regional Assembly, including the proposal for a spatial strategy for the Taunton area, and the concerns expressed in the report with respect to the appropriate levels of growth for Taunton .

To agree that the appropriate strategic planning framework for the Taunton sub area at the regional level comprises the Taunton, Bridgwater and Wellington group of towns, and that the formal advice of the County Council (“First Detailed Proposals”) to the Regional Assembly in September will be based on written proposals for such an area, supported by a Key Diagram based on that attached to the report as annex 2.

To note that housing and employment growth figures also will need to be prepared for the town of Yeovil, together with housing distributions for the Somerset Districts. I will update members at the Council meeting of the action taken by the Somerset Executive Board at its meeting on 13 th July.

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Members have been provided with a copy of the SCI and I hope that they will make their comments – The closing date for comments is the end of August and perhaps history will be made when every Member submits his/her comments to Mark Leeman. Summary leaflets are being printed and will be issued to every councillor.

The SCI establishes a consultation strategy for the preparation of the LDF documents and the consideration of planning applications. It also states how we shall work in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

Documents have been sent to Parish and Town Councils, LSP, community fieldworkers, community groups, statutory consultees, planning consultants etc. Mark Leeman will be making arrangements to meet key individuals in ethnic minority groups, voluntary groups, the business sector, disability groups etc, and he will ask the key individuals to distribute the summary leaflets.

The SCI proposes a series of action to assist community involvement with the planning process and the dates and venues of meetings with the Councils has been sent to the Clerks of All Parish and Town Councils – The meetings are planned during September.

Chelston Cattle Market

A letter was received on 4th July that withdraws the Highways Agency's direction and we now await clearance from the Secretary of State before we can issue the planning permission.

Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2

The provisional LTP sets out the County Council's overall vision and strategy for improving transport in the County and covers the period 2006-2011. It is required by statute and is the mechanism by which the government determines financial allocations for local authorities transport programmes. The LTP guidance requires the new plan to meet Government priorities for tackling congestion and pollution, and improving safety and accessibility. The plan should also deliver regional priorities such as planned growth for Taunton, and includes proposals for two major scheme bids for the Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road and the "Third Way" Relief Road. The provisional LTP is being considered by the County Council at its meeting on 20th July 2005.

Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING 19TH JULY 2005

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

SPORT

1. Swimming Pool Consultation - an extensive piece of consultation involving both pool users and non users is drawing to a close. The work is designed to inform the future of swimming provision in Taunton and has been carried out for the Council by Market Research UK Ltd. Just over 1000 people will have been interviewed as part of the research.

2. Facilities Needs Assessment - TDBC is working with 3 of the other District Councils and the County Council to ascertain the future sporting requirements of the residents of the County and the Deane. This involves a complete audit of all built facilities in terms of both quality and quantity. Once local standards have been set we will be in a position to plan where and how to provide for future sports facilities.

3. Tennis Centre - TDBC has applied for planning permission to cover 2 of the outdoor tennis facilities at Blackbrook Pavilion with a lightweight framed fabric structure. This will enable further use of the successful tennis centre at Blackbrook. Framed fabric construction is quicker to construct, lightweight and cheaper than traditional building methods. Funding is through TDBC, the LTA and other partners.

4. Vivary Chalet In The Park - work is scheduled to start on the long awaited Chalet In the Park in September 2005 and is expected to take up to 2 months to complete. The building will provide changing for golfers, a golf course reception and cafe areas.

5. Beech Grove Playing Field - work continues to bring the 'abandoned' Beech Grove Playing Fields in Wellington back into public use. The field has been unused for many years and the intention is for TDBC to lease the field from the County Council and in turn convert it into a Rugby Pitch for use by the adjacent club.

PARKS

Victoria Park MUGA and Play Area

Final details are being put together to create a new multi-use games area and play area in Victoria Park. Five companies tendered for the design and build contract. After consultation with potential user groups a design was shortlisted. The Council have been working with the winning company to finalise details which will be subject to planning permission. If permission is granted work should start on site 4-6 weeks.

Wellington Greenspace Forum

The first meeting of the Wellington Greenspace Forum took place on the 7 June and was well attended by various groups and organisations that have an interest in the greenspaces of the town. The group considered some key aspects of greenspace provision, including why we need greenspaces, feedback from the parks and open spaces strategy, information about the green flag award and the aims of the greenspace forum. Future meetings are planned to look at how we should invest in our greenspaces for the local community, especially youth.

Blackthorn Gardens

Work has started on improvements to the existing play and multi-use games facility at Blackthorn Gardens. New play equipment will be installed to make a new area for toddlers and equipment will be added to provide interest for the junior area. The existing ball court has been reduced by half to make room for the improvements. This is the result of consultation with local residents and young people. £3,000 was funded by the local Somerset County Councillor C. Gordon and the Police.

Events

The summer season of Vivary Park Sunday bandstand concerts has run successfully from June 5 and continues until August 28.

The summer edition of the Deano, giving details of activities for children in the main school holidays, has been sent to all primary school aged children in Taunton Deane and has also been published on the Taunton Deane Borough Council web site.

The West Country Theatre Company gave a lively open air performance of The Taming of the Shrew in Vivary Park on Wednesday 29 June.

Amazing Events will be providing the tribute band and proms concerts in Vivary Park on Saturday 13 August and Sunday 14 August. The concert on 13 August will be a tribute to both the music of The Beatles and The Rolling Stones featuring two of the country's top tribute bands. The classical Proms style concert will take place on Sunday 14 August and will feature Jane Gilchrist and the Bath Philharmonia Orchestra. The programme will have a sea theme to celebrate the Trafalgar Anniversary. Jane Gilchrist is a local soloist who recently won the "Operatunity" TV competition.

The Flower Show run by the Taunton Floricultural and Horticultural Society, will take place on 3rd and 4th August.

The world-renowned Moscow State Circus, regarded by many as the world's greatest circus is due to visit Vivary Park from 13 – 18 September.

TONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES

Recent Events

19th June - South West Schools Gymnastics Competition, attracted nearly 250 at Wellsprings Leisure Centre.

25th June - Tone Leisure Gymnastics Competition had approximately 200 participants at Wellsprings Leisure Centre.

25th June - Tone Leisure School Swimming Gala, was held at Wellington Sports Centre with competitors from St. James Street Baths and Wellington Swimskools.

Mini Golf Launch at Vivary Park

The new Mini Golf area at Vivary Park Golf Course opened for business on Saturday, 14th May. The area has attracted an average of 400 visitors per week since opening, with a virtually even split between adult and junior use.

Some 400-500 people attended the official opening and launch day on Saturday, 4th June, which saw Posh and Becks look-alikes performing the formal opening duties.

Forthcoming Events

Giant Camps

A comprehensive programme of children's activities starts on Monday, 25th July. The themed weeks include:

- North America Week
- The Great Outdoors
- At the Movies

A wide variety of specialist camps is on offer including:

- Tri-Golf
- Horse Riding Workshop
- Cycling Awareness
- Health and Beauty Workshop

Camps are run at Blackbrook Pavilion, Wellington Sports Centre and Wellsprings Leisure Centre.

Wellsprings Events

16th July - Swinging Sixties Evening with The Searchers and The Rapiers

14th July - Chas 'n' Dave

9th September - The Wurzels

14th October - Jethro

2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th, 16th and 17th December - Big Christmas Party nights

ARTS

Research and development

The creative industries are 8 times more significant in terms of GDP than agriculture in Somerset. The Economic Impact Study of the Creative Industries in Somerset summary findings reveals the extent that Creative Industries are involved in regeneration.

The Culture Group for the Vision for Taunton met for the first time in June. (Members of the group are Ian Franklin, Anne Curtis – chair, Tom Mayberry, Sebastian Petit, Juliette Dickenson and Peter Anderson).

Key Strategic Organisations

The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre has embraced the challenge of reduced public investment over the next 3 years with an invigorated board who embrace the Vision for Taunton. The new chairman, Richard Crowe, is leading a working party looking at further income generation including better use of inside and outside space. Marketing and staff costs have been reduced and expenditure costs are being more closely aligned to income. A new development director has been appointed to lead The Brewhouse through the next crucial years, while Glenys Gill will remain part time as artistic director until March 2006 to ensure smooth transition.

(Graham Cox and Roly England have been co-opted onto the board and are members of the working party. Graham has been matched with the Brewhouse as part of an Arts in Business placement scheme, and is the new product development manager at United Biscuits. Roly England has also been co-opted on in a voluntary capacity for his music industry and business experience. Roly is also economic development officer for TDBC)

Take Art! continue to run their Village Hall Performance Scheme, Dance Somerset and 'Breaking the Sound Barrier' – a multi-cultural youth music project based across Taunton Deane and West Somerset, as well as a number of projects.

Somerset Film and Video and SPAEDA have set up a community film club – mainly for younger people to make and show films. Their first screening on Monday 5th July in Wellington was a great start.

Somerset Art Week are hosting the Blackdown Area arts development worker, and have secured further funding for a part time temporary marketing officer.

The Somerset Arts Promoters are planning a showcase for September and establishing a 'Made in Somerset' brand for theatre.

A new training bursary scheme called 'Achieving Brilliance' has been set up by the Somerset Arts Partnership for managers at the key arts organisations.

NET-WORKING

I attended the **LGA Rural Commission Policy Review Group**. This updated us on the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill published on 19th May 2005. In order to improve delivery of rural policy and funds, the Countryside Agency is being divided into two. One part becomes the Commission for Rural Communities. Its job is representation, provision of information and advice and monitoring. The other part together with English Nature and part of DEFRA becomes Natural England. The aim is to provide an integrated approach to land management with environmental issues and also links in with the diversified rural economy, agricultural practices, a growing tourism sector and the health agenda. We also heard about Local Area Agreements.

The **Quantock JAC Field Day** included a visit to a new co-operative being set up for marketing local produce. This is a project supported partly by Somerset Food Links who in another district are doing good work on the health agenda with food boxes.

The **Brewhouse** held a well attended public meeting and the general atmosphere was most positive with many constructive and interesting suggestions emerging from the audience. It is clear that the Brewhouse has an important and vital role not only in “doing theatre” in its widest sense but also providing a base or venue for the artistic and cultural life of Taunton Deane.

I attended the official opening of the **Taunton Deane Croquet Club** situated at Taunton Vale Sports Club in Gipsy Lane Staplegrove. It welcomes all ages as members for a very modest fee and provides a very family-friendly sport. The Taunton Vale Sports Club is an example of the multi-sports club which is now being promoted by the government and Sport England.

Councillor Mrs Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 19th JULY 2005

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

Tourism

The interest in our 'Heart of Somerset' Tourism Guide continues to be very substantial. Over 37000 copies have now gone out and the TICs have already used 6000 more so far this year as compared to the previous twelve months. Response rates to the adverts have also increased. Our new tourism web-site www.heartofsomerset.com will be launched in the next 2 months. Our existing web-site has won acclaim from Google. We have also increased our overseas marketing, in 2005/06 to work alongside Bristol International Airport and the new routes it has set up. The Taunton Deane area Heritage Open Days scheme will take place 8 – 11 September, when historic properties will be open to the public free of charge. Included for the first time this year is the Magistrates' Court in Taunton. Work is progressing on the Ten Parish Festival guide, 10- 18th September. This marks a big step in promoting local arts and industry and it is hoped it will attract many people to the area.

TIC

The TIC business continues to grow, with a substantial increase of income against this time last year. They have taken stands at many events to promote themselves which have proved to be very worth while. They are now agents for theatre tokens and are the only e-agents in the South West for Ticket Master. National Express has asked the TIC to trial the launch of a new e-booking system for them. In addition to acting as agents for many ticket sales, research is also being conducted into customer perceptions of the office. Using the results of this, the TIC hopes to further improve its profitability and the quality of service it provides.

Rural Regeneration

A new farmers' market has been set up in Dulverton, and we are working with the town to evaluate any concerns. We are assisting with a number of Food Festivals that will be well worth a visit; some a little outside of our area, but still promoting our rural businesses. A consultant has been appointed to evaluate an inward investment strategy for Wellington, as part of the Innovative Market Towns Initiative. They are looking at the possibility of establishing a learning centre to improve the skills' base of the town and improve employment opportunities for everyone.

The ADO has organised and run a very successful and obviously much needed series of IT courses. In June SWERDA and Somerset Business Link launched the South West 'Rural Economic Gateway' (REG). This will basically offer two services – a telephone technical information support line, linking in with the research community, and secondly support for group working. Funding will be available to help achieve collaborative goals to

improve business performance. However, REG offers no on-farm support and business advice on a one-on-one basis as Taunton Deane does. In accordance with the REG objective of encouraging group working we have piloted our first group of some 15 members and are now pursuing REG funding.

The Taunton Farmers' market has done particularly well to win English Nature's 'Best Farmers' Market of the Year' award. This was part of the 'Somerset Life' Food and Drink awards. This is particularly interesting as it is a recognition of excellence at every level.

Community Arts

Stoke St Gregory Youth Theatre are to be congratulated on being invited to perform at the Halifax Playhouse for the National Finals and I am delighted that Taunton Deane was able to give assistance to enable them to take part.

The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, with a Working Party chaired by a new Chairman, Richard Crowe, is looking at further income generation. In particular, the Working Party is looking at the usage of the available space, reduction of marketing and staff costs, aligning expenditure more closely to income generation.

Asset Management

Tender documents are being prepared for both Blackdown Business Park and Frobisher Way, both still on schedule.

The design for the DDA work for the OMB has been completed and tenders will be sought shortly.

Work on the Crematorium extension and DDA work was delayed by a week at the start of the programme, it is now expected to complete the works by the 27th of this month.

It is hoped later this year to have the bike park operating again with a new partner who will be able to provide continuous operation for a number of years.

Economic Development

The Taunton Vision Delivery Team headed by Ian Franklin have set up a number of project groups – Community Relations skills and learning, Culture and Leisure, PR and Marketing, Highways Transport and Car parking, Flood Alleviation, and Section 106 Planning. Whilst all these areas knit together to cover the work that needs to be done, the planning and scheduling is taking up more and more of M Green's time. Come the 1st August, he will be full time working on the Vision delivery. His input to the Economic Development team has been much valued, his advice and guidance to the team much appreciated.

In the very near future work will start on the access to the new Wiveliscombe Business Park, hopefully to include all the access work before inclement weather later in the year.

Taunton Town Centre Company

This is now well established under the new Chairmanship of Frances Cornish. One of the first items to come back to this Council has been a proposal for an ice rink to act as a major attraction (USP) for Taunton during the Christmas period. Letters are going out to schools in the near future so that they may pre-book sessions.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING – 19TH July 2005.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Licensing Unit

At the last full Council meeting on the 19th of April the number of applications made in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 were 8 personal licence applications out of an expected 750, and no applications for premises licences, out of an expected 500. The figures are now 184 applications for a personal licence, 74 of which have been granted. There have been 112 applications for a premises licence, 28 of which have been granted.

The licensing unit has actively encouraged all Licensees, both in writing and by using the media, to submit applications sooner rather than later. To date 12 open days have taken place where persons applying for a licence could have a personal consultation with a member of the licensing unit to assist in the application process. The licensing unit has conducted a series of open presentations where advice was given on how to apply for a licence and more recently letters were hand delivered to the hard to reach groups such as restaurants and take-aways. The support to such businesses is particularly important because many of the proprietors do not speak English as a first language. The local newspapers have also played an important part in trying to get the message across; there have been numerous articles and further advice in the Public Notices sections.

On Wednesday 29 June a further letter was sent to all premises who have not applied for a licence, offering further assistance by way of numerous completed example application forms on the Taunton Deane Borough Council's website. The letter also offered a further open day where prospective applicants can book a personal consultation with a licensing officer who will provide help to complete the forms and check completed applications to ensure that they are correct.

The Second Appointed Day has now been set, it is 24 November 2005, this is the date when the new licences come in to effect and all old licences cease to have effect.

A decision has now been made; that Carnivals will not need to be licensed in accordance with the 2003 Act.

1.2 Health and Safety Team

Local Authorities and the Health and Safety Executive working together.

Taunton Deane Borough Council has been requested by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to sign and commit to a local "Statement of Intent" with regard to local authorities and the HSE working together. The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has set a new strategic direction for health and safety enforcement in Great Britain. The Health and Safety Executive and Local Authority Environmental Health departments share the enforcement responsibility for health and safety legislation on behalf of the HSC. The new strategy includes these two parties working more closely together in effective partnership locally, regionally and nationally, to a common set of goals and standards, committed to focusing resources on agreed health and safety priorities. The aim is to minimise harm to those in the workplace or those affected by workplace activities, and contribute to the health and well-being of local communities. A full report on this matter will be brought to members in due course.

Safety of Furniture Activities (SOFA) Project.

As part of the above initiative officers have been working on planning and implementing a joint LA and HSE project across the South West looking to address the retail distribution and delivery of furniture. This project involves local authority and HSE Inspectors working together to address an activity that at different times involves both LA and HSE enforcement responsibility for retail premises and transport undertakings respectively. This work across the South West is in part based on a similar local project undertaken in Taunton Deane during 2004.

Backs! 2005

The HSE is running a major national initiative this summer focussed on reducing the incidence of back pain at work. Currently manual handling is a major cause of back injury. One in five of those who suffer work-related ill health has back pain - bad both for people and for business. The overall aim of the Backs! 2005 initiative is to promote the use of lifting and handling aids as a means of reducing the incidence of back injuries at work.

The main phase of the Backs! 2005 campaign will involve a nationally co-ordinated publicity, education and inspection programme. The programme is being developed in partnership with Local Authorities and other stakeholders and will help encourage innovative solutions to musculo-skeletal disorder (MSD) issues. The Health and Safety Team are currently trying to arrange a local campaign using material supplied by the HSE.

1.3 Food Safety Team

Foodo Launch.

The Foodo Board game was launched to schools in May. The game, developed by Food Safety Team with sponsorship from the Food Standards Agency, is aimed at 10 – 13 year olds. Based on Cluedo, the aim is to identify locations and causes of a food poisoning outbreak. The game has been taken up enthusiastically among Taunton's Schools and has attracted much interest from other Local Authorities. It has received both local and national publicity.



Formal Caution.

As an alternative to prosecution, a town centre store was offered and accepted a Formal Caution for contraventions of food hygiene legislation. The Caution related to poor standards of cleanliness in a kitchen.

Emergency Prohibition Notice.

Due to poor standards of cleanliness in a bakery, an Emergency Prohibition Notice was served, requiring the premises to close for two days while thorough cleaning took place. Standards had improved sufficiently for the Notice to be lifted after this period, but prosecution is still being considered. In line with normal practice, the case was brought before Taunton Deane Magistrates for formal acknowledgement that service of the Notice had been justified. The Council was successful at this hearing.

1.4 Environmental Protection Team

Seagull Control.

Control measures against seagulls in the town centre, consisting of an egg-oiling exercise, have now been completed for this season. Approximately 150 eggs were oiled, out of which only 6 failed to prevent hatching. Feedback from residents and local business proprietors has been very positive, with those in the worst affected areas reporting a great improvement. A final report is awaited from the Contractor who carried out the programme.

National Poop Scoop Week.

The event was celebrated with media interest centred on the efforts to clean up Cinder Lane in Taunton. This included attendance by the Team's Dog Warden to encourage all dog owners to clean up after their pets.

Enforcement:

- i) The Proprietor of a Fish and Chip Shop in Galmington appealed successfully against an Odour Abatement Notice served by the Council. The Justices held that although the Notice was justified, the proprietor was using the best practicable means (BPM) to prevent odours. This represents a full legal defence and only the Courts can determine BPM. Accordingly, although the Notice was quashed, no costs were awarded against the Council.
- ii) A private foul sewer of pitch fibre construction serving 10 properties in Ramshorn Green and Manor Orchard, Taunton, is to be repaired following the serving of Building Act notices.
- iii) An Abatement Notice has been served on a person responsible for causing nuisance from a bonfire, in Knapp.

2.0 WASTE SERVICES.

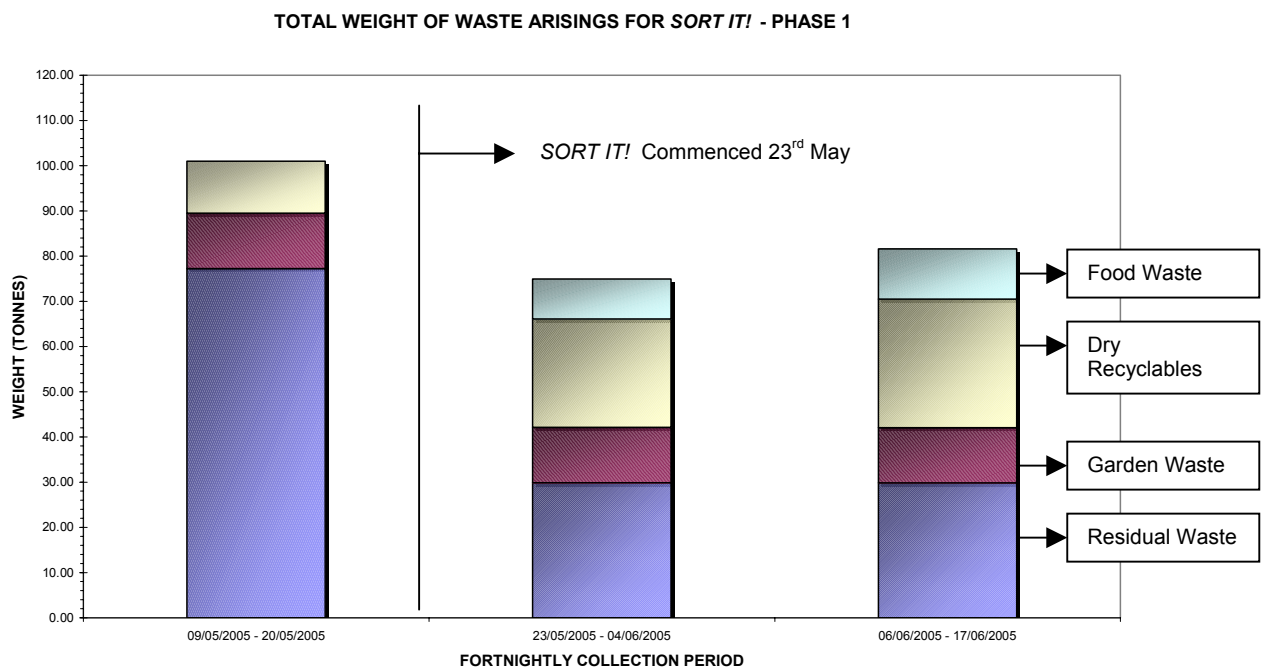
WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

The new *SORT IT!* services started in South Road, Trull, Killams, Rockwell Green and Kingston Road in late May. The weekly collections of recyclable materials and food waste change the emphasis of the services from refuse to recycling and perhaps make it a little harder to throw things away! The new services have been a great success with relatively few complaints received. In fact, customer services have had more problems dealing with the number of requests and orders for additional services.

SORT IT! sees the introduction of the wheeled bin into the Deane for the first time. These are available to suitable properties for householders who want them to store their refuse over the two week cycle of collections.

The services are definitely not “one size fits all”. Different sized containers are available for large families or small households and assisted services are available for those that need them. The underlying concept is to offer convenient, frequent, flexible and reliable services to the customer as a means of driving recycling performance without incurring excessive cost.

The success of *SORT IT!* can be seen in the graph below. Overall waste arisings have gone down and the proportion of waste that is recycled or composted has increased dramatically. The overall recycling rate is approximately 60% and although this data relates to only the 3000 properties included in phase 1 it places Taunton Deane amongst the highest performing authorities in the UK.



The Waste Services Unit are now planning Phases 2 and 3 of *SORT IT!* These will be rolled out to 25,000 properties between October and December. In order to accommodate this huge workload temporary arrangements have been made to transfer the client side and strategic management functions of the Streetscene services and public conveniences to the DLO until the end of this financial year.

3.0 TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM

3.1 Crematorium Organ

Work has begun repairing and renovating the crematorium organ. The crematorium is very fortunate to have such a quality instrument in its chapel. Having been installed when the building was built in 1963 this is its first major renovation, remarkable considering that it has been used almost daily over such a long period of time. The renovation will provide a far better depth of sound and better usage of the existing pipes; work will be completed before the busy winter period begins.

3.2 Process Guidance Notes 5/2(04) Secretary of State's Guidance for Crematoria

Following the issue of PG5/2(04) the crematorium has improved software that logs and reports emissions data. Taunton crematorium has three 'Joule' cremators and has upgraded its software so that it will be able to log and report in the new manner specified.

3.3 Cremator Brickwork

Fortunately this brickwork has lasted longer than anticipated so light repairs are programmed with a complete re-bricking being postponed until necessary.

3.4 Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting

Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. The lighting will be installed during this financial year and paid for by income generated by the crematorium.

3.5 Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions

Legislation requiring 50% of cremations in this country to be abated for mercury by 2012 has been issued. The legislation requires crematoria to let their intentions be known by the end of the year as to whether the crematorium proposes the abatement of mercury by this date or if it intends to enter an emissions trading scheme. Members will be provided with a report once further enquiries have been made.

3.6 Crematorium Waiting Room Extension & Office Refurbishment

Work is currently underway and proceeding according to plan. It is hoped that this long awaited extension and office refurbishment will be completed by August. The need for these improvements was originally identified following consultation with the funeral directors, clergy and the public. The cost is being met through the income generated by the service.

3.7 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, although enquiries continued to be made.

3.8 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 over the next few years.

4.0 STREET CLEANSING

Litter Hotline

A number and e-mail address for reporting incidence of litter in the Borough on the highway or private land is now available:-

Telephone = **01823 356456**
E-mail = litter@tauntondeane.gov.uk

The telephone line goes to Customer Services, as a high priority call, the e-mail address is now also in the TDBC E-mail address book for quick access by members of staff and Councillors. The street cleansing team will then respond by the investigation of litter on private land and clearance of litter on the highway.

COUNCIL MEETING 19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

This report will focus on two 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 Right to Buy (RTB) Receipts. I will also comment on the Home Improvement agency that we are working on in conjunction with South Somerset District Council.

Housing Stock Transfer Update

Update

In January of this year a decision by tenants was taken that should tenants vote in favour of a housing stock transfer, a “Stand Alone” Registered Social Landlord (RSL) would be the chosen vehicle. This means that staff employed by the Council who spend the majority of their time on housing landlord functions, would continue to manage the service albeit through a newly formed and locally based RSL, The newly created RSL would be totally independent and separate of any other RSL and work in partnership with this Council.

Members will recall that an application had been made to the Office Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to gain a place on the Stock Transfer Programme. An announcement was made on the 23rd June advising that Taunton Deane had been granted a place alongside 10 other Authorities. It is likely that further places will be provided as the year progresses.

Project Team

A Project Team has now been formed and comprises:

Project Manager – Carl Brazier:

Be the lead officer in managing and supporting the various specialist advisors (Lead Advisors, Independent Tenant Advisors , Legal Advisors and Communication Advisors). Carl will also be the lead officer liaising with the Government Office South West (GOSW), Community Housing Task Force (CHTF), Housing Corporation and the Shadow Board when it is formed. The Shadow Board will represent the potential new Registered Social Landlord if a transfer took place

Project Officers – Jayne Hares, Martin Price and Tracey-Ann Biss:

These officers support the Project Manager will also link with particular advisors. Jayne’s focused area is the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA), Martin’s is Legal and Tracey-Ann is Communications. They will all link with the Lead Advisors.

Project Administrator – Faye Davison:

This administration role is to provide secretarial support to the team and will include maintaining the timetable, communication plan and log.

Specialist Advisors

A key initial task for the Project Team was to recruit the various advisors needed to support the project. As with the Housing Stock Options Appraisal, support will be provided to Tenants, Staff and Members through these various advisors.

The appointed Advisors are:

- i) ITA - Aldbourne Associates have been appointed as the Independent Tenant Advisor (ITA) and who will provide support to tenants
- ii) Lead - PricewaterhouseCoopers have been re-appointed to be the Council's Lead Advisor and will for example provide financial guidance.
- iii) Legal - Pinsent Masons have been appointed as the Council's Legal Advisor and will for example provide advise on governance matters
- iv) Communications - Seymour-Cotton Partnership have been appointed as the Council's Communication Advisor and will for example assist in producing excellent communication materials, e.g. newsletters, video etc.

All four advisors commenced working for the Council from the beginning of this month.

General

The Project Team is working with other Authorities to understand how they have undertaken the work we are embarking on. The first visit was in June to North Somerset who Members may be aware have a similar size stock to ours, have similar issues to be addressed and whose tenants in April voted unanimously in favour of transfer. Visits to other authorities are also planned

As with the Housing Stock Option Appraisal, a number of groups will be formed to oversee, provide steer and support the Project Team. For example, an Officer Steering Group will be formed and will consist of key staff from across the Council. This group will be chaired by Shirlene Adam, to ensure there is both corporate involvement and ownership of this important project and will commence its duties from the end of this month.

Further details on this group and other related groups such as a Communication Group and Tenant Panels will be provided at the next Full Council and before that via other Scrutiny Panels and Information Releases.

Over the next three months briefings for Tenants, Staff and Members will be held supplemented by information releases. All Members will be kept updated and informed.

Key Managerial Staff Changes

Following Carl's appointment to head of the project team, Mr Malcolm Western is now acting Head of Housing and Mr David Whitehead is acting up in Malcolm's previous role of Private Sector Housing Manager. These acting-up appointments could change or revert back in the event of a Tenant "no" vote.

Right to Buy / Sale of Council Dwellings

The Sale of Council houses under the Right to Buy scheme has slowed nationally creating financial consternation amongst a number of stock holding authorities.

Some reasons for this slow down are:

- The 2004 Housing Act increased the qualifying period of tenants from two to five years before they could apply to buy their Council home.
- Increased interest rates have lead to a slowdown across all housing sectors
- In Taunton there is a disparity between house prices and earnings making it difficult for residents to obtain adequate mortgages. The problem of disparity between house prices to earnings is second in the South West only to London.

Stock holding authorities utilise RTB receipts to reinvest in the development of appropriate affordable homes and is precisely the action taken by this Council.

Over recent years the sale of Council houses in Taunton Deane has ranged approximately from 80 to 130 units per annum. The Budget for 2005/06 allowed for the use of receipts from the sale of 90 dwellings. The useable receipts of 90 sales equates to an estimated £1.4 million. In the first quarter there have been only 7 sales completed. If this trend continues with annual sales of only 28 there will be an estimated shortfall of circa £1 million below that required to support the programme during 2005/06.

Unlike a number of authorities Taunton Deane is fortunate in that over the last two years we have built the working balance to circa £2.25 million and is in excess of Audit Commission recommendations (circa £1 million). The working Balance (or current account) is ring fenced therefore can only be used for housing related expenditure. We will look closely at housing finances but as an alternative source of funding we could utilise more of the working balance within the Housing Revenue Account and increase the Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) thus keeping the development programme on track.

We are soon to embark on the 2006/07 budget round and reduced RTB receipts will be factored in and prioritise reviewed.

Cllr Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR TERRY HALL - RESOURCES

1 Members Services

The protocol for attendance by councillors at conferences has now been introduced in accordance with the recommendations of the Review Board. This new protocol allows for the conferences budget to be divided proportionally between the political groups (once the cost of the Local Government Association Annual Conference has been deducted). Any requests from individual councillors for attendance at conferences and seminars now need to be approved by the relevant Group.

The 60th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War has just passed and the Council, having worked closely with the Royal British Legion, Ex-Service Associations and the Police, marked the occasion with a Civic Service, Parade and inspection of veterans in Vivary Park. Next up on the civic front is a visit of a civic party from Konigslutter, led this year by the new Burgermeister, Ottomar Lippelt who is also their Chief Executive.

Members will also be aware that Taunton Deane is currently subject to an electoral review. Representatives of the Boundary Commission attended the recent Members' Briefing to outline the procedure and timetable and answer questions.

2 Financial Services

The Financial Services Unit has now completed the closure of the 2004/05 Accounts and by the time you read this report the rigorous external audit process will have begun. The Corporate Governance Committee considered the formal Statement of Accounts for 2004/05 on 13 July.

With this major piece of work now complete the Unit is focussing on other significant tasks such as the finalisation of the Medium Term Financial Plan and developing the Council's response to the Audit Commissions recent "Use of Resources" document, which will form a key part of the Council's next CPA assessment. Finally work is also progressing on the completion of major statistical returns under the Governments "Whole of Government Accounts" agenda. This will feed in financial information from Taunton Deane into the financial picture for the whole of the public sector in the UK."

3 Benefits

We have been able to significantly increase the funding we get from the DWP for overpaid Housing

Benefit. Challenging targets were set to reduce overpaid benefit because of Local Authority error.

If the Council managed to meet lower thresholds, instead of receiving 0% subsidy against Over-payments that resulted from mistakes, we would receive 100%. During 2004/2005, we were

able to meet the lower threshold target and this has resulted in extra subsidy of £77,670 we

would otherwise have not received.

I would like to record my personal appreciation to the managers and staff of the Benefits Unit
For their performance during the 1st quarter of the year. Some of the results achieved against DWP standard are shown below.

	TDBC	DWP Standard
New HB claim made to processing (days)	19.39	36
Work out HB change of Circumstances (days)	8.44	9
Percentage of HB claims accurately assessed	99.0	
99		
.. RR claims worked out in 40 days	96.22	90.

As well as receiving funding through subsidy arrangements, during 2004/2005, we made 2 Successful bids to the DWP Performance Standards Fund. The first bid was made jointly with South Hams District Council for Training Needs Analysis Software. The DWP approved our bid and awarded us two thirds of the costs we would incur, resulting in a funding of £9,183. Our second bid for funding to replace the current in-house software applications for Benefits processing, Document Imaging and Workflow technology resulted in external funding from the DWP of £400k.

We are currently in the process of procuring the new Benefits and Revenues package. Companies, which are ultimately unsuccessful with their tender can challenge our decision in the Courts and therefore it is vital that we are able to demonstrate an objective method of evaluation.

The overall process will involve assessing the merits of the various proposals submitted, obtaining references from other authorities, supplier demonstrations at the Deane House, site visits to other local authorities that are using the proposed systems and checking the supplier's financial position.

The timetable, for the remaining elements of the procurement stage, is set out below.
Closing date for tenders 25th July, Short-listing 15th August, Supplier presentations and site visits 5th September, award of contract 21st September

4 Office Services

The transference of the Deane House building management and caretaking functions from Office Services to the new Property Services Unit (under Stewart Rutledge) has begun. This involves three redundancies; the Premises Manager and the two Deane House Caretakers. One Caretaker has left to take up other employment and the other has been

successfully redeployed. The Premises Manager will leave in accordance with the redundancy policy.

The new team will be responsible for all aspects of building management, security and Caretaking activities.

The Resources Review Panel has been looking into replacement chairs for the Committee Suite. Councillors will have seen some of the possible alternatives. The Panel will receive a detailed report with proposals at their meeting later this month.

On the GIS front the work on digitising Land Charges information is virtually complete. The team has also been working closely with Waste Services on the new collection arrangements, as well as providing detailed information relating to the present Boundary Commission activities

5 Internal Audit Services

The section has now formally started joint working as part of the South West Audit Partnership and is just about to undertake joint system based-audits at Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council using the same audit staff. The process will enable Internal Audit staff an opportunity to examine how other Councils run their services and will enable us to bring back areas of good practice that will lead to service improvements over time.

We are on the move again going up one level from Room 141 to our new office in room 217 where we will continue to successfully share offices with the Council's external auditors.

6 Information Systems

We have successfully signed up with the Planning Portal to allow planning applications to be submitted to us online. We are working on a similar project with Building Control to enable similar online submission of Building Control applications.

Karen Winter has joined us (replacing Tina Saunders who has moved to a job in the Planning Unit) to oversee the work on meeting the E-Government targets as we near the deadline, and as part of that another submission to ODPM, IEG 4.5 must be made on 18th July updating our progress.

Work on updating the Housing computer system is well underway, and a draft Invitation to Tender document has been prepared for the replacement of the core housing systems with a new software package.

The Somerset online (SOL) portal is scheduled to be re-launched using tools and technology developed from within the SOL partnership. The significance of this is that much of the underlying technology looks very likely to be adopted at a national level by the ODPM to underpin work on the Direct Gov project.

7 Revenues

2004/05 Council Tax & NNDR Collection Rates – the in-year collection rates for Council Tax & Non Domestic Rates are Best Value Performance Indicators. During the 2004/05-year we collected 98.1% for Council Tax, which exceeded the target of 98%. We collected 98.8% for Non Domestic Rates, which only just fell short of our target figure of 99%. Collection rates for both debts exceeded previous financial years and represent ongoing improvement.

Collection of the 2005/06 Council Tax & NNDR – collection of the current year's charges is progressing well. Recovery action commenced in April against non or late payers, which culminated in our first liability order hearing on 23 June 2005. The court costs for the issue of liability orders have been increased from £35 to £40.

Recruitment of New Staff – the Revenues Team has recently had to undertake a recruitment exercise to replace staffs that have left the Council Tax and Collection Teams. Four new members of staff have recently joined us. All are currently undergoing training. However, it will take time before they are fully trained and there is a consequent effect on productivity.

Cessation of Rent Collection – the rent collection service formally came to an end at the end of June and both rent collectors have now left. All tenants were notified well in advance of our intention to end the service and were invited to adopt alternative methods of payment. The ending of the service does not appear to have caused any major problems.

Payment Kiosks Implementation – implementation has been held up by software programming delays, which we are anticipating will be resolved by the end of July.

8 Personnel

Management Development

A programme of Management Development began in October 2004 with the Heads of Service, Directors and Chief Executive. They have been through a development centre involving various measurement tools and new, agreed management competencies and they are being supported through a development programme. The initiative has now been extended and another thirty managers will go through in this financial year. They have been selected based on the following criteria to ensure that managers who are a priority will benefit most.

- Managers newly appointed to a management role
- Managers whose role has changed
- Managers who have clear development needs

In order to plan for the future business needs of the organisation and to assist in future succession-planning individuals who have potential to be managers have also been selected.

The first group of managers have attended a development centre in June and with a second group to follow in September.

Workforce Planning

We have also begun work on Workforce Planning, which it has been agreed we will produce as part of the 3year Pay Settlement. This plan will ensure that we have “the right people, with the right skills in the right place at the right time” This is a key business planning tool and will help the organisation ensure that, as well as adequate financial resources, we also have adequate people/skill resources to fulfil the long term objectives of the Council.

Work has already begun to assess what skills we have available, both within the organisation, and demographically at this current time. All managers have been asked to provide information about the skills they think they will need to deliver their business objectives over the next five years. Once the gap between what we have and what we need has been assessed, work will then begin on the solutions to bridge this gap in areas such as recruitment, retention, training & development, succession planning, apprenticeships.

Councillor Terry Hall

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL 19 JULY 2005

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications Strategy

When we launched our Communications Strategy we promised that this would be a 'living document' and we are currently reviewing the achievements made and what we have yet to do to meet our vision *"For Taunton Deane Borough Council to have good communications at the heart of its work and for all with an interest in the Council and its services to feel informed and able to give their views"*. Members will be given a report of progress and will have an opportunity to review and scrutinise the strategy and future priorities in October.

As you have heard from Cllr Williams – he attended a presentation by Ben Page of MORI at the recent LGA Conference. The inclusion of Communications on the LGA Agenda is recognition of the need for Councils to promote their work more effectively and to let everyone know what the Council does with their money. All too often people see things being done around them but do not know that it is the Council who is doing it! The key is good planning - we are working actively towards achieving this – our aim is for all major projects of the Council to have an accompanying communications plan by December 2006. This process has begun with work on the Vision for Taunton, Housing Stock Options and the Joint Venture Project:

Vision for Taunton

We are working closely with the project management team for The Vision for Taunton and a joint Public Relations/Communications team has been formed of representatives from all partners and they are currently developing a PR plan to cover the next 6 months. As I mentioned in my last report TDDB is producing a 'Vision Handbook' to harness local support and enthusiasm. This should be available soon for all Councillors and key staff and will be updated on a six monthly basis as the Vision begins the change from dream to reality.

Housing Stock Transfer Ballot

The Communications team is working closely with the colleagues on the Project Team who recently appointed Seymour-Cotton Partnership as the Council's Communication Advisor. Their role is to advise the Council up to and through the ballot period in Spring 2006. The aim is to ensure that all stakeholders and in particular the Council's tenants are fully informed of all and understand the choices before them so that they can decide for themselves how they want their homes to be looked after in future years.

‘Joint Venture’ Communications

Good communication is critical to the successful management of the change process the introduction of project may bring. We recognise that it is essential to keep all our stakeholders informed as the project unfolds, after all the aim is to provide an improved service for our customers. Whilst focussing on corporate services, the project touches all aspects of service delivery. Our Key Stakeholders have been identified as Members of the Council, Council Staff, Members and staff of partner councils and organisations, citizens of Taunton Deane, trade unions and neighbouring authorities with whom we have close relations.

We need to make sure the right people have the right information at the right time through appropriate channels. We aim to encourage feedback from staff so they feel involved in the process. We are consulting with Members and staff. Briefing sessions have been held with senior staff and staff representatives on the prospect of entering a strategic partnering arrangement. We have formed a Member Steering Group with cross party representation. The communications team have produced a draft communications strategy and action plan for this project and are now working with SCC to produce a joint strategy and action plan to make sure that communication across both organisations is consistent in terms of messages and timing.

Communications with Members

In June we held a Communications Workshop on communicating with Members. However, it is clear that two way communications are vital and that Members too have a role to play. We are looking at how we can improve reporting back Member involvement in Outside Bodies and Partnerships. We all seem to want shorter more concise reports – and there was a clear steer from Members that the frequency of Weekly Bulletin is right and that it is well received because it provides a good précis of events in the Council calendar. Members also want direct communication with staff and recognise the need to have a greater understanding of each other’s roles and to be given more information about the council’s work within our wards. This is a very brief overview - Members will be given a more detailed summary of the outcomes of the session so we can monitor the improvements.

The Plain English Project

As part of the Plain English project, 65 frontline members of staff have received training on how to use StyleWriter and we have 8 more sessions planned.

Public Relations

I attended the **60th Commemoration of the Second World War** event on July 10th. The government chose this date to commemorate of the end of the Second World War because it is mid way between VE Day and VJ Day. I was

impressed by the work of our officers in organising this event - it was an excellent example of teamwork across several departments and with many organisations. The Council decided to mark the occasion by joining with the Royal British Legion and Ex Service Associations to organise a civic service of commemoration in St Mary Magdalene Church followed by a Parade of veterans through the town to Vivary Park where the troops were inspected by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset and the Mayor. It was much appreciated by those that took part and the hundreds who took advantage of the fine weather to see the parade and Vivary Park in its full glory.

Deane Dispatch

We know that keeping residents informed improves satisfaction levels with the Council. We continue to enhance the look and feel of Deane Dispatch and have had positive comments from members of the public.

Media Relations & Media Awareness

It's been a very busy couple of months for our Press Office. We have a duty to accurately inform our public about the work we are doing and so I would like to commend officers for their excellent contribution to raising the profile of the Council and its work.

In particular **Licensing** and the '**Sort It**' **Recycling** campaigns stand out. Both have been high profile. Our public relations officer has been working closely with both service departments over the last few months to generate articles in the local press. The aim was to keep both topics in the public domain to raise the level of awareness and to encourage take up. The 'Sort it' campaign started back in March of this year with press briefings and is ongoing. The results speak for themselves – the response from the public has been excellent. The Licensing campaign is ongoing too and we are using a variety of ways such as leaflets/letters/press releases, radio interviews and one to one support to encourage licensees to act before the August 6 deadline.

Oxen Lane Enquiry

We continued to receive several enquiries throughout the public inquiry held at North Curry at the beginning of June. The TDBC coverage has been mainly positive throughout.

The positive press we have received on all of these topics is due to the fact that we have planned the communications over a period of time and have then responded quickly to enquiries, provided statements for the media and have always had a spokesperson.

Gwyneth Leighton

July 2005

COUNCIL MEETING – 19 JULY 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

TAUNTON DEANE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Spatial Planning

At the June meeting of the LSP, I updated the partnership on the activities of a multi-agency working group established to oversee the delivery of the new 'Local Development Framework' (LDF). This Spatial Planning Working Group has representatives from all the Community Planning areas in Taunton Deane and has been set up as a sub-group of the LSP to ensure good links between Community Planning and the LDF. The initial work of this group has been focussed on the development of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). You should recently have been sent a copy of the Pre-Submission Consultation Draft of this document.

The LSP has agreed to joint branding of future LDF publications and you will see evidence of this on the front of the SCI. The LSP has also agreed to allocate £10K towards the costs of implementing the SCI. This is in recognition of the fact that the levels of consultation required in the SCI will be very resource intensive.

Projects for 2005/06

Brief updates were given on a three projects which are being supported by the LSP in 2005/06. These included Local Action Teams to promote community safety, a scheme to promote the take up of apprentices across partner agencies and a proposal to create a shared database for improving access to information and services by customers and agencies alike.

LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are a new Government initiative that will, in theory, enable a greater degree of local freedom in the way that priorities are determined and resources allocated. An LAA is an opportunity to gain a greater level of local determination and a rationalisation of funding in four main blocks:

- Children and Young People
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Economic Development and Regeneration

The Somerset Strategic Partnership's bid to the Government to participate in the 2nd round of LAAs has been successful. Somerset County Council has now begun the more involved task of preparing a draft LAA for Somerset and negotiating with the Government Office for the South West. The LSP, district councils and other key partners will play a key role in the preparation of the LAA.

BASELINE ASSESSMENT WORK IN NORTH AND EAST TAUNTON

One of the LSP's four priorities is to promote a stronger economy and tackle the causes of deprivation. Parts of North and East Taunton feature consistently in national indices of deprivation and, because of this, the LSP has commissioned a baseline assessment to gain a better understanding of local trends, priorities and service provision in the two areas. The baseline assessment will be used to help identify priorities for local action to reduce deprivation in the two areas.

TAUNTON DEANE CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIP

2004/05 crime statistics: total crime was down by 0.8% over 2003/04, and particular success was achieved in a reduction in dwelling burglary, which has now halved within the last 2 years. There was also a reduction in robbery, non-dwelling burglary and theft of motor vehicles. Statistically, violent crime showed an increase, mirroring what has happened across the country. It was pointed out that a wide variety of offences are now included under the "violent crime" heading, ranging from GBH and domestic violence to harassment and sending threatening text messages. Theft from motor vehicles also increased.

Volume Crime – theft from motor vehicles. There is currently a problem with theft from motor vehicles in some car parks in Taunton. This tends to be an opportunist crime and occurs because items are left in vehicles in full view. Various suggestions were put forward as to ways in which the public can be made more aware of the risks of leaving items in vehicles where they can easily be seen and these suggestions will be taken forward.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act: this act requires Crime and Disorder Partnerships take environmental crime into account when developing strategies and makes greater use of fixed penalties as an alternative to prosecution. It gives increased powers to local authorities to deal with abandoned cars, nuisance parking, litter (including cigarette ends and chewing gum), graffiti and fly-posting, fly-tipping and waste, dogs and noise and will come into effect over the next year.

ANNE FRANK EXHIBITION

Many of you will have read an article in First magazine on an exhibition based on the life of Anne Frank. This exhibition is touring the country to promote

community cohesion. The themes that dominated Anne's life - racism and bigotry, hatred and conflict - are also relevant to day. The intention is that visitors, particularly those aged 11 to 17, will better understand the horrors that befell the Holocaust's victims, and how they came about, and will recognise the need to challenge injustice in our society today.

I am delighted to say that this exhibition is coming to Taunton in March 2006 and will be staged in Temple Methodist Church. This council has offered a grant of £1500 towards the costs of staging the event, and our Equalities Coordinator is working with the organising committee. .

Joanna Lewin-Harris