

COUNCIL MEETING 12 OCTOBER 2004

PART II

To receive reports from the Executive:

Councillor Williams Leader of the Executive
Councillor Bishop Planning Policy and Transportation
Councillor Mrs Bradley Leisure, Arts and Culture
Councillor Mrs Bryant Communications
Councillor Cavill Economic Development, Property and Tourism
Councillor Edwards Environmental Services
Councillor Garner Housing Services
Councillor Hall Resources
Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris Community Leadership

COUNCIL MEETING 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

We now have our CPA result and it is a tremendous result which reflects the good work of this Council over the years, but particularly of the present administration of the Council. The “Excellent” rating was gained because the “Achievement of improvement” and future “Ambition” were singled out as being major factors in gaining what is the highest award possible. It is particularly gratifying when compared with performance in the rest of the South West region as we are one of only three Councils to have received recognition as being an “Excellent Council”.

It is also good to read in the report that we are recognised as a Council for the whole community across Taunton Deane, not just Taunton, and that clear leadership and officer/Member relationships are important factors in securing the award and I quote from the report “Effective leadership by the Chief Executive is supported by clear roles and responsibilities and mutual respect between councillors and Staff.”

The people of Taunton Deane may very well say; “congratulating ourselves over being an Excellent Council is all very well, but what does this mean to us the taxpayer?” It is very good news because we are now granted an inspection holiday for up to three years, (other than the usual annual audit) which saves huge amounts in direct costs and indirect costs of staff gathering and presenting the required information for assessment. In addition we are given much greater freedom to trade: where we do a service well we can also sell this to other authorities or in general to increase our income other than through taxes.

Having achieved this award it does not mean to say we can rest on our laurels, we have to address the weak points highlighted and ensure we continue operating efficiently in other areas. However, the team effort and hard work from all who contributed, including our external partners, is very much appreciated, and I offer my congratulations and sincere thanks; without everybody’s contribution it would not have been possible.

In affirmation of our status as an “Excellent Council” we have also been awarded “Business Britain Local Authority of the Year 2004/2005”. This was an unsolicited award from the national magazine, Business Britain, where professionals independently assessed us following a comprehensive review of local authorities across England against strict criteria. The conclusion was reached that Taunton Deane leads by example in attracting inward investment with many attributes such as:

Range of Services – What services are in place to ensure companies in Taunton Deane are supported and are allowed to prosper.

Additional Services – looking at the additional services made available such as housing, planning, economic development, customer relations, location and Infrastructure. Available Resources, ongoing Development and Redevelopment Programmes,

Future Visions, marketing and promotion – how well Taunton Deane’s inclusion worked in Business Britain and also what additional marketing is being done.

Appropriateness to Business Britain Readers – obviously they are looking to ultimately recommend the location to their readers so had to ensure the award was of relevance.

There is no doubt, it was our clear articulation of our future plans and the way we have approached the implementation of urban regeneration together with our proactive approach towards business, whether inward relocation or assistance to existing, that secured us this award. Coupled with our “excellent” status this has to be good news for Taunton Deane.

Budget Setting

The challenge of trying to achieve a balanced budget becomes even more challenging and the process appears to commence ever earlier! We were aware last year that our present financial position is not sustainable, costs are rising substantially above our income by about £600,000 per annum and next year, with such one offs as recycling of waste, we face a shortfall of around £1.2M. A detailed paper setting this out has already been presented to the Review Board at their meeting last week. This amount was not altogether unexpected, and it led to our bringing before the Council earlier this year our proposals for financial restructuring which set out the need for a hard look at our services to ensure they matched the priorities of the people and we ceased, or reduced cost, on non-priority or non-statutory duties. This financial strategy was accepted and approved by Full Council in April 2004. In fulfilment of this we have presently embarked upon a major assessment of our services in full consultation with managers and staff, and efficiency savings are being sought right across the whole range of Council services, or increased income where realistic. This will result in further consideration by the Review Board, open to all Councillors, during November and December in order to inform the Executive in the budget setting process for initial consideration by all Councillors in January 2005.

Make no mistake, we all have to make some hard choices if we are reduce our base budget to achieve a sound and sustainable financial future. An example of these difficult decisions that have to be made is the decision of the Executive, before you tonight for ratification, to return footpaths to the Somerset County Council as the responsible authority because it is costing us about £100,000 for which we receive £45,000. Although I accept this is not a universally popular decision it does not make economic sense to continue a service at such great cost to Taunton Deane taxpayers and I urge you all to support this decision. This can be regarded as the first test of our resolve to seriously address our unsustainable budget situation.

Vision for Taunton

Although not highly visible at present much is happening behind the scene, the all important infrastructure and viability studies have been prepared and are being studied by officers at present. An integral part of this has been the further studies into the value of an inner relief road and possible alternative designs. The “third way” as it has become known has now been developed showing an alternative route through Tangier and the river crossing; it does look good but I still have concerns about its discharge into Bridge Street and will be monitoring this aspect closely. The proposals for this alternative route have already been presented to Councillors at a joint SCC/TDBC meeting and will be the subject of public consultation as from the 18 October.

The County Cricket Club are still strongly promoting their plans for a complete redevelopment of the ground to allow hosting of the all important one day international matches. I am able to confirm that their plans will not mean the closure of the Brewhouse Theatre, this can still operate. Having said this it is still our intention to include a new and larger theatre in our redevelopment of the town centre, and the “third way” inner relief road as mentioned above would allow this. I am aware that Abbey Manor Development, who have planning consent for development of the East Goods Yard at Firepool, are in the process of agreeing final design with the Planning Department and once agreed wish to commence works on site. This will truly be the beginning of work on the ground in respect of the Vision for Taunton. Another essential ingredient for the Vision process is the relocation of the livestock market from its present site. An application for a new site adjacent J26 at Chelston has been received and is presently being processed ready for consideration. It is imperative that a successful relocation be achieved in order to maintain such a vibrant business within Taunton Deane and release the present site for redevelopment.

Adoption of Local Plan

This is before us for final adoption this evening and I commend it to all Members. If approved we would hope to have it fully adopted by the end of the year, thus ensuring a considerable degree of clarity and certainty for the public, developers and our planning department. This document is vital to ensuring that the necessary development within Taunton Deane takes place against an overall strategy for development and comprehensive infrastructure and community facilities are provided including the vital social housing element. This will also incorporate areas of the Vision development allowing them to proceed with the full authority of the Local Plan in support.

Areas of the Taunton Vision, such as Tangier area, not presently covered by the Local Plan will be dealt with under a new procedure recently introduced by central Government being the Local Development Framework. These have to be prepared and agreed with Government Office SW by April 2005.

The Local Plan is a vital policy document for this authority and involves a huge amount of work, I commend all those involved in our planning department, and Member review, for their commitment and hard work in bringing this to what I hope will be a satisfactory conclusion tonight. Not all will be satisfied with the end result but I hope they will be able to accept that we have delivered as equitable plan as possible within the constraints imposed upon us by the Inspector who conducted the public examination of it.

Cornhill, Wellington

It is disappointing to note the level of criticism and negative comment aimed at this Council over the assumed failure to act sufficiently promptly to gain improvements to Cornhill. It may not be high profile but Members and officers have been working together to bring about change. That within our control we have effected quickly, what is not within our control we have been trying to enable, to bring much needed improvement in what we recognise could be a very attractive street; an asset to Wellington, not run down as at present. Even more disappointing is that representatives of this Council, who watched Cornhill deteriorate as it has done over the last twelve years, are now so critical of our efforts because we have not resolved this long

outstanding problem in such a relatively short time. However, I am delighted to note that some Wellington Members are promoting a constructive approach with the proposal to set up a working group of interested parties and Wellington Town Councillors, the group will be able to monitor the progress of improvements, be kept up to date with potential future plans and input ideas so better progress may be made. This working group has direct access to a relevant Taunton Deane officer and the Portfolio Holders responsible. I have no illusions that success in achieving regeneration will require commitment and hard work but with a constructive approach this will be much quicker than the destructive negative approach we have witnessed to date.

Car Parking Charges

There is much vocal comment about our parking charge policy but I can only reiterate that we have to implement these charges to fulfil our agreements of the Taunton Parking and Congestion Strategy, a strategy signed up to by the previous administration. Failure to do this would probably invoke penalties from central government and certainly do nothing to aid our commitment to reduce congestion. I accept this is ahead of a decent bus service but it has to be recognised, we are in a very difficult situation, the bus services have been in a spiral of decline for many years, the bus company will do nothing about this because the serious congestion problems do not allow them to run a reasonable service, therefore people refuse to use the bus thus making the service even more uneconomic. We must break into this spiral and assist the bus company to run a sensible service thus attracting more people back on public transport. This, with alternative means of travel, will have an impact on our congestion problems and regrettably it has to be linked to higher parking charges so that driving and parking is no longer the easy option as at present. It will focus peoples minds to giving serious thought to alternative means of travel.

I recently attended a Taunton Town Centre partnership meeting where I explained our parking charging strategy. Although I acknowledge the concerns raised, there appeared to be a general acceptance that we had to do something about the very serious congestion, particularly during the rush hours, and that the proposed increases were in line with the agreed Taunton Transport Strategy. It was also agreed our parking charges were quite favourable to a lot of comparable towns and cities.

To do nothing is not an option if we are to combat our congestion problems.

In conclusion it would be wrong of me not to acknowledge the further wonderful accolade bestowed on Taunton Deane when we were awarded the Tesco Cup and Gold Medal for Taunton and the Portman Cup and Gold Medal for Wellington in the South West in Bloom competition. This has to be great credit to Shaun Cregan for Taunton and Isabel Ward for Wellington and of course the tremendous band of helpers that contribute. My congratulations and thanks to you all for making Taunton Deane such a great place to live, work and visit, please do keep up the great work you do.

Councillor John Williams
Leader of the Council

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP – PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Planning Fees

The ODPM has announced that it aims to raise an extra £30million to fund planning services in 2005 – 06 by raising application fees.

Launching a consultation on the structure of fees, Planning Minister, Keith Hill said that although councils had been given a boost by planning delivery grant (PDG), it was still the case that fees are short of the costs of dealing with applications, especially major applications.

The paper, proposes that councils that meet the targets for determining major applications should be allowed to increase their application fees by up to ten per cent. Fees should be structured in proportion to the size of the application, as research commissioned by ODPM found that it is the largest applications where fees are furthest from achieving cost recovery.

The Minister, Keith Hill said “Any increase in fees must be accompanied by raising the bar when it comes to quality. We don’t expect people to pay more and get less. Councils will be encouraged to work harder to meet targets”

Parliamentary Statement

On 14th September Keith Hill the Minister for Housing and Planning and Lord Rooker the Minister of State made statements in the House of Commons and House of Lords respectively on the Government’s revised strategy of support and engagement with local planning authorities that are performing poorly in their handling of planning applications

The ministers statements name and congratulate 39 local planning authorities that have demonstrated significant improvements in performance and as Taunton Deane was included in the list I congratulate all staff who are involved in the delivery of the planning service.

Joint Structure Plan Alteration

Proposed alternative to proceeding to Examination in Public

I recently attended meetings of the County Council’s Environment and Transportation Policy Panel and the Strategic Planning Conference where it was agreed not to proceed to an Examination in Public and that a recommendation would be put to a future meeting of the County’s Executive Committee and Full Council.

Included in the recommendation and of particular importance to Taunton Deane are:-

1. That further discussions and if necessary further investigations take place with the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) and District Planning Authorities. These discussions and investigations are to focus on the spatial planning policies contained in the plan alteration, and the emerging spatial planning options set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) “Possible Development Strategies for the Region” consultation report .

2. That agreement be sought with SWRA and relevant District Planning Authorities to a future spatial strategy that results in Taunton retaining its “Principal Urban Area” designation, and Yeovil achieving an “Other Designated Centre for Growth” designation.
3. That objections to the Joint Structure Plan Alteration that were received in accordance with the statutory requirements be considered and assessed at this time and that a report be prepared on these objections for consideration by the Panel, Executive Board, and ultimately Full Council.
4. That the issues raised and the views offered in the objections received during the JPSA deposit period be taken into account in conducting any further work in the context of recommendations 1 and 2 above.
5. That the County should, in consultation with the districts, embark on an exercise to establish the housing numbers requirement for Somerset.

Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West (RSS) 2006 – 2026

The Regional Assembly are consulting on the most appropriate way for development to happen in the South West over the next 20 years and they would like your views in order to help the Assembly develop a strategy to recommend to Ministers, which is most likely to meet all our needs, and those of the region as a whole. The consultation period ends on 26th November 2004, and it is likely that a Draft Regional Spatial Strategy will be prepared by March 2005.

The information contained in the draft RSS will be taken into account in the preparation of the Local Development Framework (LDF).

Development at Tone Mill, Wellington

An application has been submitted for 147 dwellings and Commercial units and the following statements have been forwarded with the planning application:-

Planning and Design Statement

Flood risk Assessment

Transport Impact Assessment

Conservation Plan

Tone Mill Partnership

Tenders have been invited from appropriate consultants to undertake a Feasibility Study of the proposed Regeneration Project. At the close of the tender period five consultants had responded. Their bids will now be evaluated and the contract offered to the successful consultancy.

Public Transport Review

At the invitation of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee of Somerset County Council I attended the first evidence-taking session where information was obtained from transport operators, interest groups, providers and users. At our next meeting on 7th October we shall be evaluating the options for future provision and on 4th November we shall be discussing the proposed priorities and an action plan. The Integrated Passenger Transport Unit at County Hall would welcome your views which will be fed into the Review Process..

Consultation Housing and Planning in the Region

The Deputy Prime Minister has issued a consultation paper setting out plans to strengthen links between housing and planning strategies at regional level. The 12-week consultation sets out plans to do this by merging Regional Housing Boards with Regional Planning Bodies, to bolster the Government's commitment to create thriving and sustainable communities in all regions. Regional Housing Boards are non-statutory advisory bodies. Regional Planning Bodies (which the Deputy Prime Minister will soon direct in each region to be the Regional Assembly) are formally constituted and have a statutory role in the planning process. Because of this the Government considers that the most effective way forward would be for Regional Assemblies to take on responsibility for functions currently undertaken by the Regional Housing Boards: i.e. producing a Regional Housing Strategy and making funding recommendations to Ministers.

Planning Obligations

In the light of the Barker Review of Housing Supply, the Government has reviewed its plans for taking forward the reform of planning obligations. The Government proposed in its November 2003 consultation paper a number of measures aimed at improving the current negotiation arrangements under Section 106 and a new optional planning charge. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provide powers to make regulations to implement changes to the planning obligations system. The Barker Report recommended that the Government should introduce a planning-gain supplement (PGS) tied to the granting of planning permission so that part of the landowner development gains could contribute to wider benefits for the community. The Government agreed that it was in principle acceptable to fund social housing and other measures out of the uplift in land values associated with the development process and in the Budget Report last March the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he would consider proposals for a national PGS and make a decision by the end of 2005. The Government now proposes to take matters forward as follows :- The Government will press ahead with identifying and implementing changes to the current arrangements for negotiated agreements. It will do this by revising the current Circular 1/97 on Planning Obligations and publishing good practice guidance for local authorities and developers and the draft revised circular should be issued in the autumn with a view to putting the new arrangements in place early in 2005. In parallel the Government will work up proposals for an optional planning charge, on a timetable consistent with that for decisions on the PGS.

Councillor Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING OCTOBER 2004

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

Tribute Band and Proms Concerts

The annual tribute band and proms concerts were held this year on Friday 13 August and Saturday 14 August in Vivary Park, organised for the second year by Performing Arts Management. On Friday night the FABBA Girls, an ABBA tribute band, performed some of ABBA's greatest hits. The following evening, the Performing Arts Symphony Orchestra accompanied by the soprano Annette Wardell performed a host of popular classics along with the traditional proms favourites. Both concerts saw an increase on the previous year in numbers attending, approximately 3,000 at the tribute band and approximately 1,800 – 2,000 at the proms concert.

Cultural Quarter Consortium

The Cultural Quarter Consortium, originally set up to promote the cultural quarter as part of the Vision for Taunton met on 6 September. Esther Scott from SWERDA outlined the current planning and delivery stages of the Vision for Taunton. Bill Ferguson of Integria Solutions gave a presentation on his Options Appraisal of the potential for the Brewhouse and Hunts Court as a Creative Industries Hub, This appraisal was commissioned by TDBC, Somerset Art Gallery Trust and the Somerset Local Authority Arts Council England Partnership. The final report was due at the end of September.

Somerset Art Week

Somerset Art Week (SAW) ran from 11 to 26 September. The sixth biennial showcase of visual arts has over 300 venues across Somerset. Over 110 artists are showing at 50 venues across the Deane. This year, SAW has gained significant sponsorship from Wessex Trains to enable SAW posters to be put up in train stations from Reading to Penzance, alongside a billboard campaign. The small signs appear to have been everywhere.

Wellington Skate Park

The work to create the skate park, adjacent to the Wellington Sports Centre, is now complete and was opened for use for the August Bank holiday. Two ramps, a fun box and grind rail have been installed on the existing tarmac area and safety fencing around the perimeter in accordance with the safety audit. Taunton Deane made money available to Wellington Town Council to work with the skateboarders of Wellington to choose and site their equipment. I

Taunton and Wellington in Bloom 2004

On behalf of all in this Council I would like to congratulate Shaun Cregan and the Taunton and Wellington in Bloom Committees for their brilliant success. The

competitions are not just about floral displays and permanent planting but also street cleaning, sustainability and community involvement. I would also like to thank all the Deane staff for their work too.

Taunton and Wellington were entered in the South West Region of the Britain in Bloom competition organised by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Taunton won the Tesco Cup for towns with a population of 25,000 to 69,999 competing against Torquay, Weymouth, Paignton, Exmouth and Yeovil.

Wellington won the Portman Cup for towns with a population of 12,000 to 14,999 competing against Penzance, Thornbury, Corsham and Portland.

PARKS & GREEN SPACES

Taunton Flower Show was again a great success, receiving visitors around 19,000 visitors over the two days. On behalf of Taunton Deane I would like to thank the Chairman and Committee of the Taunton Floricultural and Horticultural Society for a very well planned and laid out event which we all enjoyed very much and to congratulate Colin Trewen and the Parks department for winning a Silver Gilt Medal for their stand with its sophisticated display of not just flowers but grasses too. The comments we have received show that people really do appreciate all the floral displays which enhance the town for both residents and visitors alike.

Green Spaces Strategy: this has now been adopted and provides a framework for negotiating s.106 agreements to help fund the provision of open spaces. However its implementation involves a lot of work at ground level with local communities and it is that local involvement which can draw down funds. We are especially committed to provision of youth facilities as the research shows a dearth of these and our consultations back this up.

STONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES

Partnership Work with Taunton Deane Primary Care Trust (TDPCT)

Stone Leisure Limited, in partnership with TDPCT, are about to 'pilot' a new Lifestyle Referral Programme based in local Taunton Deane GP Surgeries. TDPCT will be contributing £12,500 to the project in year one and this will then be reviewed based on the success of the programme. The longer term objective is to operate schemes from four surgeries (two in Taunton, one in Wellington and one in Wiveliscombe). The purpose of the Lifestyle Programme is to focus specifically on reducing levels of obesity, reducing levels of diabetes type 2, promoting take-up of smoking cessation programmes and decreasing the risk of coronary heart disease. The Lifestyle Referral Programme differs from the already successful ProActive GP Referral Programmes in that Stone Leisure staff will be operating the scheme from the surgeries and the focus is not entirely on physical activity, but a variety of lifestyle factors.

Health Works

At the beginning of September Tone Leisure launched a new interactive health information section to their website on www.toneleisure.com. The 'Health Works' website offers visitors the opportunity to complete healthy living questionnaires, measure their body mass index online, enter competitions, provide advice and health tips, undertake a national research poll and to view both local and national health news and information.

Diversionsary Activities

Tone Leisure is playing an active role in the Taunton Deane Diversionsary Delivery Team and over recent months young people have enjoyed access to some interesting and imaginative projects. These have provided an effective and popular diversion from crime and anti-social behaviour and into physical activity and sport participation.

- **Vibe Sport**

This is an attractive blend of music and activity based at Wellsprings Leisure Centre on Friday nights from 7-9 pm. Tone Leisure secured funding from the Crime and Disorder Partnership enabling the activities to run for a year. Sports Coaches and Somerset County Youth Workers have been available to help local 13-19 year olds get involved in a whole range of sports and activities and the general consensus has been "We want more of this - it's fun". In the words of one young enthusiast, "I would never have tried body combat without coming here".

- **Summer Holiday Activity Programme**

These programmes targeted 13-17 year olds and operated at Wellsprings Leisure Centre, Blackbrook Pavilion and Wellington Sports Centre. Funded by Connexions, the programme involved Tone Leisure coaches, instructors and local clubs working alongside Connexions Personal Advisors and Somerset County Youth Workers.

- **Football Programme at Lyngford Park**

Building on last year's success the scheme ran on Thursday afternoons for the 5 weeks of the holiday. The programme was jointly funded by Tone Leisure and the Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership and organised by Alison Cotter, Community Development Worker for North Taunton Partnership. The sessions were hugely successful, attracting lots of local young people and were supported by local Police Officers, Community Wardens and the Co-Op.

The success of the above projects is a tribute to the Taunton Deane Diversionsary Delivery Team - an effective partnership between the Somerset County Youth Service, Tone Leisure, Connexions, the Police, Young Somerset and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership. Arrangements are already in place to plan an

annual programme of events for next year and for the partnership to put together joint applications for funding bids.

NETWORKING

Rural Commission and Conference; this took place in the Bath Assembly rooms and included a civic reception in the Roman Baths with their original Roman flagstones. We were assured that the government expects local authorities to be their agents for delivery beneath the plethora of Quangos directing operations with their strategies. I attended a workshop led by the CAB and Shelter who made a very good case for being our agents in helping us to deliver on the economy and on social inclusion. The other workshop was on Food, Farming and local government; with interesting reflections from a consultant who pointed out that water is coming up the Agenda. Jane Thompson the Corporate Sustainability Officer from South Gloucestershire then explained how successful they had been in promoting local food from local farmers to local schools through their procurement officer. This was keeping the land North of Bristol under cultivation. Cumbria and Carlisle had their own stand which was an impressive bit of promotion; the Foot & Mouth epidemic had forced them forward into new ways of working on the ground. The message is clear: get out there and work alongside communities on small and clearly focused projects.

Councillor Mrs Dilly Bradley

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REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS BRYANT

“Deane Leads the Way”, “TDBC has been recognised as one of the best local authorities in the country...”, and “Green machine wins Government praise”. Great headlines like these in the local press acknowledge the work of TDBC staff and members in producing positive results and improvements to the benefit of people living in Taunton Deane.

The first is about the EXCELLENT rating we were awarded in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) –we were one of only 3 councils in the South West to achieve this. The second refers to an unsolicited award from Business Britain whose judges felt Taunton Deane Council leads by example in attracting inward investment to the area and praised the Vision for Taunton. In the latter, Government Minister for the Environment, Elliot Morley, MP, congratulated the Council for saving up to 18% household waste.

In addition, the press office has fielded several radio interviews for Somerset Sound and Orchard FM and since last full council has issued press releases on a wide range of council services, which in the main generated a positive response from the media. These included:

- Upgrade planned for Taunton Deane Crematorium
- Housing Stock Transfer to be Investigated
- Proposals for the Future of Flagship Park (Vivary)
- Successful Prosecution for Food Safety Offences (with pic)
- Plans for Late Night Taxi Rank
- Safety Scheme Proposed for Deane (Drink Safe)
- Walk Well in Wellington Park
- Roving Rangers in the Deane (with pic)
- Young People Get Active in North Taunton
- Child Labour Findings
- Seagulls Give Cause for Concern
- Leisure Under New Management (with pic)
- Green Boxes Go Rural (with pic)
- Street Cleaning Continues to Improve
- Heritage Open Days in the Heart of Somerset
- Last Orders Called for Underage Drinking
- Wellington Skateboard Facilities are Open (with pic)
- Licencees Fined for Breaching Public Entertainment Conditions
- Residents Given Chance to Sample Delights of the Deane (Residents Weekend)
- Drop-In Sessions Planned for Tenants
- Deane Licensing Policy Out for Consultation
- Taunton Deane Descendants Make Civic Visit (with pic)
- Panel Recommends Review of Artwork Proposals

The commitment given at the last Full Council to circulate press releases to those members who wish to receive them has now been fulfilled and over the coming weeks we will be reviewing the media protocol.

Deane Dispatch

The winter 2004 edition of Deane Dispatch is in preparation and will be distributed towards the end of November.

Press Office/Public Relations

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome Emma Brewster to Taunton Deane. Emma has recently taken up the role of public relations officer. Emma has a wealth of experience having worked for two international public relations agencies based in Singapore working with multi-national clients to develop communications plans, messaging handbooks, day-to-day account servicing, event management and extensive media / analyst relations.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Becky Brown for the work she has done whilst manning the press office. She has done an excellent job, dealing with officers and members, as well as the media, with discretion and patience. I wish her and her family every success in the future.

Councillor Gwyneth Bryant

COUNCIL MEETING 12 OCTOBER 2004

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

Tourism and TIC

Discussions with SCC regarding the future administration of the TIC are continuing. The TIC has been very successful this year in the services that have been provided to the public. To date they have achieved a 3% increase on enquiries and income against the previous year, a 15% increase in the number of accommodation bookings and the value of those bookings has increased by 32%. The TIC has acted as one of National Express's agents via its octopus booking system, enabling the variety and value of travel bookings to be increased. The committed staff of the TIC are looking at additional services they can offer in 2004.

Neroche Project

Forest Enterprise is organising a project bid for Lottery funding, to restore and improve important historic landscapes, and provide training. This proposed project will be of great benefit to Taunton Deane and the local community, providing a new major tourism attraction. The time-scale seems quite long, but within the report of the Executive Committee held on 22nd September there is a considerable list of works to be undertaken.

Valuation

All of our maps have gone through a first GIS, however some errors have been thrown up and it will be the end of October before the scanning is complete. To date there are over 800 problems for the Valuation Service to check through, in addition to the written documents. To assist with this matter a property assistant has been taken on, part-time, who will be starting shortly.

As ToR has produced the draft final reports on the UDF, it has enabled us to proceed with some small parcels of land, not required within the Vision. One such is the area of land in Upper High Street, which should provide 6 additional homes.

Asset Management Plan

The updated AMP is now progressing through the Panels. It recognises that in the medium term there is a considerable amount of work that has to be addressed, and that we still have some under-performing properties particularly the OMB, which will in itself require innovative solution. Off Bindon Road we have an area of land on which in the near future we hope to be able to develop into small starter business units.

Economic Development

A conference was recently held in London for those interested in re-locating as identified in the Lyons Report. The Economic Development Team designed a fresh

literature to promote Taunton and the Vision and have also developed a fresh web-site: www.Firepool-Taunton.co.uk. Our stall at the Fair attracted considerable interest, possibly due to the miniature cider brandies and other local products available. Our thanks must go to a developer who assisted in the promotion without prejudice.

For some time now we have been in discussion with a number of landowners to assist in the bringing forward of allocated employment land. These will require some initial finding from the Council, enabling us to provide additional employment units.

The business survey has received a 20% reply, the results are being correlated at the moment.

During the summer a number of events were held Deane-wide. Of particular note was the Food Festival held in the centre of Taunton in partnership with DEFRA, which was well received and a great attraction.

The section has been strengthened by the transfer in of Lorraine Bush. Lorraine, with Hattie and Emma, has been holding Community and Business Planning events. The information gathered at these events will form part of the Community Strategy Document.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND LICENSING

Pest Control

The months of July, August and September were exceptionally busy ones for our small Pest Control Team, mainly due to record numbers of wasps nests reported. This was a national problem.

Comparisons between these months, for wasps only, between 2004 and the average of the last three years, (in brackets, below) puts this into perspective:

July 50 (38)	Aug 206 (112)	Sep (as at 20 th) 172 (62)
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Despite the increased demand, the Team managed to respond to the challenge, in addition to their routine work and only two comments have been received indicating dissatisfaction over waiting times for treatment.

Air Quality

Following wide consultation on the options for improving air quality in our two Air Quality Management Areas (at Henlade and East Reach), we are now in the final stages of completing the Action Plan.

Noise Abatement

Stereo equipment was seized by noise control officers, acting under a Magistrates' Warrant, from a Council tenant in the Halcon area.

This action was necessary because the tenant had ignored a Noise Abatement Notice and was continuing to play loud music, causing a statutory nuisance to his neighbours.

A prosecution case is being prepared.

Emergency Response

Our Procedures for responding to Environmental Health emergencies out of normal hours have been completely updated and re-written. All Officers on the out of hours Rota have received training, which included a comprehensive desktop Exercise.

We have taken advantage of the significant amount of effort that this involved, to market a 'Dealing with Emergencies' package and training Seminar for delegates from all over the Country.

The Seminar, to be held in November, is already fully subscribed.

Seagulls

Although the Council has no statutory duty to deal with complaints of seagulls, we have responded to public concerns about growing numbers of these pests in the town centre area of Taunton. Inland urban gulls are an increasing national problem, with experts estimating that populations will escalate by around 30%, year on year.

Every food premises in the area has been given a leaflet reminding them of the need to control food waste. Operators of non-food Businesses occupying premises on which these birds are roosting or nesting have been given advice on proofing measures and another leaflet, giving general advice to members of the public has been made available to anyone who makes enquiries about this problem.

If the necessary funding is made available, it is hoped to commission an expert study before the next breeding season, with a view to establishing a cost effective control strategy. Any such strategy will specifically exclude culling.

Customer Services Training

Training has now been given to all but three Customer Services staff on how to deal with enquiries relating to Environmental Health.

This is in preparation for the Service going 'live' with Customer Services in the next tranche.

The training consisted of a two hour PowerPoint presentation on the structure and functions of the Department, supported by a Manual, and was well received.

CEMETERIES & CREMATORIUM

Enlarged Waiting Room/Upgraded Office

Companies wishing to tender for both the waiting room and office improvements have been assessing the work. Tenders are due by the 4th October. Works involved will be taking place in a very sensitive area so contractors will be required to work around funeral services, visitors and staff.

Cremator Probes

A seminar was held at the Taunton Crematorium demonstrating the effectiveness of the recently fitted probes. Following it's success it is hoped that future seminars will be held for Environmental Health Officers.

Recycling Of Metals Following Cremation

The Federation Of British Cremation Authorities is currently looking at the recycling of metals following cremation. Legal opinion is being sought to determine whether this is possible.

Abatement of Mercury

Crematoria have been regulated under Part 1 of the Environmental Protection Act since 1991. Substantial improvements have been made through the requirement to use Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Costs (BATNEEC) and the statutory government guidance, known as the process guidance note PG5/2. The controls have not, however, so far addressed the emissions of mercury. In response to this DEFRA has consulted with the industry on whether or not to specify gas cleaning of mercury in the next revision of the statutory guidance, this guidance is due at the end of the year.

WASTE SERVICES

Waste Collection and recycling

The leader John Williams has received a letter from Elliot Morley, Minister for the Environment, congratulating the Council on achieving the statutory recycling and composting target of 18% by March 2003.

Performance data for the first quarter of 2004/05 indicates that the Council is still making progress and the recycling and composting rate is now 20.5%. However, the next statutory target is still a major challenge as the Council must achieve a diversion rate from landfill of 34% by the end of March 2006.

The first phase of service developments required to reach this target was introduced in late August when the collection service for dry recyclable materials was extended to include a full range of materials from almost all households in the Deane. This involved the reconfiguration of the entire service and required most households to be sent a leaflet notifying them of changes to the collection arrangements. Inevitably with such huge task there were some teething problems. The improved service has now settled down and any remaining houses that have not been introduced to the service will be included as soon as possible.

In November phase 2 of the service developments will be introduced. This will involve aligning the refuse and recycling collections in preparation for phase 3 when the weekly recycling/food waste collections and the fortnightly refuse collections are introduced to 5000 properties. This is now programmed for February.

Street Cleansing

Recent monitoring of the quality of street cleansing in the Deane indicates that improvements are continuing to be made. BVPI 199 requires that over 300 sites are inspected every 4 months. The sites are randomly selected and the selection criteria ensure that they are representative of the borough. The results of the inspections have been validated by ENCAMS and show that 79% of the inspections were of an acceptable or high standard. This is the second year that data has been collected for BVPI 199 and the results show a 2% improvement in performance.

Public conveniences

The public convenience service was taken back in house in July. Since then the toilets have been cleaned by staff transferred to Deane DLO from the previous contractor. The change has resulted in an improvement in the quality of cleaning and the moral of the staff who have recently undergone a training programme. The training which was provided by the British Institute of Cleansing Science resulted in six members of Deane DLO staff being awarded sanitary cleansing certificates.

Councillor Mark J Edwards

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR 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 homelessness.

Housing Stock Options

The debate on this subject continues at both local and national levels. This subject will therefore be a regular feature of future reports where I shall advise members of action taken since the last meeting of Full Council, ie the last three months and the action planned for the next quarter.

Past three months:

- The services of DOME have been retained as independent Tenants Advisors. Their first task was to set up, operate and advise all of our tenants and leaseholders of a free phone number (0800 919994) established to address any queries in relation to housing stock transfer. This is a service that is additional to the option of speaking directly to Taunton Deane housing officers.
- Following the last Full Council we issued a press release and also spoke on local radio stations advising tenants of the decision taken, why it was taken and what were the next steps.
- The next major step was to consult with our tenants about the type of Housing Association they would prefer should they vote for stock transfer; either a new, stand alone operation or to join with an existing Housing Association. Members and staff were sent details on this in the middle of September.
- The first part of this process was to arrange drop in sessions for tenants and these took place across the Deane from the 30th September to the 2nd October and were conducted by DOME.
- Discussions have taken place with the Government Office South West (GOSW) who continues to indicate their satisfaction with the work being undertaken and the progress being made. It is anticipated that the Housing Stock Options Appraisal process will be “signed off” by GOSW in November.
- Staff are also being kept informed through briefing sessions throughout September and October, they will also be asked their preferred choice of Housing Association should a transfer took place.

The next three months:

- The outcome of the drop in sessions will be relayed back to all tenants asking them to also express a preference. The outcome will be notified to Members in November.
- A partner's day is being arranged for the 5th November. The purpose is to both update them and also seek their views.
- In January we will formally apply to be placed on the Governments Stock Transfer Programme and work has started on compiling all the necessary information. PricewaterhouseCoopers will assist officers with the preparation of the application. However, it must be stressed this does not mean we will transfer, this is advising Government that this may happen.
- A project team will be created early next year to manage the stock option consultation process, this will largely comprise housing staff but will also comprise non-housing staff to ensure corporate involvement and that the Council rather than Housing owns this process.

Homelessness

This Council successfully met the target set by the ODPM of ensuring that no families were housed in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. The deadline was April 2004, a target that we hit and have continued to comply with to date.

My concern now is that of single homeless people. My concern lies around the overall effect that homelessness has on the individuals concerned and also the financial cost to this Council in meeting its obligations in this respect.

The homeless situation was exacerbated following the 2002 Couttie Report. This effectively brought more people into the vulnerable people category; previously vulnerable people were defined as people with mental and/or physical disabilities. The Couttie report also brought 16 and 17 year olds into the net and it is this influx that is putting considerable demands on our resources.

Average numbers of single homeless:

2002	12 people per night
2003	25 people per night
2004	35 people per night

This Council's resources are under pressure both financially and from a manpower perspective. The average cost per night is £35 per person and we are forced to place individuals as far away as Minehead, Burnham on Sea and Weston Super Mare!

The vulnerable group showing the largest increase is the 16 and 17 year olds because basically the word has got around that the Council are obliged to house them.

To add to this pressure, the ODPM (letter dated 24th September 2004) has introduced two further targets that must be met by 31st March 2005:

1. Reduce the level of Rough sleepers by at least two thirds below the 1998 level.
2. Reduce the use of temporary accommodation for families with children from the level recorded in the year commencing April 2003. (In other words we need more long-term solutions).

Needless to say that following the Couttie Report no additional funding has been forthcoming to support the delivery or assist achieving these targets.

However we are determined to meet this challenge head on, and will require the same level of blue-sky thinking and new initiatives that helped this Council meet the families' situation. These new initiatives are currently being formulated and include:

- Negotiating more favourable terms with existing suppliers (price).
- Looking to expand our pool of private sector accommodation.
- Introduction of a cash incentive scheme for flats.

Members please note that under existing rules and considering the existing vulnerable people profile within the Borough of Taunton Deane (i.e 16/17 year olds) the situation could continue to worsen, as we become the victim of our own success.

Councillor Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004
REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL – RESOURCES

1 Financial Services

Within Financial Services work has started on the preparation of the 2005/06 budget, this includes updating the Medium Term Financial Plan, meeting with Managers and providing costings for the forthcoming service review process. This work will occupy the Unit until well into 2005. In addition to this a project team has been set up to manage the implementation of the new Financial Management System which is due to go live in October 2005. In the near future some staff resources will be dedicated full time to this important project.

In addition the Unit is gearing up for the second quarterly monitoring exercise of 2004/05, which will be completed in October and reported to the Review Board in November. Finally the Unit has been undertaking financial awareness training for the Deane DLO.

2 Member's Services

A Members Web Site facility has now been introduced. All members will have been informed of this new service, which is now ready to go live. An example has already been posted on the TDBC web site and members who wish to take advantage should submit the proposed content of their individual pages to the Member Services Unit. Contents are subject to an Acceptable Use Policy.

A short time ago members were surveyed on whether they wanted to continue to receive agendas in hard copies or electronically. A new distribution system is almost ready to be introduced which will ensure that members get this information in the format they have requested. Internal distribution of hard copies will be radically reduced with an email alert being sent to most officers instead of the usual hard copy. This will reduce the distribution and printing costs quite significantly. It also complies fully with the Government's e-government aims.

3 Benefits

The embargo on outcome of our assessment from the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate was removed with the announcement of the Council's CPA results. We achieved 94% compliance with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Performance Standards and have put together an action plan to address any identified weaknesses. We received a letter from the DWP advising us to expect an increase in the time it takes us to work out the effects on benefit from a customer's change in circumstances. The decline is attributed to the new review regime and our results so far would support this. We have analysed the feedback customers gave us from the satisfaction survey carried out in 2003/2004 and this shows improved satisfaction in many areas. We are working on those areas where customers are less happy with our service.

4 Information Systems

The contract to supply and install the storage area network has been issued to Taurus Informatics. We are expecting all hardware to be delivered by the middle of October, and the project plan shows a go live date in mid November. We now have only about 100 days worth of free disk space before we start to get very worried.

We have advertised for a project coordinator, and will be recruiting an additional technical resource, both on a temporary IEG funded basis.

We have commenced projects to deliver the National Priority Outcomes. In particular, we are in the process of signing up with the Government Gateway to allow secure authenticated access to personal information.

This is the key to delivering more services electronically as we can be sure of the identity of the person requesting the service.

We have started a pilot project to look at Electronic Document Management, based on some software call Sharepoint Portal Server from Microsoft. One of the things included in the pilot is a Corporate Digital Image library, which we hope to have running by the end of October.

We are working on replacing the ageing handheld hardware used by the parking attendants with something more up to date (and cheaper!). We hope to be able to go live with this in early November.

In conjunction with the print room, we have instigated a project to look at reducing the complexity and costs associated with printing in TDBC. Xerox is doing some (free) investigation and claim that a 66% reduction in printers (and associated costs) may be possible. We wait with interest the outcome of this study.

Our 2 new students from Plymouth University (on a one year placements part of their 4 year degree) have now started and are again demonstrating the value to both TDBC and the students of this arrangement.

5 Revenues

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

- *Cash Deposit Machines Implementation* – tenders have been invited and submitted from 3 potential suppliers. References are currently being sought in respect of each supplier and visits are being conducted to other Council's in order to view machines in action.
- *Council Tax & NNDR Collection Rates* – collection rates remain on target and as yet the change to the instalment date appears to have had no adverse effect.
- *Business Rates 2005 Revaluation* – central government have only recently released the draft proposals for the new transitional relief scheme, which will be

effective from 1 April 2004. We are currently undertaking work in order to identify the IT system changes that will be required to operate the new scheme.

- *Small Business Relief* – draft regulations have recently been introduced relating to the introduction of the new small business relief scheme. Work is being undertaken to interpret these regulations and to identify the changes that will be required to our IT system.
- *Business Rates Discretionary Relief Guidelines* – a rough draft of new guidelines for awarding discretionary relief has now been completed. This will be ‘fine-tuned’ during the next month or so before being put before members for approval.
- *IT System Development* – major changes are to be made to our Council Tax system during the next 12 months in order to improve its functionality and make it e-govt compliant. A complete specification of the changes required has been drawn up and agreed with the IT section.

6 Internal Audit Services

The Audit & Review function has been split (with the Review function being merged into the newly formed Policy and Performance Unit) and the Council’s Internal Audit Section moved to the ground floor within the Deane House. The section has continued to progress with the system-based audits during the last quarter, which include Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates and Housing Benefits. It has also started to explore ways in which it can work more closely with the other Somerset Districts.

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

- Data Protection – Continued provision of general advice and guidance on data protection issues (Dealing with subject access requests, providing guidance to staff on disclosures).
- Risk Management – Facilitation of Risk Management sessions and ongoing involvement in the creation of new risk registers covering each of the six Heads of Service.
- Wessex Reinvestment Trust – Advice and guidance on audit and risk management issues.
- Partnering – Provision of advice on the Council’s future partnering arrangements regarding the awarding of kitchen refurbishment contracts.

7 Office Services

Additional funds from the e-government budget have meant that the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Team has been able to digitise the Council’s land holding Terrier and Council housing stock ahead of the original programme. Both sets of information are being checked by Valuation Services before being available for general use. The Team is now working closely with Land Charges to help them move towards electronic delivery of Searches. It has recently acquired a portable GPS unit

that will help with pinpointing locations of data in the field, where our historic information is not as good as it could be, for example Tree Preservation Orders.

Stricter adherence to the use of Second Class Post and closer monitoring of outgoing mail by the Office Services Team has reduced overall postage costs by £1400 a month so far this year. I hope this trend will continue.

8 Personnel

We are very pleased to report that the Council as a whole has been accredited with the Investors in People Standard. This is a significant achievement for the Council and thanks go to the efforts of all staff that have contributed towards making this possible.

As part of implementing the Best Value Improvement Plan, work has now been completed on a comprehensive management development programme. This programme, which has been designed and developed in-house, is shortly to be piloted through the Corporate Management Team. It is intended that this programme should then be rolled out across the Council so that other managers may also benefit from it.

Finally, we have now secured the services of an on-site Occupational Health nurse, who holds a weekly drop in session at the Deane House. These sessions will help managers by providing speedy and accessible advice and support, which will enable sickness absence to be managed effectively. It is hoped this will in turn improve the Council's sickness absence levels.

Councillor Terry Hall

COUNCIL MEETING – 12 OCTOBER 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

“The council is providing effective community leadership via its many partnerships”.

This very positive statement from our Comprehensive Performance Assessment points to one of the strengths of this council that contributed to our Excellent result. It demonstrates that we are an outward-looking council that seeks ways to work jointly with others to the benefit of the people of Taunton Deane and it is pleasing to note that the Auditors saw added value in the way our partnerships are bringing real improvements. Credit and thanks are due to the many officers and members who are involved in our various partnerships for the commitment and effort they have shown in making these partnerships effective.

LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Local Strategic Partnership recently agreed spending plans for the £143,000 raised by increased council tax on second homes. The partnership set up priority areas where it wanted to see the money spent, and a group of officers from the different partners then met and agreed where the money should go. This was the first time the LSP had taken on this responsibility and I would like to thank the officers who undertook this task so effectively. For the LSP to genuinely add value, the different partners need to show commitment to the priorities of the Community Strategy and area strategies rather than the priorities of their own organisation, and this is beginning to happen.

Now that the LSP is responsible for spending money raised from the council tax payer, it is important that the public are made aware of where that funding is going. The next edition of Deane Dispatch will carry information on the schemes to which that funding has been allocated. Details of this are also on the LSP website. I will not list them all here, but will pick out a few that may be of particular interest to members of this council:

- £25K to the Police for further Police Community Support Officers. This sum has been matched funded by the Police from their own resources.
- £5K for a project led by the County Youth Service to pull together information gathered from various youth consultations undertaken by different partners, map any gaps and make the outcomes available on a website. This is good for this council, because it addresses one of the areas where CPA identified a weakness. It is also an example of where I hope the LSP will be increasingly effective, i.e. in the sharing/pooling of information among partners.
- £15K towards local schemes identified in the emerging area strategies for the different areas in Taunton Deane.
- £15K towards three schemes in the most deprived wards in Taunton Deane: a feasibility study on the redevelopment of the Boys Club site at Priorswood as a community resource, support for the newly formed Taunton East Action

Trust to secure the development officer post to the end of March 2005 and to enable community involvement in the development of a feasibility study to redevelop Tonedale Mill

- £5K towards projects identified by Local Action Teams to help with anti social behaviour in specific areas
- £5K towards helping young people design and commission their own Youth Shelters.

CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP (CDRP)

The Partnership has been allocated Home Office funding to tackle anti-social behaviour. The money, awarded for two consecutive years, 2004/05 and 2005/06 was particularly “ring fenced” to tackle anti-social behaviour issues.

The CDRP has agreed to spend their award in recruiting a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) specifically to tackle anti-social behaviour identified by Taunton Deane Borough Council and the CDRP. Employed by the Constabulary the PCSO will receive their initial 5 week training from the Police but will then be based in Deane House working with the Community Safety Team.

Whilst not finalised it is anticipated that the PCSO will work on a five week rolling shift pattern to allow for some evening/late night working on a weekly basis. This will assist with patrols, tackling anti-social behaviour as it is reported and linking with additional initiatives such as the drug testing equipment.

The list below, though not exhaustive, outlines some of the areas which the PCSO will be working on in the future.

- Pro-active patrolling of identified problem areas received and prioritised by TDBC (out of hours if necessary)
- Answering complaints received by members of public about ASB.
- Assisting with joint work with licensing e.g. Drugs Testing Machine, trading standards checks, under age drinking
- Devising a system for officially recognising ASB and recording baseline data from reports received
- Point of contact for ASB steering group – liaison with legal team over prospective cases for ABC’s & ASBO’s
- Signposting service for Community Beat Manager’s and Community Beat Officers and the Local Action Team co-ordinator
- Dealing with replying to complaints of low level general nuisance and quality of life issues.

The recruitment of a PCSO to work from the Deane House is the result of close working with the police and is an positive step forward in enabling this Authority to take an improved pro-active response to those who write into the Council with complaints about anti-social behaviour. Currently we have limited resources to deal with these complaints and this can, on occasion, give the impression that we are not interested and/or “passing the buck”. This new PCSO will be an added valuable resource in a position to compliment the existing work of the CDRP and Community

Safety and will be a lead officer in tackling the anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues that can affect everyone in the community.

EQUALITIES CO-ORDINATOR

I am pleased to report that Harry Connery takes up the post of Equalities Co-ordinator from 11 October 2004.

Our CPA process identified a weakness in the Council's approach to equality and diversity, and this post will be instrumental in helping all services to address our commitments and statutory responsibilities in this important area.

Councillor Joanna Lewin-Harris