

Part II Reports from the Executive

COUNCIL MEETING 18 JULY 2006

Report of Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council

At the time of writing this report the Local Government Association annual conference which I attended has just concluded and as usual it was highly efficient in its organisation with a wealth of interesting sessions to stimulate the thought process. The whole theme of the conference was “the future is local” and most certainly we heard speakers from all main parties advising how local government had “grown of age” and were to be trusted in future with devolving of responsibilities back from the centre. Very welcome news but I will not hold my breath until I see it actually happening, what was it one speaker said “actions speak louder than words” ? Some of the highlights of the conference were:

Rt Hon David Miliband, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

A dazzling display of statistics dealing with recycling, global warming and the need for clean renewable energy, the pressure to improve recycling/reduce landfill will continue. Local energy production was promoted for individual developments and seemingly supporting wind farms!! He was challenged from the floor how the strong promotion of local renewable energy schemes sat with the declared intention of the Government to consider building more nuclear plants. Mr Miliband responded, unenthusiastically, it appeared, that climate change was such a threat to the future of the planet that no source of near zero emission energy production could be discounted.

Sir Michael Lyons and Extended Review

Sir Michael, with an impressive panel, provided an enlightening talk on possible Local Government Review and the funding of Local Government how this was best achieved. It was stressed that his extensive consultation process and thus final reports, were nowhere near concluded and would not be until much later this year. In respect of Local Government reorganisation the review was not identifying a compelling need for such major disruption which would detract from LA's primary purpose of delivering efficient local services to the community. There was a strong indication that greater efficiencies could be gained from the status quo but with much more partnership working between local authorities whether from different tiers or not. As regards local authority funding again preliminary opinions were offered but with the health warning that final deliberations were not concluded. The highlights were:

1. Government should and must devolve more powers to local authorities.
2. Local authorities must fully involve the community on receipt of devolved powers
3. Accepted as a given that nobody likes paying more tax than necessary
4. The resistance to Council tax difficult to understand as such a small proportion of the total tax taken by Government.
5. Measures need to be taken to reduce the hitherto high increases in Council Tax to avoid the perceived unfairness.
6. Consider all cases where applicable, of charging for services used rather than raising general taxation.
7. Some form of local taxation is essential but had not found the silver bullet to replace Council Tax as a property based tax appeared fundamentally right.
8. Retain perhaps a broadened Council Tax with a proportion of some national tax allocated to local authorities.
9. Review if NNDR can be returned to local control with safeguards over inflation only increases.
10. Engage with local businesses to gauge support for this proposal.
11. Greater take up of Council Tax benefit was regarded as key to alleviating the perceived hardship imposed by Council Tax.

Later this year Sir Michael will be presenting a full report.

Rt Hon Ruth Kelly Secretary of State for Local Communities and Local Government & Minister for Women

Again the theme of the conference was maintained with a strong emphasis on devolution of centralized powers back to LA's. A remarkable statistic quoted (or should I say unremarkable as we have complained long and hard about the level of meaningful inspection) was that of all the inspections and checks on process and performance carried out by local government 80% were to satisfy central government demands only. It was only 20% of these inspections that provided any benefit or information to the local community. This was followed by an immediate promise to have a bonfire of regulations to reduce unnecessary inspection, what did I say earlier about not holding my breath and actions speak louder than words!! This prompted a question from the floor to the effect how was the present proposal to set up a deregulation panel different from a similar panel established about eight months ago and would the work done by the previous panel feed into the work of the new panel. It was merely reiterated that we were now going to see a determined onslaught on unnecessary inspection regimes and all LA's were exhorted to contribute to the process. On the future of local government reorganisation the emphasis was definitely not to pursue it as a mandatory requirement and clearly a strong indication that "partnership working" between all local authorities would be much more preferable. Efficiencies would then be gained from economies of scale and the ability to make greater investment.

Rt Hon David Cameron, Leader, Conservative Party

Very supportive of devolving powers back to local authorities and dealt ably with the thorny issue that it was previous Conservative governments that had started the process of centralising local powers back to central government. In response to questions from the floor it was clearly stated that actions by “loony left” councils at the time demanded the imposition of control measures. The clear statement now was that local authorities by their actions had demonstrated an unquestionable ability to properly and democratically represent their communities and as such should be given the freedoms and flexibilities to get on with it. Included in this was a clear commitment to halt the spread of regionalisation and reduce quangos that have over the years removed powers from democratically elected authorities. A clear statement was also made that the Standards Board for England would be removed as it had proved to be overbearing, inefficient and unreasonable. Also included was getting the balance of funding right so that elections meant something to the electorate in respect of an administration being responsible for delivering efficient services at reasonable cost. There was also a very strong commitment to the environment with the recognition that we must all play our part in promoting and improving recycling, reducing harmful emissions and renewable energy as climate change was the most critical factor facing mankind and the planet we live on. His clear statement on nuclear energy was that we should not start with the solution to the problem but consider the problem first and then arrive at the solution and it was his opinion that many alternatives had to be fully investigated before promoting nuclear power as the solution.

Finally, one breakout session I attended was entitled “Delivering affordable rural housing” and speakers were Commissioners that prepared the report for Government “Affordable Rural Housing Commission” presented in May this year to DCLG and Defra. As you will all be aware I have considerable interest in this subject and not just for rural communities, so attended in the hope I might learn something. Although I had great empathy with the aims of the Commission it appears that nobody has informed them of the ongoing government initiative and demands for “sustainable development” as determined in the Regional Spatial Strategy. In Taunton Deane’s case only 75 dwellings per annum outside the main settlements of Taunton and Wellington are allowed for the next 20 years! I gained the distinct impression that the Commission’s report proposed building large numbers because they had identified a huge unmet need. My appraising them of the difficulties with this approach notwithstanding the “exceptions policy” we use, was met with a complete lack of understanding that it could possibly be a problem, I was exhorted to make the effort not look for difficulties! Talk about the Left hand not knowing what the Right hand is doing!

I now turn to local issues;

Some good news for Wellington

Concern has been expressed to me that vacancies in retail shops are increasing because of parking charges. I have consistently maintained that Wellington

enjoys some of the lowest parking charges around for a significant settlement of its size so should not be a cause for lack of occupancy of shops. From our regular annual Wellington Retail Survey just conducted it would appear to be very good news with the lowest figures ever recorded over the preceding five years (less than half the number recorded annually 2003 to 2005). The feedback I have been given is that not only are there less vacancies than last year but "it was felt the town looked smarter than last year"

Excellent news all round and when combined with the substantial investment already made in Wellington and in progress at the Blackdown Business Park, it can only bode well for the future economic opportunity and prosperity in general. A credit to the community and local organisations involved for making Wellington such an attractive place. We must also not forget the huge initiative being progressed by our Economic Development department in conjunction with local organisers and traders to promote Wellington as a "food town" of the South West, with lots of local delicacies and specialities proposed as the foundation of the marketing for niche suppliers that already exist and will follow. A credit to all involved and I wish it every success. This again reinforces our clear commitment that we are a Council for the whole of the Taunton Deane not just Taunton.

Ballot for Housing Stock Transfer

I must pay tribute to all of our staff involved in this process as we are now managing to raise the level of understanding as to what the options of a yes or no vote will mean to the very tenants that will be asked to make the decision. An enormous amount of hard work has gone into the research and preparation of reports to show the alternative positions based on the budgets that will be available for each scenario. Clearly this shows a massive £1.85 million shortfall per annum to 2010 and swingeing cuts in services will be necessary to meet this shortfall if tenants choose to vote no.

I also acknowledge the hard work of many, many officers who are going out to meet tenants at meetings and in their homes to ensure the facts of the situation are communicated and to avoid misunderstanding of what we are proposing. The commitment being shown is truly commendable and I thank all of them.

The important part for me is not to persuade the tenants to vote either yes or no but to ensure they are fully informed when making that choice, we all have that duty to ensure the factual situation is imparted and tenants realise the full implication of a yes or no vote. For tenants to suffer cuts in services having said no to transfer and not to have appreciated this will be the reality of a no vote and will be the worst situation of all. I can only urge all Members and everybody involved to work constructively together to try and avoid this potentially dreadful position.

Annual Report of the Council 2006/07

This is an “excellent document” for an “Excellent Council” and may I pay credit to Simon Lewis and his team for the huge amount of hard work to prepare it in due time for submission in a format which is easily assimilated and good to read. But more than that, it is a credit to all Officers and Members of the Council that the Authority operates in such an efficient manner to achieve the “excellent” results as recorded. “A Year in View” on pages 6 and 7 provide a very interesting snapshot of the many achievements. It reports against our key priorities with a summary of ongoing key projects. It also lists the weaknesses as identified by the Audit Commission during inspections and how we will address these in the current year. This report has been circulated to all Members and I commend it to you as a record of achievements of your Council.

Relocation of the Livestock Market

Regrettably I have no further positive news about this, we still await final confirmation from Taunton Market Auctioneers as to the final location and it remains very much that commercial forces will prevail as to their final choice.

Affordable Housing

This is very much a top priority of this Council. Officers have been carrying out in depth studies of how we may provide this to meet the huge demand from our community as identified in the ARK Consultancy report in 2005, of over 550 dwellings per annum. We should be in a position to share these studies with all Members and the community within a few months. Affordable housing is a serious problem across the land but more serious here than a lot of areas as, in common with London and the South East, we share average house price to earnings ratio of around 10 to 1. This disenfranchises large numbers of our community from ever meeting their aspiration of a home of their own. This, I believe, must be an absolute top priority of our administration provide far greater numbers of affordable houses whether to rent or to buy. The very successful “Affordable Housing Day” set up in Deane House recently adequately demonstrated the demand, over 400 people visited and record numbers for an exhibition of this type registered for packs to apply to join the Housing Register and in excess of 100 registered for affordable housing from a developer, in anticipation of them obtaining a suitable site. This is truly a case of “actions speak louder than words”. To deny our community the opportunity to buy homes such as this is truly denying the less well off in our community the opportunity to provide themselves with the dignity and privacy of a home of their own. We must all work constructively to avoid this.

Vision for Taunton or regeneration of Taunton as I would now prefer to call it because it is moving forward apace. Somerset County Cricket Club has unveiled exciting plans for a complete redevelopment of the ground to transform it into a club that will attract international one day matches. Also develop training facilities that will cater for all manner of sports and with extended and improved conference facilities, they will truly become a driver for economic development in Taunton. They are also working closely with the Brewhouse Theatre who have

exciting development plans for the existing site, because they truly see culture and sport as being inextricably linked in any future development plans. A recent Government announcement has really set the seal on our huge regeneration programme which confirmed the award of major grants towards essential infrastructure costs for revised road access to the largest regeneration areas. We will shortly be seeking expressions of interest from major developers for the Firepool area and from there we can determine the best proposals offered. The redevelopment of High Street, both East and West is presently being worked on by developers to establish if viable schemes can be produced. We should have further news about this in the next few months. We are presently considering the proposed parking strategy for Taunton, as recently prepared, and although not finite recommendations it does provide us with a wealth of information on which to base final decisions. The decisions made about parking will impact tremendously on the future growth thus prosperity of Taunton, it must be carefully considered to ensure we achieve the right balance between the ability of shoppers and short term business visitors to access the town easily and find relatively convenient parking whilst persuading the commuter to think differently how to access the town for work. A major consideration here has to be adequate and convenient park and ride together with a much improved public bus service.

Redevelopment or Relocation of UKHO

Much has been written and said about this possibility. Be assured that as the local authority responsible, we are very much concerned about the outcome and have been working with UKHO management for many months behind the scene to ensure the retention of this important and valuable business in Taunton. We have made it absolutely clear to the UKHO that we will leave no stone unturned in order for them to achieve a successful redevelopment, or relocation of their establishment within Taunton Deane, preferably Taunton. We are very much aware this could be a political decision that determines it finally but be assured that as an administration we shall ensure that if we fail it will be a political decision, not for any substantial reason of logistics or will on our part.

Introduction of Staff Travel Plan I am pleased to report that Taunton Deane has achieved the implementation of a Travel Plan which went live on 3 July 2006 after detailed negotiations with staff and unions. The introduction of traffic reduction measures has long been an aspiration of this Council and it was first considered as an action item as far back as November 2000 when a working party was set up. With the need to take positive action to reduce air pollution, improve health and the serious congestion in Taunton it was obvious that we had to take the lead before we could exhort others to follow. I am delighted that we have managed to bring this very sensitive proposal to fruition and have achieved consensus how it should be operated. This is a credit to all who have to make or accept the hard choices that have to be made in order to sensibly deliver the Travel Plan. As I write this, we are now in the second week of operation and I am pleased to say that it is functioning well so far but, it is accepted, that future close

monitoring will be required. This particularly so as we approach the winter months when travelling becomes more difficult.

Elton John Concert

Last but not least, what a tremendous success for the County Cricket Club and for the community of Taunton and around. Circa 22,000 people attended, I believe in the order of 70% from a TA post code, and so well organised with minimum problems for access. Prior to commencement an electrifying air of good natured anticipation was evident amongst the huge crowd. I must applaud all those involved for their entrepreneurial spirit in arranging this, the organisation that appeared to be impeccable and for the fantastic night that was had by all. The largest crowd that I have ever seen in Taunton for a single event, the first and I do hope it is not the last, as it most certainly was an unprecedented success.

Cllr John Williams
Leader, Taunton Deane Borough Council

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Report of Councillor Terry Hall - Resources

“Isis” – (Improving Services in Somerset)

Meetings with the 3 short-listed bidders are now well under way across the Council, including meetings with managers from those services not within the scope of Isis. This is to ensure that both the bidders (and our managers) get the maximum opportunity to explore what the bidders can do, to help us improve and transform the way we provide our services as a whole.

Bidders will then have the summer months (i.e. July to October) to shape their bids, taking into account the changes and the improvements we are looking for across the board.

We have now issued the ITN (Invitation to Negotiate) on 30 June, and hope to select our preferred bidder early in the New Year.

A number of activities are either currently taking place, or are being planned to ensure that all managers and all staff get the maximum opportunity to meet the bidders. Open house “Roadshows” were held in May, and last month staff from those services in scope are meeting with each bidder to discuss ideas and answer staff questions in more detail.

Procurement

NePP Review

The IDeA visited the Council in April to conduct a free review of our e-procurement position, as part of the National E-Procurement Project (NePP). This was a very useful exercise highlighting some of our strengths and areas requiring improvement. Specific findings from the review were:
Our centralised Corporate Purchasing Unit has been operating effectively and the Council has shown a clear understanding of the importance of procurement

The Procurement Strategy is well written and comprehensive but in need of updating. There is still scope for significant savings through the cost of goods and service and more efficient procurement practise

The report recommends we-

- a) Define our ‘procure to pay’ process to identify wasted steps and opportunities to streamline the procurement process.
- b) Write a business case for e-procurement to identify which methods of e-procurement best fit the Council in the future
- c) Update the Corporate Procurement Strategy to take account of the e-procurement findings and the latest guidance from the National Procurement Strategy
- d) Use the Spend Analysis to find other ‘quick win’ savings across the Council

Continue to work closely with SCC to identify opportunities of joining up on contracts to achieve economies of scale.
We will be taking these actions forward in July, with the support of the Corporate Procurement Group.

Corporate Property Services

As mentioned in my April report, the Corporate Property Services Group are monitoring water and energy usage within the Councils Corporate Buildings and in highlighting to staff various simple ways of saving both.

An easy guide has been produced which has been distributed to all Managers who are requested to inform the Property Group of items of equipment, or any building failure contributing to energy and water waste so that action can be taken now to resolve those problems before the Autumn.

There is a considerable amount of work being handled by the group e.g. in respect of the Old Municipal Building to make it suitable for use by the County Registrar; alterations to the Bike Park building in St James Street; registration and marketing of the council owned industrial units at Wellington - the main preoccupation of certain members of the group over the last few months has been to attend the various meetings and carry out work in connection with the ISIS project.

All the teams within the Property Services Group are "in scope", so should the project go ahead will be part of the new partnership. Specifications have been drawn up and are in the process of being finalised. This phase of the process was completed by the end of June when the Invitation to Negotiate was sent out to the three bidders. After that for a short period it should be possible to catch up with the backlog of work.

Members Services

The annual meeting of the Council has taken place since the last Council meeting and the decision to take the meeting to Wellington proved to be very successful. The meeting was held at the Kings Church and was well attended by local members of the public.

Taunton Deane has always enjoyed a good relationship with its parishes and this is due in no small measure to the appointment of a Parish Liaison Officer way back in 1974. David Greig continues to nurture that relationship and so far this year he has attended 29 different Parish Council meetings. He hopes to visit as many of the parish councils as possible during the year in addition to being on hand to provide advice, guidance and training where needed.

With the 2007 local government elections looming work is proceeding in developing ways of encouraging local people to make sure they are registered to vote and to take part in local elections. As well as contributing to Local Democracy Week, the "Making a Difference Campaign" will include a small road show from January 2007 designed to visit a number of locations and

encourage people to make sure they are registered, draw attention to the forthcoming elections and encourage them to vote. In tandem with this, potential candidates will be encouraged to think about standing for election.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Financial Services have been finalising their work on the closedown of the 2005/06 financial year. The outturn for 2005/06 has now been completed and this showed an underspend on the GF of only £45k which is a vast improvement on previous years. For the HRA the underspend was £352k which was due to reduced spend on management & maintenance. The DLO made a surplus of £70k. Work is now complete on the production of the 2005/06 Statement of Accounts which has been approved by the Corporate Governance Committee - The Statement of Accounts has been produced one month earlier than last year and will be externally audited over the Summer.

We will be finalising the 2005/06 annual efficiency statement and in July we will be doing further consultation with the public on our priorities and budget. This follows hard on the heels of a very successful discussion forum held in June with representatives from the Taunton & Wellington Pensioners Forum.

Work is also continuing with supporting many of the key projects which the Council is actively pursuing such as Waste Contract Integration, Housing Transfer and of course the inevitable ISIS

REVENUES

Collection of the current year's Council Tax and Business Rates was on target at the end of the first quarter (30 June 2006). The targets for this year are the rates actually achieved for last year. We have not increased the targets because it would be unrealistic to do so in view of the additional workload generated by the system conversion exercise and ISIS.

New Revenues System

The conversion of information is currently being undertaken and our old Council Tax system was shut down on 30 June 2006. The Conversion exercise will take 3 weeks. We will start using the new system on 24 July 2006. A backlog of post will build up during this period. However, we were processing post within 3 days of receipt prior to the system closing down and consequently the backlog will be a maximum of 4 weeks. All staff have now received basic training in the use of the new system. However, it will obviously take a certain period of time for staff to become fluent in the use of the new system.

Internal Audit Services

The Audit Team have now finished the first year of working as part of the South West Audit Partnership. We achieved 77% of the 2005/06 Taunton Deane Audit Plan, which represented an improvement on the previous year's

performance. However, this meant that the service missed its local performance indicator of 95%, the failure to achieve the target was down to staffing changes during the year and the resource that was used up in setting up the new partnership. Performance is set to improve during 2006/07 as working practices have now been established and the economies of scale achieved in working as part of the South West Audit Partnership materialise.

The Internal Audit Team at Taunton now has a full compliment of staff and continues to deliver in the following areas: -

Undertaking an ever-increasing range of non-financial audits (recent examples include abandoned vehicles, building control and housing repairs). Helping in the roll out of Risk Management at service level and ongoing provision of Data Protection and Freedom of Information advice. Playing a vital assurance role in some of the major projects that the Council is working on including ISIS, replacement Revenues / Benefits and Housing Systems.

PERSONNEL

Leadership Development

A programme of Leadership training started earlier this year with top corporate management and is now being delivered to all senior managers and beyond. The training is unique to TDBC having been designed specifically for our organisation. Early signs are that it is proving highly effective.

Investors in People

The standard for achieving this status changed at the beginning of this year and we are working towards developing the organisation to be well placed to retain our recognition in December 2007.

Workforce Planning

This is progressing well and the full workforce plan for the council will be published by Sept. A great deal of work has gone into this plan which will set out the way the organisation plans to ensure the right people resources are in place to meet future service needs and challenges.

Job Evaluation

The council is changing its Job Evaluation scheme this year and work is now progressing well to equip managers and staff for the task of re describing jobs and for trained panels to evaluate those jobs. Strategies and implementation terms are being designed and negotiated to ease the transition

Sickness Absence

An impressive number of strategies involving training, monitoring, management support and the engagement of other specialist support are

being implemented in an attempt to reduce absence levels and increase productivity.

HR Support for Major Corporate Initiatives

The unit is providing a high level of professional HR support to the ISIS, Housing Stock Options, Waste and Building Control partnership initiatives. This has meant refocusing our activities and structure to dedicate specialist resources to ensuring the success of these projects.

Recruitment Support

Various developments in the service have taken place including on-line personality profiling, production of an intranet based recruitment toolkit and a new protocol, which would prepare us for ISIS and Housing Stock transfer.

Information Systems

Sharepoint

Work on our new Intranet site continues apace – the first tranche of user training is now complete and has been enthusiastically received. We now have around 70 sites or areas publishing information using the system. CMT are assisting in developing the information management aspects of the system by identifying the key documents and information they require access to as part of their management role. Our Communications group has been tasked with establishing the design for the new portal 'home' page. We hope to complete the switch over by the autumn.

Revenues and Benefits system implementation

We are now in the first week of the 3-4 week conversion and switch over, and so far progress appears to be good. There is still a long way to go, particularly with some of the more complex interfaces, but nevertheless we are happy with progress so far.

Housing System

Work on implementing the new housing system kicked off in earnest for us in first week of July, with a series of detailed meetings with the system suppliers.

These two major system implementations running concurrently, plus the volume of the rest of the work going on, is placing intense pressure on the resources of the ICT unit at the moment and for the foreseeable future.

Councillor Terry Hall

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Report of Councillor Mrs Joanna Lewin-Harris - Community Leadership

LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Sustainable Community Strategy

A key task for the LSP this year is to develop a new Sustainable Community Strategy for Taunton Deane. Government guidelines tell us that this should represent a common vision for a more sustainable future for the Borough and that this vision must be based on evidence. The Strategy should balance social, economic and environmental need and meet the needs of existing and future generations.

There is a wealth of information available from which to draw. For evidence we have the Local Futures work, Audit Commission Area Profiles and Quality of Life Indicators, Health and Social Needs Analysis and information from the Regional Observatory. There is also the results of local consultation.

The Strategy needs to take account of key regional and sub-regional plans, for example the Integrated Regional Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy, Housing and Economic Strategies, the Local Transport Plan, the Local Area Agreement and, at the other end of the scale, local Parish Plans. Local Cultural and Biodiversity Plans need to be wrapped up in the Strategy.

The Talking Tomorrows Taunton Deane consultation is now at an end. Much useful information has been gathered. This is being analysed and will feed into the new Sustainable Community Strategy as well as into the new LDF documents.

The new Strategy will probably be built up around the LAA Themes of Children and Young People, Older People, Healthier Communities, Stronger Communities, Economic Development and Enterprise and Safer Communities. An action plan for who will do what and when will be crucial, as will measurable outcomes.

So, the information is there, the context is there. The challenge will, as ever, be to prioritise. The Community Strategy will cover a wide range of issues for the area, but it also needs to identify a small number of really important outcomes for Taunton Deane that all partners on the LSP can buy into and work collectively to deliver.

LSP Review

Some useful findings have come out of the recent review of the LSP but there is more work to do. The findings need to fit in with the emerging governance arrangements for the SSP and other partnerships in Taunton, for example the Vision Delivery Team. There is a need to be practical about capacity and how we can most effectively achieve maximum influence and added value. Delivery and monitoring of the new Sustainable Community Strategy will be an important task for the LSP and any new structures need to reflect this. The LSP will consider options at its September meeting.

CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIP

No Drinking Order

The June meeting of the CDRP endorsed the proposed extended area for the new No Drinking Order that is out for consultation. This will replace the existing Byelaw in the town centre.

Biometric scanning was discussed. It is accepted that there is a need for better identification of clients to pubs and clubs. A scheme is operating in Yeovil whereby clubs have access to a finger scan machine that can be linked to a photograph to make it easier to identify customers. Premises can be linked to prevent problem clients moving from one venue to another. It was agreed to investigate this further and to invite a user from Yeovil to a future meeting.

Neighbourhood Policing

Structures are currently being put in place to roll out neighbourhood policing in Taunton Deane. Police beats now mirror TDBC wards and the whole area has been divided into 5 clusters of wards, each of which will be the responsibility of a police sergeant. The proposal is then to set up a Public Forum in each cluster whereby members of the public can discuss and influence local priorities for the police.

There are currently 15 PCSO's in Taunton Deane with a further 25 expected over the next 12 months or so. This significant increase in the number of PCSO's will help to provide the visible police presence for which the public is clearly asking.

Neighbourhood policing provides opportunities and challenges for the police. Funding for PCSO's will be at 100% until March 2008, with 75% funding available in the following year. The police will be expected to find match funding to fill this gap. This will clearly be quite a challenge. It is worth pointing out that TDBC currently contributes £30,000 p.a. towards the costs of PCSO's in the borough.

Crime Update

Inspector Ashwin reported the general trend of local crime is downwards, with a significant drop in cases of burglary (41% down from last year). The

exception is of theft from motor vehicles, which has increased. There is a lot of information on crime statistics, down to ward level, on the police website www.avonandsomerset.police.uk.

CPA USE OF RESOURCES

An important element in the new CPA framework is 'use of resources' – how well we use public money for the benefit of residents and council tax payers.

The Audit Commission recently placed us 24th out of 238 district councils in England. Within Somerset, we scored higher than any other district council and, compared with the 35 regional (South West) district councils, only one authority (West Devon) had a better score.

The full details of this excellent result can be seen in the Audit Commission's 'Annual Audit and Inspection Letter' available on the website.

ANNUAL REPORT

The Executive has approved the Annual Report 2006/07 which is before you for approval. It includes our vision and core values, a snapshot of the borough, progress against last year's promises, key plans for 2006/07 and how we will address our weaknesses. My thanks to members of the Policy and Performance team who have pulled this key document together.

SCRUTINY

The review of scrutiny is moving forwards. Review Board members have agreed that changes to Scrutiny should be built around the following 6 objectives:

- Engage with officers and members to promote and embed good scrutiny
- Development of a scrutiny forward plan
- Development of a "gatekeeper" role for the Scrutiny officer
- Effective training for members and officers
- Communication and publicity of scrutiny and its outcomes
- Development of Task and Finish reviews

The Scrutiny Officer has made 9 specific pledges on work that he will undertake over the next three months and I am confident that all members will soon begin to notice the impact of this work.

Joanna Lewin-Harris

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Report of Councillor Bishop-Planning Policy and Transportation

Regional Spatial Strategy

The South West Regional Assembly submitted the Draft RSS for the South West 2006 –2026 to Government on 24th April 2006.

Consultation on the Draft RSS began on 6th June and will run for 12 weeks from 6th June to 30th August 2006.

An Examination in Public will take place during Spring 2007 and it is anticipated that the Panel Report will be published in mid 2007. The Secretary of State will issue the proposed changes to the Draft RSS at the end of 2007 followed by an eight week consultation period. The Revised RSS should be issued in Early 2008.

Transportation Issues

On 6th July 2006 the Government announced, in a letter to the Leader of the Regional Assembly, its response to the transport proposals which were included in the South West's advice presented to Ministers at the end of January and included in the announcement was confirmation that the two new schemes that had not been previously approved (the Greater Bristol Bus Network and the Taunton Third way and Northern Inner Distributor Road) were included in the schemes that are expected to be funded during the next three years (2006/7 to 2008/09).

It is also stated that "We also expect to fund a start on the Second Strategic Route (A30/A303/A358), which you have prioritised to spend from the end of the RFA period. We will wish to discuss further with you the composition and timing of this investment in the light of the outcome of the current review of the A303 Stonehenge scheme. We recognise the importance of this route to the south west, and also that it is likely to place a heavy future call on your RFA funds".

The Third Way and The Northern Inner Distributor Road will facilitate the regeneration of our major sites in the town centre.

Talking Tomorrow's Taunton Deane

'Talking Tomorrow's Taunton Deane' in recognition for its fresh approach to community involvement and partnership is in line for the 'Community Strategy' award at next years Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) awards. I would like to congratulate all the officers involved, the Members and the public who attended the workshops, urban and rural road shows, lunch clubs, farmers meetings and local youth groups.

We are currently reviewing the results and we will let people know about our findings, and in the meantime work will continue on the Local Development Framework (LDF) to ensure that community aspirations and local planning

policy are firmly brought together. Draft Community Strategies for Taunton North and Taunton East will also be prepared following the very successful meetings in both areas.

Many visitors to Taunton town centre may also remember the street theatre, which aimed to be a fun way of publicising the consultation and to get local people to take part.

E planning criteria ,changes and Planning Delivery Grant

Local Government consortium Planning and Regulatory Services Online (PARSOL) recently announced revised guidelines which state that Local authorities must block personal details on planning applications published online.

It follows a survey that exposed the fact that three quarters of local authorities are failing to block applicants' details.

PARSOL planning chairman Martin Howell said recently "Practical use of the guidelines indicated that some areas were open to interpretation". He also stated "Local authorities should where possible, remove from the digital version of the form the applicant's telephone number, address and signature"

The DCLG is evaluating a fresh set of standards which could help in determining the amount of planning delivery grant for e-planning. PARSOL chairman Martin Howell stated "PARSOL is in discussion with the DCLG on the use of a subset of the standards to award the e-planning component of the grant"

The DCLG expects to start a consultation on the criteria for the 2007-08 grant awards before the end of this month. One of the standards would award credit to authorities that broadcast live webcasts of planning committee meetings and publish agendas, reports and minutes on-line.

Councils with a list of all applications for the past ten years would also be given credit and other suggested criteria encourages councils to provide E-mails and texts of all planning applications in a particular area, plus the publication of pre-application advice.

Meanwhile the government has agreed a new target for ten per cent of all applications to be made online by next March.

Circular 01/2006

The circular gives guidance on changes to the development control system implemented by the commencement of provisions in the Planning and Compulsory Purchases Act 2004 and changes to the General Development Procedure Order (GDPO)

The amended regulations modify, from 10th August 2006, the outline planning permission regime in relation to the information to be provided at the outline stage and the matters that may be reserved.

With an application for outline planning permission detailed consideration will always be required on the use and amount of development. As a minimum, therefore, applications should always include information on :

The use or uses proposed for the development.

The amount of development proposed for each use.

An indicative layout with separate development zones proposed within the site boundary where appropriate.

An indication of the upper and lower limits for height, width, and length of each building within the site boundary.

Indicative access points – an area or areas in which the access point or points to the site will be accessed

The changes made to the outline planning permission regime do not affect a local planning authority's current ability to require further information. This power enables the local planning authority to direct an applicant in writing to supply any further information necessary for them to determine an application.

The circular also requires applicants to provide a Design and Access Statement to accompany an outline application. A statement accompanying an outline application must, from 10th August, explain how the applicant has considered the proposal, and understands what is appropriate and feasible for the site in the context.

It should clearly explain and justify the design and access principles that will be used to develop future details of the scheme. Such information will help community involvement in the planning process and informed decision making.

The design and access statement will form a link between the outline permission and the consideration of reserved matters..

A design and access statement must accompany planning applications for both outline and full planning permissions. The elements to be described in the statements will be the same regardless of whether the application is for full or outline permission but their scope will differ.

A statement will not be required for a material change of use of land or buildings, unless it also involves operational development. It will also not be required for engineering or mining operations or the development of an existing dwelling house, or development within the curtilage of a dwelling house for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling house..

I have highlighted just a few of the changes to the planning process.

Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING – 18th July 2006.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR DOROTHEA BRADLEY – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Licensing.

Scrutiny Council

The Licensing Unit has finished the initial Scrutiny Council process and changes are now being made to the Secretary of State's guidance that accompanies the Licensing Act, the full details of the changes to the guidance will be known in November 2006. There are likely to be changes to the Primary Legislation. A very significant proposed change to the legislation is the removal of the need for Village Halls and Community premises to name a "Designated Premises Supervisor" in order to sell alcohol. This is an area that we as a Scrutiny Council felt very strongly about and encouraged the Government Department to make this change, because many village halls are run by volunteers for the benefit of the local community this requirement placed a significant burden on them.

Gambling Act 2005.

The Council is about to embark on the Statutory Consultation required in relation to introducing a "Gambling Policy" in the Borough. The draft Policy or "Statement of Licensing Principles" has been written and it is hoped the consultation will begin on 13 July. The Council has to undertake this work as a Licensing Authority to comply with the provisions of the Gambling Act 2005, and is part of the process of the Council taking on new powers under this legislation. The Policy has to be approved and adopted by the 1st January 2007. From the end of January 2007 premises such as betting shops, bingo halls and amusement arcades will be required to apply to the Licensing Authority, (TDBC) for a premises licence.

1.2 Health and Safety.

Working at Height

As part of the Health and Safety team's contribution to supporting a national initiative to promote safe working at height, the team hosted a "Safety and Health Awareness day" at Chelston Business Park, Wellington. The event was attended by approximately 35 delegates, mainly from businesses based at Chelston. Speakers included Officers from Taunton Deane's Health and Safety team and the Health and Safety Executive. Further practical guidance on both non-mechanical and mechanical lifting aids was provided by Speedy Hire and Health and Safety Laboratories.

The day proved very successful in changing employer's perceptions on working at height as demonstrated by one of the delegates contacting the H&S team immediately on his return to his office to report two separate incidents of unsafe working practices underway in the High Street. Enforcement Officers immediately responded to these serious complaints and on attending the High Street served one Prohibition notice after establishing workers had climbed out of a first floor window at approximately 20 feet high onto a window ledge in attempt to access external lighting.

1.3 Food Safety.

Safer Food Better Business.

More than 125 catering businesses in Taunton Deane have now benefited from a series of training events to help them comply with new food hygiene regulations introduced earlier this year. Organised by Environmental Health working in partnership with The Training Station (Somerset Skills Alliance), five of the special events were held in Taunton and two took place in Wellington. The initiative was prompted by the launch of the Food Standard Agency's 'Safer Food Better Business' pack for catering firms and small retail businesses that sell food. Each event provided practical advice on the new regulations for the safe preparation and storage of food, as well as guidance on staff training and techniques to improve business efficiency such as reducing food wastage.

Funding for the series of "Safer Food Better Business" events was obtained from a grant from the Food Standards Agency, one of the real strengths of the bid was the added value provided by the partnership with The Training Station. The bid also allows for up to 70 one to one 3 hour coaching sessions for individual businesses on implementing the SFBB pack in their business.

1.4 Environmental Protection.

Gull Egg Oiling

Officers from the Environmental Protection Team and Pest Control have now concluded the Gull Egg Oiling programme for this year. This programme was delivered "in house" this year rather than using external contractors. We managed to oil 133 eggs of which 74% did not hatch, this work is vital to attempt to halt the increase in the urban gull population locally.

1.5 Environmental Health - General

Environmental Health Customer Satisfaction.

The analysis of customer satisfaction responses for last year has just been completed and the results are again very encouraging. Both business and residential customers are asked to rate performance in relation to 4 key areas as either v.good, good, average or poor. The 4 areas assessed are based around the following questions:-

1. Was it easy to contact the department?

2. Did you get a quick response?
3. Were you kept informed of progress with your enquiry?
4. Was any correspondence sent to you clear and easy to understand?

The overall average satisfaction level i.e. either rating the service as good or very good in these four areas has again improved from 94.9% in 2004-05 to 95.1% last year, thank you to all Environmental Health staff for their contributions to improving on this already impressive performance.

2.0 WASTE and RECYCLING SERVICES

Fixed Penalty Notices for Litter.

Utilising new legal powers contained in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, Fixed Penalty's are now starting to be served on people witnessed leaving litter in the Borough, by Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's). The full penalty is £75, reduced to £50 for payment of the penalty within seven days. In a recent joint targeted operation with the PCSO's and Environmental Health staff a number of people were served with fixed penalty's, mostly for dropping cigarette ends, which are now specifically included in the definition of litter.

Public Conveniences

The removal of permanent attendants at the Castle Green Ladies toilets seems to be working well with very little vandalism to date and no adverse comments received. The transferring of the public convenience facility in Wilton Lands to the new Vivary Hub " Sandwedge Cafe" seems to be well accepted. The new public convenience adjacent to the Community office at Priorswood place has been welcomed by shoppers using the area.

Recycling

The Somerset Waste Partnership achieved a recycling rate across the whole county of over 40% last year and achieved the Local Public Service Agreement stretch target that was set in 2002. The achievement of the stretch target can be put down to three things; firstly the new kerbside collection services introduced by the district councils and secondly, the improvements to the household waste recycling centres run by the County Council. The third and most important has been the support of residents in embracing the practice of re-cycling their household waste with really most commendable enthusiasm.

Taunton Deane's contribution to this high level of performance through *SORT IT!* continues to go well and is generating very few problems as residents become more accustomed to the new services. The plans for introducing the remainder of the Deane to *SORT IT!* are now well advanced. The notification packs are currently being printed for distribution from 1 August and phase 4 collections will commence on 16 October.

However, looking to the future we need to remember that our future waste management plans are predicated upon figures relating to weight not volume.

We also need to view recycling in the context of fuel costs and long term sustainability.

Cllr Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 18th JULY 2006

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL ECONOMIC ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM

Asset Management

On the 5th July we were able to acquire a property called Highfields at Stoke Road. This is a large four bed roomed detached house in need of modernisation, and set within grounds of some 6.5 acres, along with out buildings. This property now gives us the ideal site for the proposed re-location of our nursery as it has excellent access and is situated on the edge of town. Not only will it enable us to update our nursery facilities, making them more efficient, but also it will enable us to realise a significant capital receipt from the redevelopment of the present nursery site at Mount Street. Having re-organised the access from the highway to a 4.1 acre field, it will then be possible to re-sell the house with the residual 2.4 acres, although discussions regarding possible uses by the Council of the surplus property are also taking place.

The construction of seven much needed industrial units at Blackdown Business Park, Wellington is progressing well. At the moment the contract is approximately two weeks behind schedule because of difficulties below ground when putting in the footings. However, our contractor remains confident of achieving the agreed completion date, 27th August. Our agent will shortly be seeking expressions of interest from potential tenants.

We are about to advertise for suitable contractors for the building work in the OMB to make it compliant with DDA and the relevant regulations and to suit the requirements of the County Council Registrar. It has been agreed between SCC and TDBC that the Registrar will move from Flook House when the work has been completed, hopefully towards the end of this year.

With respect to the Disability Discrimination Act, by the end of this financial year, much of the work required to make the Council's buildings compliant with the 1994 Act will have been completed. The Act requires owners of publicly accessible buildings to undertake such work as is reasonable to improve Disability related issues. Because we are dealing with existing buildings it is not always possible to obtain a perfect solution.

After a considerable amount of discussion with the NHS Primary Care Trust an agreement has now been reached. Work will commence in August on the Bike Park in Coal Orchard. The Bike Shop is being altered to form consultation rooms and offices. The bike parking and changing facilities will be retained. This arrangement will give us a long term solution to managing and providing the Bike Park facility for the public.

Tourism and TIC

Somerset Destination Management Organisation/Service (DMO).

The Council has been working closely with Districts, SCC and SWERDA to

improve the marketing and promotion of Somerset as a tourist destination. It includes the closer alignment of the Tourism Marketing Facility and the development of single systems and standard of operation across the county. It will include a streamlined booking and handling system. To assist the progressing of the system and for a trial period the District Tourism Officers will be working together for one day a week starting on Thurs 13th August. A paper is being prepared to update and inform the next Review Panel in August.

Economic Development

The Wellington Food Town project is now gaining momentum, and beginning to capture the imagination of local people. EDU is working closely with Wellington Economic Partnership, Wellington Town Council and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce to develop proposals to establish Wellington as a regional food town. It seeks to build upon the strong producers in and around Wellington to develop a reputation for quality local food, produce and hospitality. The concept has been enthusiastically embraced by local interests, and Wellington Town Council has endorsed the proposal by committing funds to its development. It is hoped to create food trails, directories, and a major promotional campaign which will culminate in a regional food fair in the town in the late summer of 2007. It is hoped that this initiative will help boost visitor numbers and shopper spending in the town.

The Wellington Free Parking scheme is the first stage of a wider initiative of the Wellington Food Town. The free parking scheme is aimed at encouraging more shoppers into the town by offering a 50p reimbursement of their parking fees to those who make a minimum spend in participating shops. Fifty pence is the minimum cost of parking in any of Wellington's P & D car parks.

As part of the Somerset Local Area Agreement a commitment has been made for all District Council and the County to work closer together to address a range of issues of the County's economy over the next three years. This involves the creation of a Somerset Inward Investment Agency, which will market Somerset as a business location, actively seek to attract new businesses to the County, and develop a Business Champions Programme with business leaders, together with a support programme for inward investing and developing local firms. It has been our view that this agency should be primarily concerned with promoting Somerset and attracting business location enquiries; whilst the Districts should remain able to concentrate on developing and assisting local businesses. The Agency offers an opportunity to achieve improvements in the quality and level of detail as well as the cooperation between EDU's and the business community. Further consideration of the proposals will no doubt take place and if agreement can be reached then it would be possible for the agency to start operating from April 2007.

The Taunton Deane business development grant is proving to be very successful with a number of local businesses applying for the first round. The first of three business planning seminars has been held at Business Link Taunton where the applicants have been developing their business plans and

future growth. The applicants will be submitting their completed business plans in August, in the hope of winning one of the £2000 grants on offer.

Following the success of the Taunton Business Fair, we are investigating a partnership event in 2007. It would be based around doing business with the public sector. Many small businesses have difficulty in bidding for public contracts, whether it is in complying with track record and other legal requirements, or the fact that because of the current 'best - value' requirement the contracts are made rather large. The government is encouraging us to consider the needs of small firms when letting contracts. With this in mind we are researching an event that would assist local companies.

Community Arts

Creative Business BOOST was launched on 6th July, a great achievement for the Creative Enterprise Strategy. The resource centre is being established under contract by Integria Consultants, who are specialists in creative business support. They have a proven track record in a number of locations in the UK. The project is funded by £45,000 from Taunton Deane, £150,000 from the Rural Renaissance Scheme, £32,000 from SCC and Integria is providing £12,000 in the form of equipment and management time for the project. The well-equipped resource centre based at the Brewhouse has an excellent media suite and a print centre.

Councillor Norman P Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING 18TH JULY 2006

Report of Councillor Clark – Leisure Arts and Culture

Arts and Culture

Creative Business BOOST was launched on Thurs 6 July. This is another milestone for economic development and a target achieved for the Creative Enterprise strategy. It is a resource centre at the Brewhouse Theatre providing business advice, technical support and marketing resources for all sorts of creative people. It is hoped that it will become a meeting place for artistic and creative people from all walks of life.

Elton John entertained over 20,000 guests on 18th June. It was a beautiful warm evening demonstrating the potential of Taunton. It was a great celebration proving there is an audience for a large scale music events, indicating that such an event could become part of an annual calendar.

The Westival is another example of local arts groups combining their resources to stage a 10 day period of varied programmes for all ages. The plan is to make this a significant addition to the cultural provision both for tourists and also for those looking to set up new business in the area.

Park Events

A family fun day is planned to take place in French Weir Park on Sunday 6

The summer season of Vivary Park Sunday bandstand concerts have run successfully from June 11 and continue until September 3.

Stage Electrics will be providing Abba and Queen tribute bands and Glenn Miller style concerts in Vivary Park on Saturday 12 August and Sunday 13 August.

The Chinese State Circus, featuring the world famous 'Shaolin Wu-Shu warriors', is due to visit Vivary Park to perform from 20 – 25th September.

Grant Aid

Applications for grant aid assistance has been received for Comeytrove Community Hall and without prejudice permission to commence works has been granted for emergency roof repairs.

Wellington Open Spaces

A group of Wellington Councillors has met with the Leisure Development Manager to consider the Open spaces report and the Council is now considering the ideas proposed on the way forward.

Youth Facilities

The Leisure Development Manager has jointly commissioned a report on the scale and adequacy of the provision of freely available facilities and activities for young people in North Taunton. The partner in this pilot is the Somerset County Youth Service.

Use Of Public Open Spaces For Events

The new system of issuing formal permits to organisations wishing to put on events on public open space is now being implemented. This ensures that the Council is fully aware of exactly what activities are being planned on its land and properly indemnified. It also includes a charge where appropriate as was approved by Members.

Beech Grove Playing Field

The Council has completed land drainage work at the Beech Grove Playing Field in Wellington. The rugby club will lease the field from TDBC and it is expected that some games will take place on the new pitch during the winter of 2006/07 before the field comes into full time use in the winter of 2007/08.

Blackbrook Tennis Centre

The contract to build a new 2-court indoor tennis centre at the Blackbrook Pavilion is proceeding smoothly. The new facilities replace 2 outdoor courts, which were little used and difficult to maintain. The completion date is September 4th 2006, just in time for the indoor season!!

Taunton Green MUGA

Funded (£50,000) by Barclays Spaces For Sports, the new multi use games area at Taunton Green is under construction and will be completed by the 9th July. The Taunton Green site will then boast 2 full size tennis courts, a MUGA and a 3rd full size court that can also be used for 3 mini tennis courts.

STONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES

New Young Persons' Activity Zone

Building work has recently started at Blackbrook Pavilion to convert the upstairs bar and viewing area into a new fitness facility for young people aged 6 to 16 years. The zone will have fitness activities and classes including group cycling, combat classes, aerobics, circuits and a range of other fun fitness programmes. The project is funded through Sport England South West, Stone Leisure, Taunton Deane Crime and Disorder Reduction

Partnership and Somerset Partnership Fund. It is planned "The Zone" will open in September 2006.

British Mini Golf Championship

Vivary Golf Course's new Mini Golf facility will host this year's British Mini Golf Association Championship on 8th July 2006. The British Mini Golf Association were so impressed with the new course built by Tone Leisure last year that, only a few months after opening, they booked it for the 2006 Championships.

Physiotherm Therapy

Blackbrook Pavilion is one of the first in the country to offer a revolutionary physiotherm therapy. The unit operates at around 35° Centigrade and delivers infrared heat through lava sand heaters, providing a safe and gentle deep heat therapy session. Regular use of the therapy can provide relief from and improvements in many conditions, including osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, spinal disorders, asthma, bronchitis, infections, stress conditions, muscle tension and immune deficiencies.

Quest Registration

Wellsprings Leisure Centre and Wellington Sports Centre have been successful in achieving Quest registration during the last few months. Quest is a leisure quality award, which recognises good practice in all areas of facility management from marketing to cleanliness and housekeeping. The Assessors were very complimentary about the way the Centres are run, adding:

"There is a clear, positive management style evident, both at Centre and Contract level, that appears to engender a strong sense of ownership within all levels of staff to the management of the Centre."

During 2006/07 Blackbrook Pavilion and Station Road Pool will be working towards Quest assessment.

Facility Investment

● **Vivary Golf Course**

The Sand Wedge Café at Vivary Park Golf Course opened over the Easter weekend and has received favourable feedback from golfers and other park users.

An enhanced waste management system is being installed to the Greenkeepers' Workshop area at Vivary. This is an important improvement, which will enhance our environmental management.

- **Improvements**

Works to improve the Reception area at St. James Street Baths will be carried out during July. The enhanced area will offer a modern, open plan Reception area which will provide an enhanced level of customer service. Works to refurbish the Ladies changing rooms at Blackbrook have now been completed. The effect is very good and customer feedback has been very positive

Forthcoming Events, Service and Programme Developments.

- **Wellsprings Leisure Centre**

Sport Relief comes to Wellsprings Leisure Centre on Saturday, 15th July. We will be running four waves of 1-mile races, starting on the hour from 12 Noon.

A full programme of holiday activities is ready for launch during the summer holidays. Activities take place at Blackbrook Pavilion and Tennis Centre, Wellington Sports Centre, Wellsprings Leisure Centre, St. James Street Baths and Vivary Golf Course.

Taunton Tennis Club will be running a Town Centre Tennis Day on Saturday, 26th August.

Plans for the future

Meetings are taking place to assess the potential redevelopment of the Museum in Taunton.

A task group has been established to consider the possibility of providing training facilities for teams participating in the 2012 Olympics. This follows the successful staging of the Iron Man triathlon at Wimbleball reservoir and the bid to host a stage in next years Tour of Britain cycling event.

Councillor John Clark

COUNCIL MEETING 18 JULY 2006

Report of Councillor Greg Garner – Housing Services

This report for Full Council will focus on two areas: First the usual update on the Housing Stock Transfer Project, second an update on affordable housing.

Housing stock transfer

There has again been a significant management change within transfer team, Shirlene Adam who was overseeing both the ISIS and Housing Stock Transfer projects is now concentrating on the ISIS Project only. In her stead, Jeremy Thornberry will now lead on the HST project. This change became effective from 1st July 2006.

Housing Stock Transfer Update

Last three months

There has been a great deal of work undertaken since April, with the Project Team communicating to tenants, staff, Councillors, our partners and generally driving the consultation process forward.

Since the last Full Council update, there has been:

- i) A further briefing to all Housing and Building DLO Staff
- ii) Briefings to Non Housing Staff
- iii) Continuation of Drop-in-Sessions across the Borough
- iv) Coffee mornings and Residents/tenants meetings attended
- v) Analysis of historic complaints completed with key areas of concern.
- vi) Work on draft RSL policies completed and ready for discussion at Shadow Board.
- vii) Policies for Offer Document amended and passed to Tenants Panel prior to Policies working group & Shadow Board
- viii) Housing Managers 'wish lists' & tenants priority survey feedback distributed for development and inclusion in offer document.
- ix) Exec meeting 21/6 – reports re DLO, Housing Options, Retention picture and Capital Receipt.
- x) Training for Non-housing staff - housing benefits and customer services.
- xi) Tenants newsletters & bulletins distributed
- xii) Events list formulated – Managers and Project Team to attend various events, venues.
- xiii) Information packs sent to Parish Councils and agencies to raise awareness.
- xiv) Posters, Questions & Answers printed and distributed.
- xv) Press Release (13/6/06)
- xvi) Staff Fact sheet and log sheet produced for housing staff to use to raise awareness of project.
- xvii) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum and Tenants' Panel and Tenants' Forum
- xviii) The Shadow Board has met twice covering key areas such as:

April: Aldbourne's survey of tenant opinion & Stocktake Report
June: Housing Corporation Stock Transfer Registration –
Communications Key messages – development of Offer
Document – Housing Repairs service

Next three months

- i) Further Tenants and Staff Newsletters will be sent out.
- ii) Leaseholders will also receive newsletters and fact sheets – drop in sessions being organised.
- iii) Filming of Video/DVD (based on Offer document)
- iv) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum and Tenants' Panel and Tenants' Forum
- v) Two further Shadow Board Meetings (covering Offer document and Impact on valuation/business plan, TUPE protocol, Offer document final version of Policies.).
- vi) Undertaking Events /drop in sessions by ITA. to talk to tenants about the 'Offer Document' Promises.
- vii) Produce banners/posters for the town, local supermarkets
- viii) Press release on major works programme proposed by Deane Housing.
- ix) Continuation of door knocking, staff training and monitoring.
- x) Conduct the test of understanding (tenants).
- xi) Finalise Offer document – Council meeting to decide whether to proceed to stage one consultation.

Social and Affordable Housing

Social

The situation with regard to social and affordable housing remains challenging. With nearly 3000 applicants on our council housing waiting list, the pressures on housing continue. (note: circa 20% of applicants are from out of area applications). The pressure is also mounting from an increasing number of migrant workers, rough estimates suggest that approximately 1000 migrant workers per month are moving into the South West region and there is no indication of this trend tapering off.

Affordable

The 2002 Couttie Report identified a need of 131 affordable homes within Taunton Deane to keep pace with anticipated demand. In 2005/06 Lesley Webb delivered a very commendable 110 homes. This is short of the figure suggested by Couttie but better than earlier years as per the table below:

Year	Completions
2002/03	106
2003/04	42
2004/05	36
2005/06	110

The fluctuating deliverables are no reflection on effort but a clear indication on the difficulties faced when dealing with a wide-ranging number of stakeholders and differing agendas eg developers versus council (housing/planning).

The new Ark Housing Needs Report indicates a revised annual target of 564 houses per annum (based on shortfall and future projections). We are virtually at a point where the indicative numbers as suggested by various reports become meaningless. We are aware of the potential for delays/cancellations etc due to planning, funding, developer and other considerations therefore we must explore all possible avenues to deliver affordable housing whilst being mindful that not all proposals will actually crystallise

The development programme for affordable housing 2006/07 currently stands at 73. However, there are a number of exciting projects in the pipeline eg Taunton Trading Estate, Cades Farm, Firepool, Taunton Cider works and the BT building, all of which will provide affordable housing however the lead time/numbers still represent a moving target. This is why we continue to look for infill sites to increase numbers however these are proving continually more difficult to identify.

Cost as well as the physical number is also a major consideration. Cheaper housing does not necessarily mean affordable housing. With the earnings multiple in Taunton Deane currently 6x for couples 9x for singles Taunton Deane requires affordable starter homes at circa £60k. We are therefore actively exploring possibilities with developers to hit this price point.

Cllr Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 18 JULY 2006

Report of Councillor Gwyneth Leighton - Communications

Consultation

Your Council, Your Views Consultation

We have had an acceptable 12% response to this survey and we will be able to use it for variety of purposes including the Corporate Strategy; setting priorities; budget setting and communications targeting.

For the first time this year we included many open ended questions about the perceptions the public have of the council and councillors and several public engagement questions asked by the Lyons Inquiry.

Responses to the latter have been submitted to the **Lyons Inquiry** on the future of Local Government. Members may find the Lyons website a useful reference tool and can be found at: <http://www.lyonsinquiry.org/>

All the detailed responses to the questionnaire – and there were a great many – are currently being analysed and a full report will be made available to all members shortly. As noted above, the information provided by the public will be used to help determine the Council's future priorities and inform the budget setting process.

General Survey

This is a 3 yearly statutory survey that will be carried out during September by Mori on behalf of the Council. Currently, it is commendable that TDBC has top quartile satisfaction ratings compared to other English districts.

Information Management

Local Futures – State of the Borough and Local Knowledge Database

Many of you attended the presentation at the Review Board meeting held in May on the State of the Borough and I was delighted with the positive feedback received from members. We are using this to inform the preparation of the next Community Strategy (Dec 06). Other uses include Economic Development & Regeneration Strategy and the Corporate Strategy. All members have been sent details of how to access the database.

Public Relations and Media Relations

Media Protocol

As members will recall we introduced a new media protocol in April and will continue to monitor this.

Public & Media Relations

Public Relations handle both proactive and reactive responses to daily requests from the media for information on all aspects of the Council's business. This past few months this has been diverse with requests about affordable housing, FPNs for litter,

doorstep recycling, business development grants, Blackdown Business Park, the new Tenant's Forum in Wellington, our web site and the fantastic achievement of the team at Kilkenny for being the first in the country to simultaneously gain all 3 accreditations from the Telecare Services Association's (TSA) Code of Practice for Social Alarms Services for the Deane Helpline service, to mention but a few!

The 'Affordable Housing' open day in June was a huge success with more than 400 people attending. We arranged a special press briefing prior to the event so that the media were able to understand the complex issues involved in the delivery of affordable housing in Taunton Deane. We have received excellent media coverage on this issue over the past few weeks which has raised public awareness of the dilemma we have in meeting the need of our 2600 plus people currently on the waiting list for a home in our area and with an annual need as determined by the ARK Consultancy of in excess of 550 dwellings per annum to 2011.

We continue to work with the Vision Delivery team who have now appointed a communications/marketing person on a part-time basis.

Deane Dispatch

The next issue of *Deane Dispatch* is scheduled for delivery during September.

Marketing

A-Z of Services booklet for all Taunton Deane residents

A new A-Z of services booklet has been distributed to all Taunton Deane residents. This booklet is something that our local residents have been asking for and has been paid for by advertising. Copies of the A-Z are available on request.

Style Guide

Effective brand management is one of the key actions highlighted as good practice by the Local Government Association's reputation project which Taunton Deane signed up to last year. As part of our commitment to this, we have produced a new corporate Style Guide. The Style Guide applies to all publications written for the public, including letters, reports, stationery and leaflets. The aim is for all Council publications to be customer focused and accessible to all in the community. The highlights include:

- The introduction of a new corporate font for all letters, reports and e-mails; 12 point Arial
- The introduction of a standard e-mail signature
- The use of plain English
- Guidance on the use of logos
- The introduction and use of corporate electronic templates
- A new alternative formats statement translated into relevant languages.
- The interpretation and translation policy and guidance

The Style Guide is currently being promoted internally and bite size training sessions are being run to explain the new standards, over 80 members of staff have already attended these. This Style Guide is work in progress and the next chapter currently

being written will cover the new corporate design to be used for all corporate leaflets, brochures.

Finally ... I would like to congratulate Simon Lewis and his team for their excellent work and infinite patience in producing our 'new look' **Annual Report** on time to meet the 30 June statutory deadline. A copy of this was recently sent to all councillors. This year our report is much easier to read and shows the Council's key achievements, performance information and future plans.

Gwyneth Leighton
Executive Councillor for Communications

July 2006