

PART II – REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

COUNCIL MEETING 17 JULY 2007

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

As this is my first Full Council as Leader, I would like to say a few things. Becoming Leader is a big learning curve and without the support of the staff who have helped me, it would not be possible. I would particularly like to thank my Personal Assistant, Linda Redd, who has provided fantastic assistance to me and made my new role so much easier than it would have been.

I would also like to thank the Members of my own Liberal Democrat Group who have risen to the challenge of providing the new administration and also supported me very well as the new Leader of the Council. One group of Councillors is not the whole Council and of course we as a Council will only succeed by working together. A new regime of co-operation and partnership is what we must all work towards in a balanced Council situation. I was disappointed that the Conservative Group turned down our offer of a joint administration in May, as I feel it would have been good for this Council. However, I have been pleased with the way that all the new Councillors of all parties have worked together. It is a daunting thing becoming a Councillor and the way the new Councillors have settled in bodes well for the future.

Local Government Review

The Government consultation period on the County Council's proposals for a new Unitary Authority has now passed. Taunton Deane and the other Somerset Districts have had a very strong campaign which has highlighted the Joint Team Somerset proposals which would mean closer partnership working short of a Unitary Council. This positive campaign is to the recent County wide poll, which rejects the County Council plans by a majority of 158,000 to 33,000. This on a massive 49% turnout, which was higher than in the recent Council elections. This shows how much people care about keeping Local Government local in Somerset.

ISiS

The long Council debate on ISiS reaches a crucial phase this week after months of debate and lots of meetings and information sessions. Of course there have been lots of questions and for some concerns, but on balance this could and should be an exciting new venture for Taunton Deane and the other potential partners. To reflect how important this decision is, I informed officers that I wanted a Full Council vote on this issue rather than just the Executive voting on this issue. This is far too important for Members not to have a vote on.

Park Charges

The first major decision this administration is making is to propose to scrap the charges on charity organizations to hire our parks. This charge sadly has hit at groups like the organisers of the Flower Show who put on their show in August which brings so much money, prestige and enjoyment to Taunton Deane. It is crazy that this Council has penalized these groups and we intend to put this right. We will also ask the Health and Leisure Review Panel to consider one of 4 options on how this can be done financially.

Job Evaluation

The staff job evaluation results are now out. This process started under the previous administration has resulted in long discussions between senior officers, Unison and all staff. It has been for all, a difficult process and some, a painful one. This process was never going to be easy and I would not expect everyone to be happy about it. Myself and Councillor Mrs Smith had several meetings with officers in the last two weeks to ensure this process was not delayed further and to end the uncertainty over the job evaluation.

Partner Meetings

One of the other main parts of this new role is to bring myself up to date on a number of issues. I have had countless meetings in the last few weeks with various partners, introducing myself to them and also giving them re-assurance that the new administration is very supportive of the work they do and that we look forward to working with them. These have included meetings with Lucy Ball, Members of the Licensing Trade, the Project Taunton Team, representatives from the Golf Club and the Brewhouse to name but a few. Finally, I have accepted an invitation from the Samaritans to take part in a charity shopping pack at Sainsburys on Saturday 28 July in the morning.

Priory Housing

I wanted to say a few words about Affordable Housing at Priory, Wellington following the elections. A review took place of a proposed scheme of 23 houses on 3 different locations. I am pleased to announce the following discussions between officers and Raglan. We are able to announce a scheme of 27 affordable houses at Priory. The two schemes at Gay Close and Bakers Lane will go ahead very shortly and we are consulting very shortly on plans for 8 houses at Gay Street. This doubles the number of potential affordable houses which would have been delivered on the withdrawn Humphries Road site. Well done to Lesley Webb and the housing team for delivering a scheme which will provide even more houses than the previous scheme did.

Councillor Ross Henley

COUNCIL 17 July 2007
Draft Report for Executive Councillor Coles

1. Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

This is a statutory document that sets out how we will consult on both the Local Development Framework (LDF) and planning applications. Its preparation has involved valuable input from the local community and I would like to thank all those who have contributed to it. We now have a strategy that can deliver effective and inclusive community involvement.

The SCI has been through three rounds of consultation and an examination by a Planning Inspector. The Planning Inspector issued his binding report in February. This was considered by full Council in April and it was agreed to adopt the SCI subject to the minor recommended changes. It is now adopted as of July 2007.

2. Local Development Scheme (LDS)

The LDS sets out a programme for the preparation of all the LDF documents. Government Office (GOSW) has requested Councils to review their LDS. In March we submitted our review to GOSW and last month we received comments from them suggesting minor changes to dates, mainly concerning the Planning Inspectorate. These changes have been made and we are awaiting confirmation from GOSW that the changes have been accepted prior to resubmission of the final document. We hope to publish the revised LDS soon.

3. Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)

The RSS will replace the existing Regional Planning Guidance (RPG10) which designated Taunton a Principal Urban Area. It will set out the housing requirements that each local Council will have to make provision for in its LDF.

The RSS Examination in Public has been held for the last three months at the Thistle Hotel in Exeter. Since the Draft RSS was submitted in March 2006 national and regional estimates of the number of dwellings that will be required from 2006 up to 2026 have significantly increased. It is therefore likely that housing numbers for all the main urban areas will be increased, but we will not know the outcome until the Panel's report is published at the end of the year.

A paper on the 'Partial Review of RSS: Pitch Provision for Gypsies and Travellers' is due to be considered by the Regional Assembly on 13th July. The paper contains draft proposed additional pitch requirements for local authorities across the region. Of a total of some 1,500 pitches required in 2006-2011, the Taunton Deane requirement is 17 new pitches. This is the number identified in the First Detailed Proposals submitted to the Assembly by the Somerset local authorities. If approved by the Assembly, the draft proposals will be submitted to the

Note for Simon Coles – Report to Full Council

Procurement of New Development Management IT System

Members will recall that in December 2006 the Executive agreed to the replacement of the Council's in-house IT system for the processing of planning applications with a new bought in package. This will improve the Council's ability to meet its time taken Best Value Performance Indicators as well as providing easier access to planning application data. Tenders were received from three of the major suppliers, all of which currently provide systems for other authorities in Somerset.

These tenders have now been assessed and two suppliers have been asked to provide demonstrations of their packages. It is hoped that we will then be able to proceed to full implementation within the current financial year.

Development Management Staffing

Authorisation was given to appoint two additional professional planning staff in April. The aim of this was to facilitate a restructuring of the Development Management teams to increase the capacity at a senior level in light of the large number of major proposals expected in the future. This will also free up more of the Development Manager's time to carry out work which had previously been undertaken by the Head of Development (Tom Noall).

To enable the proposed restructure we need to appoint two additional Area Planning Managers. Following national advertisement of these posts, only one application was received. It was therefore agreed that the posts should be readvertised following the results of pending Job Evaluation, the uncertainty of which was inevitably a factor in the poor level of response.

In the meantime, an experienced Planning Officer (Mick Roberts) has been appointed through an agency on a parttime basis to manage one of the new teams. Liz Pulsford is also assisting on a parttime basis in one of the teams until the posts are filled.

The three teams now cover the following areas:

West Area	South Area	East Area
Manager John Hamer	Manager Gareth Clifford	Manager Mick Roberts

See attached list.

Secretary of State as a draft RSS Revision, and subjected to public consultation for 12 weeks between August and October.

4. Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TTCAAP)

The aim of this plan is to deliver the regeneration of Taunton town centre and meet the objectives of the Vision for Taunton. The draft plan will be coming to SPTED Review Panel and Executive on 31 July. It will be subject to a statutory six week period of consultation in September/October this year and subject to an Examination in Public in June/July 2008.

5. Review of Policy EC9: Protection of Employment Land

A report has been prepared for SPTED on 31 July, clarifying the application of policy EC9 of the adopted Local Plan. This will be used as an internal 'Best Practice Guide' to ensure a consistent approach to the future assessment of proposals affecting employment land.

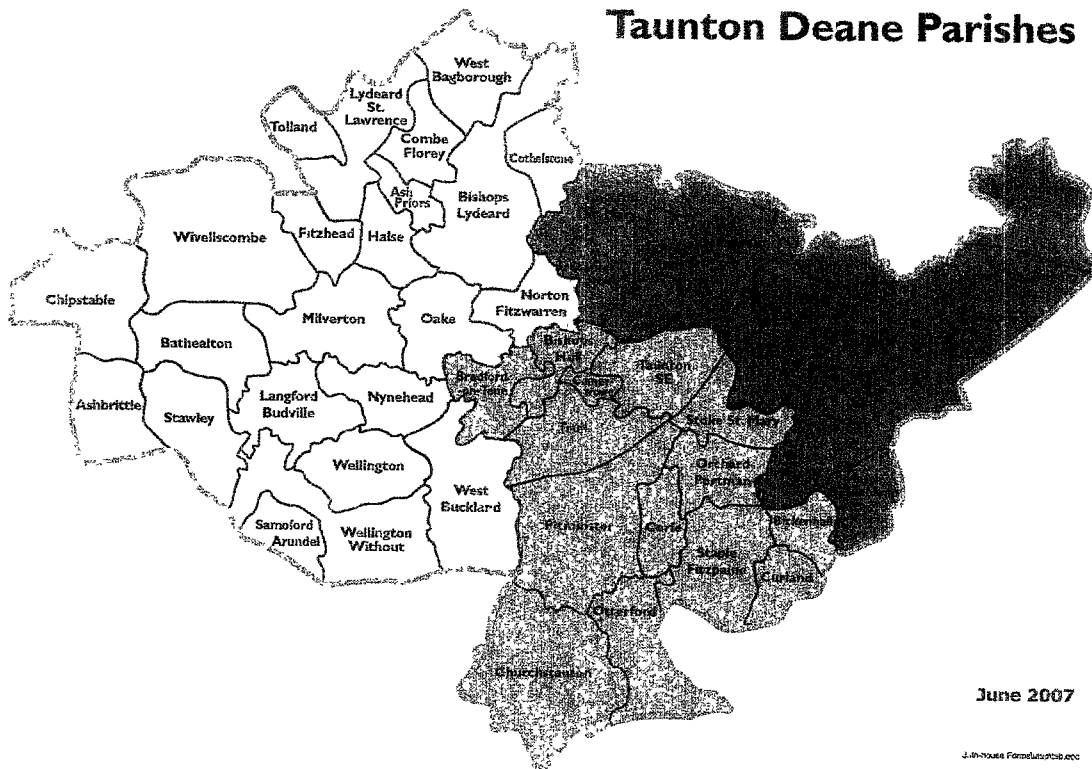
6. Carbon Reduction

We have been working with the Regional Assembly to establish a policy in the RSS that will require the reduction of carbon emissions from new development. Following the outcome of the RSS Panel Report the policy can be applied in the consideration of planning applications. SPTED will soon receive a report setting out the increase in build costs for different scales of residential and commercial development with regard to the anticipated range of appropriate renewable energy sources.

7. Former Taunton Cider Factory, Norton Fitzwarren

Significant progress is being made in bringing forward this major allocation of the Taunton Deane Local Plan, which will include 373 dwellings, employment uses and community facilities, for development. Work has been underway for several months on the dam upstream on the Halse Water, needed to deal with the flood risk on the site. In the past few weeks demolition of the factory buildings has begun, and is advancing quickly. The developers plan to start construction work on the site, initially ground works, in October.

Taunton Deane Parishes



June 2007

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Monkton Heathfield Major Planning Application

An application was submitted for a mixed use development covering the majority of the land allocated in the Taunton Deane Local Plan to the east of the A38 at Monkton Heathfield on behalf of Persimmon and Redrow Homes in late 2005. Negotiations have subsequently taken place and further information has now been submitted. A key consideration in the determination of this application is the alignment of the Eastern Relief Road, which has been proposed not in accordance with the Local Plan. This has resulted in objection from the Council's Landscape Officer in terms of visual impact upon the Green Wedge. Concern has also been raised in respect of the consortium's ability to deliver the Western Relief Road linking the A38 with the A3259. Counsel's opinion has been sought in relation to these issues. Following receipt of this opinion, a date can be set for the Planning Committee to consider the application.

Tone Mill

A planning application has recently been received from Mendip Estates Ltd for the redevelopment of the Tone Mill complex at Wellington. The application provides for the restoration of important listed buildings which contain machinery of significant historic importance. To facilitate the restoration the applicant is proposing enabling residential development as well as an element of new employment use. The application has now been validated and views are being sought. English Heritage have been involved in pre-application discussions and their advice will clearly be an important factor in the consideration of the

Planning Services Parish & Ward List

No	Parish		Ward	Area Team
01	Ashbrittle	WVWD	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	West
02	Ash Priors	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
03	Bathealton	WVWD	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	West
04	Bickenhall	NER	Neroche	South
05	Bishops Hull	BH	Bishops Hull	South
06	Bishops Lydeard	BL	Bishops Lydeard	West
07	Bradford on Tone	BOT	Bradford on Tone	South
08	Cheddon Fitzpaine	SG or WM	Staplegrove or West Monkton	East
09	Chipstable	WVWD	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	West
10	Churchstanton	BLK	Blackdown	South
11	Combe Florey	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
12	Corfe	NER	Neroche	South
13	Cothelstone	BL	Bishops Lydeard	West
14	Creech St Michael	R&C	Ruishton & Creech	East
15	Curland	NER	Neroche	South
16	Durston	NC	North Curry	East
17	Fitzhead	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
18	Halse	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
19	Hatch Beauchamp	NER	Neroche	East
20	Kingston St Mary	SG	Staplegrove (Parish)	East
21	Langford Budville	BOT	Bradford on Tone	West
22	Lydeard St Lawrence	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
23	Milverton	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
24	North Curry	NC	North Curry	East
25	North Fitzwarren	NF	North Fitzwarren	West
26	Nynehead	BOT	Bradford on Tone	West
27	Oake	BOT	Bradford on Tone	West
28	Orchard Portman	NER	Neroche	South
29	Otterford	BLK	Blackdown	South
30	Pitminster	BLK	Blackdown	South
31	Ruishton	R&C	Ruishton & Creech	East
32	Sampford Arundel	MNT	Monument	West
33	Staple Fitzpaine	NER	Neroche	South
34	Staplegrove	SG	Staplegrove	East
35	Stawley	WVWD	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	West
36	Stoke St Gregory	SSTG	Stoke St Gregory	East
37	Stoke St Mary	NER	Neroche	South
38	Taunton	B&H	Blackbrook & Holway	South
38	Taunton	BH	Bishops Hull (Ward)	South
38	Taunton	EG	East Gate	South
38	Taunton	FW	Fairwater	East
38	Taunton	HN	Halcon	South
38	Taunton	K&M	Killams & Mountfield	South
38	Taunton	LFD	Lyngford	East
38	Taunton	M&W	Manor & Wilton	South
38	Taunton	P&R	Pyrland & Rowbarton	East
38	Taunton	SG	Staplegrove (Ward)	East
39	NOT USED			
40	Thornfalcon	R&C	Ruishton & Creech	East
41	Tolland	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
42	Trull	TRL	Trull (also see K&M)	South
43	Wellington	RGW	Rockwell Green & West	West
43	Wellington	WGE	Wellington East	West
43	Wellington	WGN	Wellington North	West
44	Wellington Without	MNT	Monument	West
45	West Bagborough	MVND	Milverton & North Deane	West
46	West Buckland	MNT	Monument	West
47	West Hatch	NER	Neroche	East
48	West Monkton	WM	West Monkton	East
49	Wiveliscombe	WVWD	Wiveliscombe & West Deane	West
50	NOT USED			
51	Burrowbridge	SSTG	Stoke St Gregory	East
52	Comeytrowe	CTW	Comeytrowe	South

application. Full details of the application can be found on the Council's website ref: (43/2007/059&060LB).

Taunton East Goods Yard

Proposals for three elements of the redevelopment of the former Taunton East Goods Yard between the railway and canal are currently being formulated. A planning application has been received for an office building between the proposed Taunton Northern Inner Distributor Road and the railway (ref 38/2007/193). It is likely that this application will be considered by the Planning Committee on 25 July. Drawings are also being prepared showing conversion of the former water tower to provide a restaurant. The first phase of residential development is also being planned. Initial drawings are to be considered by the South West Design Review Panel (SWDRP) on 17 July. SWDRP (who are supported by CABI) will also be taking a role in the development of proposals at Firepool and it was therefore felt important that they provide the Council with design advice on this adjacent scheme as well. The Panel have already considered proposals for the redevelopment of the cricket ground earlier in the year. It was felt by all involved that the suggestions made by the Panel added significantly to the quality of the scheme which was ultimately considered by the Planning Committee.

COUNCIL MEETING 17 JULY 2007

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HORSLEY - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PROPERTY

This report outlines the key areas of work that I will seek to further develop over the coming 12 months:

Economic Development:

1. Project Taunton

Project Taunton remains a key priority for this administration. The Project Taunton Team are progressing well, and it is now expected that the announcement of the Developer Partner for the Firepool area will be made shortly. This will also enable proposals for the development of the Taunton Cultural Quarter to be brought forward.

In addition, the Economic Development Unit is leading work to create a partnership with skills and learning agencies to ensure that local people have access to the jobs and opportunities that will arise from the build-phase of the development. This includes the development of both a practical 'process' to support access to these construction jobs for local people, but also seeks to establish a framework for future Section 106 agreements with developers.

I was immensely encouraged by the enthusiasm that greeted the launch of Project Taunton at the Genesis Centre on 22 June under its title "Future Perfect". It set the scene for ensuring that the highest standards of design and sustainability are used in all areas of the Project. We must also use our persuasive powers to retain control of applications in the Town Centre to meet those same objectives where we do not have actual ownership of the land.

2. Somerset Inward Investment Company

The first meeting of the Shadow Board of the Company has now been held. Most of the issues raised and reported to Council by Cllr Cavill in April 2007 have now been resolved.

Work is currently underway to examine closer working and governance of both the proposed SIIC, and the emerging Destination Management Organisation so that potential for duplication of effort and cost can be avoided, and both organisations' governance can be co-ordinated.

It is anticipated that a detailed report on progress and launch of the Company will be presented to SPTED in September 2007.

3. *Employment Land*

There remains a shortage of suitable employment land available within Taunton that reflects the current demand for freehold land and premises for local expanding companies.

Cllr Coles and I have asked the Forward Planning Manager to prepare a report for SPTED in July which address the loss of employment land to other uses and the impact that this has on the ability of Taunton Deane to meet the needs of the local economy. I am working with Officers to address this issue and anticipate that further reports will be brought to SPTED during the next 12 months.

4. *Wellington Economic Partnership(WEP)*

The Partnership, which has been established since 1994, is changing it's Terms of Reference to allow it to become an Community Development Trust with powers to hold and manage finance and to take a full leadership and management role in developing a wide range of initiatives in Wellington. A number of sub groups have been formed by WEP to manage the process of Food Town and a wider community-based Market & Coastal Towns programme

This has resulted from the successful Wellington Food Town event in December last year, and the successful bid for Market & Coastal Towns Initiative Funding from 1 April 2007 has also required a change to the operation of the Partnership.

WEP is organising a second Wellington Food Festival on Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th September 2007. This will involve a bigger and better Festival that that held in December last year, and I would urge members to attend.

5. *Bio –Energy Developments*

The Rural Team continue to investigate the potential for the Council to lead in work towards establishing the Deane as a centre of excellence in environmentally friendly energy use on both farms and in the rural industrial setting. The recent creation of a Rural Hub in Warwickshire that provides practical and effective business development and farm diversification for rural businesses in areas such as food supply chains, bio-energy, non-food crops, waste management and resource efficiency has proved popular and attractive to Advantage West Midlands (The Regional Development Agency). Further work to assess the lessons and messages to be learnt will take place later this year.

6. *Taunton Town Centre*

We await with great interest the outcome of the vote by local businesses for the Business Improvement District within Taunton Town Centre. A positive outcome and the additional funding of £300k par annum for the management and implementation of Town Centre improvements over a 5-year period can , in my opinion, only enhance the reputation of Taunton as a progressive and forward looking provincial capital.

The ballot concludes on 31 July, with the result being available shortly thereafter. I have cast a YES vote on behalf of all the Council's property within the BID area.

I am keen to maintain the excellent working relationships with Lucy Ball and her Team.

7. Creative Industries

Taunton Deane Borough Council has initiated a local Creative Business Forum to co-ordinate the wide range of business support available to creative enterprises. The second meeting on 24 July will bring together Creative Business Boost, Arts Matrix and Hothouse (the incubator units at SCAT) and other providers to programme and promote seminars, training and networking activities collectively. Project Taunton recognises the importance of the need to encourage Creative Business opportunities and sees this sector is being very important in the future development of the district.

Creative Business Boost has so far supported over 200 creative enterprises in its first of its two year life at the Brewhouse. The project, funded by the RDA Rural Renaissance programme, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council, provides bespoke face to face business advice as well as marketing and technical support for small and emerging creative businesses and community groups. However, growth in the sector at 3% in Somerset was half that of other areas hence the investment in this specialist support. An evaluation of Creative Business Boost is about to be commissioned, and will report in February 2008.

8. Inter – Departmental Working

I am keen that improvement is made to the level of collaborative working between Portfolio Holders and Departments, particularly where there exists considerable areas of overlap between responsibilities. To this end I will be working with both Planning and with Health and Leisure Portfolio Holders as well as Housing to develop and lead work in these overlapping areas.

Cllr Simon Coles (portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning) and I are setting up regular meetings with our chief officers to ensure seamless working and that I am confident that this will bring forward a more cohesive and effective range of projects that will demonstrate this Administration's emerging priorities.

Cllr Jefferson Horsley
Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Property

July 2007.

Council Meeting 17 July, 2007.

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Leisure, Arts and Culture

Herewith I present my first report to Full Council, this is after following on from the last Administration's Portfolio Holder for this area, John Clark. There are items in my report that are continuation of Mr. Clark's work which are on-going and will be followed through in due course. I would, therefore, like to put on record my personal thanks, in this report to Mr. John Clark for the hard work he put in whilst having the responsibility for the Art, Leisure and Culture Portfolio.

The summer season of Vivary Park Sunday bandstand concerts have run successfully from June 3 and continue until September 9.

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

A family fun day is planned to take place in French Weir Park on Sunday 12 August. The event is being organised for the first time this year by the Friends of French Weir Park with assistance from the Leisure Development Team.

IML Concerts will be providing a concert by Jools Holland and His Rhythm and Blues Orchestra in Vivary Park on Saturday 7 July. The concert is expected to be sold out.

The Great Moscow State Circus, is due at Vivary Park to perform from 19 – 25 September. The visit follows last year's performance by the Chinese State Circus.

Applications for capital grant aid assistance, for voluntary village halls and community centres and sports clubs have been received and are currently being assessed. Total applications received amount to 3 times the amount of grant aid available.

Park Rangers

Following the success of the summer Park Warden last year the Council has now employed, as from 11 June, 2007, two part time Park Rangers. They will be based in Vivary Park but will use a bike to cover the key town centre parks – Goodland Gardens, Victoria Park and French Weir Park.

Their remit is to ensure the parks are safe and pleasant places for the public by providing a reassuring staff presence in the park, promoting and enforcing appropriate behaviour, and encouraging participation in activities. They will ensure that any damage or inappropriate behaviour in the parks is addressed quickly and appropriately by, working closely with the teams who care for the parks and also with

the Police and other partner agencies/organisations who can help to ensure the parks are clean, safe and pleasant for the public. They will also engage park users in developing ideas for improvements in the parks.

Get Growing

Work is in hand to publish an Allotments Strategy for the Borough in response to the burgeoning demand for plots. As part of this work, Victoria Park will host a fun free event for people of all ages on October 7th, focussing on learning about vegetable/fruit growing and the benefits of local/home production and of eating fresh produce. It will showcase the achievements of allotment gardeners to the public, demonstrate skills in growing fruit and vegetables, promote opportunities to “grow your own” at home or on an allotment, provide opportunities to “have a go” at planting, harvesting and preparing vegetables for cooking at home. The Council will also be taking the opportunity to consult with people who are not plot holders (nor on a waiting list) to discover what level of unknown demand there is in the community for allotment plots.

Play Strategy

Over the past year work has been underway to develop a play strategy for Taunton Deane. By play we mean what children and young people do in their free time when no one else is telling them what to do.

The strategy will provide the information to allow the right decisions to be made about how we plan for children and young people’s free-time activities for the next ten years. It will take a fresh look at the importance of play in children and young people’s lives and set a new agenda for the future - re-thinking the way play is provided in the district.

In the short term it also enables us to request our allocation of money for play from the Big Lottery Fund in September. This will allow us to deliver some of the work in the Action Plan. We will continue working with partners to deliver the rest of the Action Plan

The work to develop the strategy has been carried out with the assistance of a newly established Play Partnership with representatives from the district and county council’s and various other agencies and organisations whose work affects the lives of children and young people. It has included a comprehensive audit of play opportunities, as well as consultation with play providers, parish and town councils, parents and carers, children and young people.

The Draft Strategy will be on the web site by 23rd July and we welcome public comment. All our partners in the delivery of play will be invited to comment as well. Following this the Executive will be considering the Strategy and we will send our application to BIG Lottery in September.

The parks nursery has contract grown hanging baskets for the following organisations:-

East Devon District Council = 750 baskets

Tiverton Town Council	= 120 baskets
Cullumpton Town Council	= 30 baskets
Bishop Lydeard Parish Council	=105 baskets
Various business	= 500 baskets
Taunton Deane B.C	= 750 baskets
Railway Stations	= 220 baskets

The nursery has also grown 240,000 summer bedding plants for our own use in the parks, public open spaces, roundabouts and housing areas throughout the borough.

The Green Flag judges have made their annual visit to our three Green Flag parks, Vivary Park, Wellington Park and Victoria Park. The results will be published on 18th July.

The South West in Bloom judges will be making their annual visit to Taunton on 18th July and Wellington on the 19th July. The results of their judging will not be known until the 20th September.

Galmington and Hamilton Gault Pavilions

Applications to the Football Foundation for support towards the replacement of the Hamilton Gault and Galmington Pavilions will be submitted later this month. The application will seek up to 70% of the funding necessary to replace the 2 ageing facilities.

The remainder of the necessary funding will be from existing Developer Contribution agreements earmarked for playing fields. Tenders are due to be opened later this month and pending a positive response from the Football Foundation construction should be able to begin later this year.

Tour Of Britain

TDBC continues to support the forthcoming 2nd stage of the Tour Of Britain event that finishes in Taunton on 11th September - our involvement includes sport, waste services, street cleansing, car parking, licensing, tourism, and economic development.

This is an International Sporting event in Taunton! The town centre will be closed for the majority of that day to accommodate what I'm sure will be a colourful and spectacular finish in North Street.

The Sports Services Manager continues to be the Councils representative on issues relating to the event.

Skate Park

Plans have been agreed with the skating and BMX fraternity for a replacement skate park in Hamilton Gault Park. The next stage is to apply for and secure planning permission – it is expected that this can be achieved by end of September 2007. The necessary drawings are now being prepared and the costs are being finalised.

TONE LEISURE (TAUNTON DEANE) LIMITED ACTIVITIES

Facility News

Blackbrook Pavilion and Taunton Tennis Centre

Works to refurbish the toilets at Blackbrook Pavilion were carried out over the Easter period. The refurbishment has lifted the quality of the finishes to the same level as the changing areas, which were refurbished last June. Customer feedback concerning these improvements has been very positive.

Blackbrook Pavilion played host to the second Schools Sports Festival on Wednesday, 27th June. Around 1,200 children from 14 schools attended during the day. Activities included Tennis, Climbing, Mountain Biking and a mass participation dance mat competition. The event was run in partnership with the Tone Schools Partnership and will be followed by a two day event in September.

Wellsprings Leisure Centre

Wellsprings has successfully launched a new programme of cycling courses, aimed at 3-6 year olds. The courses, named "No More Stabilisers", aim to give young children the skills they need to successfully progress from fun balance bikes to cycling safely, with no stabilisers.

Freddie Starr makes his first appearance at Wellsprings on Friday, 27th July.

Vivary Golf Course

In partnership with Golf Coach Richard Coffin, part of the Golf Professional Shop has been converted into an excellent retail area. The shop now offers a full range of golf clothing and equipment, as well as offering a custom fit club service.

Following an unsuccessful tendering process, Tone Leisure has invested in ice cream and catering equipment, in order to operate the Sand Wedge Café in house. After some initial problems the café is proving very popular. The café is currently open from Wednesday to Sunday inclusive, with full seven day operation planned for the summer holiday period.

Vivary staff have been out in the community promoting the benefits of golf as a skill for life. Manager, Neil Hobbs, and Coach, Richard Coffin, took golf 'have a go' stands to the Town Centre and the inaugural secondary schools competition, run in partnership with the Tone Schools Partnership. Around 250 children participated in the two events, some of whom have since taken up golf at Vivary.

Wellington Sports Centre

An eight week pilot scheme of children's activity outreach has been running throughout May and June in the Wellington community. Four locations were selected (including some of the most deprived areas), and twice per week an informal 'drop in' sports (eg., football, rounders and basketball) and fun games/fitness session has been delivered to children aged 5-16 years by Danny Earles (Wellington Sports Centre Fitness Instructor). To date, some 400 children have participated in this scheme (despite some awful weather at times!) which, together with very positive feedback from the children and their parents, demonstrates that this has been a very successful project.

Sports and Health Development

Walk in the Park

Diabetes UK South West and Tone Leisure worked in partnership to stage the Diabetes UK Walk in the Park event for the first time in Vivary Park. The event took place at the end of National Diabetes Week on Saturday, 16th June, with 95 people of all ages coming to the start line at 11.30 am. As well as raising the public's awareness of diabetes and raising money for diabetes research, Tone Leisure and Diabetes UK worked together to promote the importance of a physically active lifestyle for those with and without the condition. Tone Leisure's Fitness Instructor, Caroline Beasley, led the crowd for a warm up, which got everyone in the mood for embarking on their sponsored walk. Tone Leisure's Junior Activities team provided fun for families with games and activities through the rest of the day. The event was a success in terms of getting more people more active and it is anticipated that a good sum of money will have been raised towards the Diabetes UK campaign.

Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Triathlon

The 10th Annual Taunton Deane Triathlon took place on Sunday, 20th May, sponsored by Foot Anstey Solicitors and organised by Tone Leisure in partnership with Somerset RC Tri. 400 competitors entered the event swimming at Wellington Sports Centre, cycling to Milverton and Wiveliscombe and back and running around the lanes and footpaths of Wellington. The race was full in record time this year with all 400 places being taken in just two weeks back in January, with competitors entering from all over the South West. The event provided something for the whole family; trade stands and refreshments were at the finish area and a bouncy castle, face painting and ball games kept children entertained and active whilst waiting to cheer on their family in the race.

Taunton Rounders League

The Taunton Rounders League is taking place again this year with six teams entering the six week league which started in June. Tone Leisure have provided the administration and equipment for the

league with SASP staff organising fixtures and umpiring matches and the venue and pitch marking has been kindly offered free by Taunton Rugby Club.

The Health and Leisure Panel on 5 June welcomed a report from Max Hebditch, the chairman of the Taunton Cultural Consortium, on the first year's work on the development of the cultural quarter.

A new public art and design policy, agreed at the Strategic Planning, Transport and Economic Development panel on 5 June, seeks to secure integrated public art into the design of developments at an early planning stage. The new policy will be incorporated into the Local Development Framework and Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan. The river frontage, pedestrian links, the cultural quarter, the town centre have been designated public art and design sites where developments will be required to enhance the public realm through excellent and unique design or integrated artworks.

The youth dance performance of Black Moves held at the Tacchi-Morris on 21 June was a great success with over one hundred young people participating in the project which was led by Take Art: Dance. Taunton Deane Borough Council alongside the other local authorities and Arts Council England supported the initiative which took the Abolition of Slavery as its theme.

I was able to attend this production and it was really encouraging to see young people being creative in dance and music and supporting each other so very well.

I was also able to attend a performance by Orchestra West at Queens College which was a very polished presentation Well attended and so pleasing to see this Orchestra developing.

At the Brewhouse there was a presentation of a play, "Glass Eels" written by a Somerset person and it had its first show on 29 June. A marvellous production which now goes on to London. Lets hope it is as successful as the previous play by the same writer.

Councillor Richard Lees

COUNCIL MEETING – 17th July 2007.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MEL MULLINS–ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Smokefree England

Now that England is Smokefree all Environmental Health teams will start to include checks on Smokefree issues as they carry out their routine premises inspections. Advice will be given to all non-compliant premises on what actions are required to become fully Smokefree compliant.

1.2 Licensing

The Gambling Act is now here and in the past week we have started to receive our first applications. To date we have received four premises applications. Activities covered by the Gambling Act include betting shops, trackside betting, bingos and fruit machines. From the 1 September the licensing unit will work to achieve the following objectives under the Act:-

- To prevent gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime.*
- To ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way.*
- To protect children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.*

1.3 Health and Safety Team

Falls From Height and Ladders Exchange

Latest figures show that 46 people died and 3351 suffered serious injury as a result of a fall from height in the workplace in Great Britain. (HSC Statistics of Fatal Accidents 2005/2006). Falls from height remain the most common cause of fatal injury and the second most common cause of major injury to employees. Falls from ladders account for around a third of major injuries.

Ladder Exchange is a national scheme that will be adopted locally and run for the next few months. It is an opportunity for businesses that have defective ladders to take them along to some local designated suppliers and get up to a 50% discount on a new ladder. Locally we hope to contribute to the national target, to take 4000 defective ladders out of the workplace using a Ladder Exchange scheme and working with partners. Local publicity will be undertaken shortly on this scheme.

1.4 Food Safety.

Work is almost complete to produce, in-house, an electronic version of the FoodO Board game for children aged 7-11. This follows the introduction two years ago of the hard copy version. The game is based on Cluedo but the object is to solve a food poisoning mystery rather than a murder and the idea was the brainchild of a member of our Food Safety Team. Trials of the new computer based format are currently being held at some local schools, after which it is planned that the Game will be distributed to all 250 Primary Schools in Somerset. The game teaches basic food safety principles

and links in very well with the national “Healthy Schools” initiative that many local schools are currently working towards. The longer term aim is then to roll it out across the South West and, eventually, to offer it nation wide.

The Food Standards Agency, who funded the original hard copy Game, has been enthusiastically supportive and will be providing most of the additional funding and the logistics of the launch and distribution.

1.5 Environmental Protection Team

Air Quality

The mobile air quality analyser trailer will be re-located from the Silk Mills (Crematorium) roundabout to the entrance to the North Street car park in Wellington, during July. The equipment analyses concentrations of oxides of Nitrogen, from which we can calculate the Nitrogen dioxide component, and of particulates in the air, against health-based targets set by central government. The trailer is located in one place for several months before re-locating, in this way a picture of air quality across key areas of Taunton Deane can be built up.

2.0 CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM

2.1 CCTV.

Following a small number of thefts from vehicles, a CCTV system has been installed covering vulnerable areas. Further measures taken to improve safety include the operation (in conjunction with the police) of the vulnerable vehicle scheme and notices warning the public that thefts have occurred from cars.

2.2 Car Park Lighting

Following a successful trial of a solar powered street light, the crematorium car parks will be fitted with lighting to provide better safety for mourners during the winter period.

3.0 WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

3.1 Cardboard Recycling

The paper banks provided at all the drop off sites in Taunton Deane have now been converted to accept cardboard packaging. This development was introduced in response to the enthusiasm of residents to recycle as many materials as possible following the introduction of *SORT IT!*

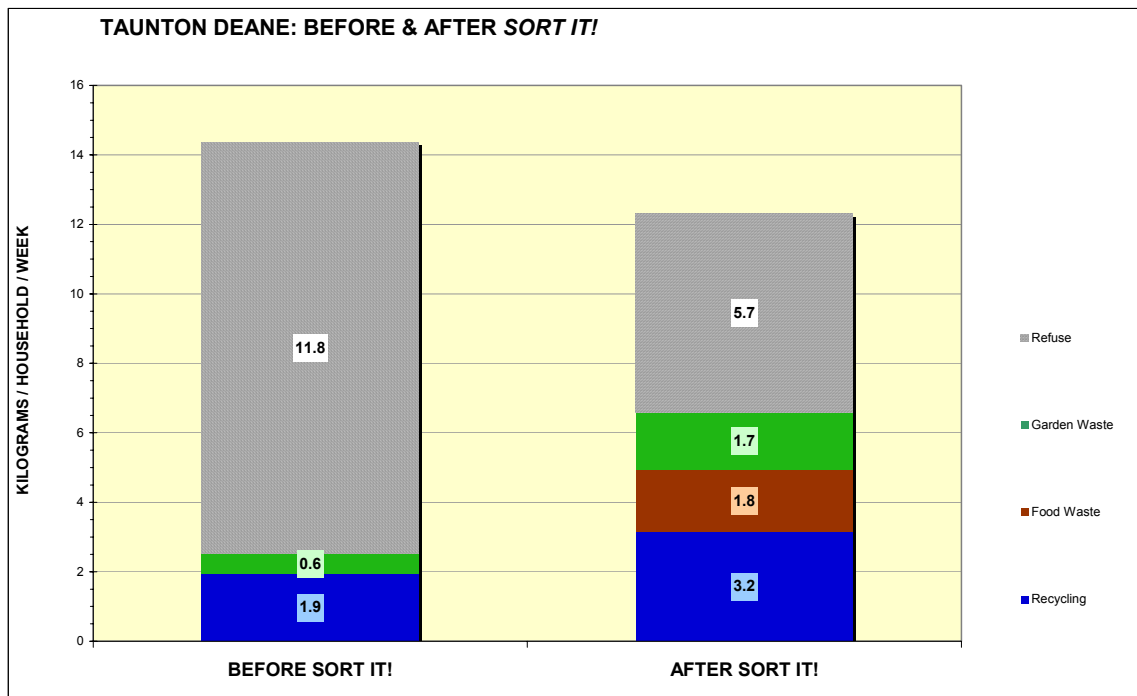
3.2 Somerset Recycling And Refuse Collection Contract: Update

On 29th March the Executives of the 6 SWP authorities endorsed the decision to appoint ECT as Preferred Bidder and SITA UK as the Reserve Bidder. The SWP Negotiation Team have been meeting regularly with ECT to clarify outstanding issues to enable the award of the Contract. The SWP Project Team have also met with members of each District Executive/Cabinets to discuss future service options. Every SWP District would like to move to *SORT IT!+* if the addition of plastic and cardboard kerbside collections can be made to be affordable.

Somerset is moving to the widest range of major materials being collected at kerbside anywhere in the UK, and so developing the most effective and efficient collection approach is key to making the enhanced services affordable for all SWP authorities. The Health and Leisure Review Panel met on the 12th July to discuss this, and preparations are well advanced for the SWP Executives to meet again on 19th July to consider the outcomes of the negotiation in relation to the award of the Contract and to agree the final steps in the Governance arrangements that will create the Somerset Waste Board

3.3 SORT IT!

The *SORT IT!* services were first introduced to 3500 properties in May 2005 and the whole Borough has been receiving the services since October 2006. The change in the level of recycling performance that has been achieved in just two years is remarkable and is illustrated in the chart below.



3.4 Public Conveniences

Priory Bridge Car Park

As a result of unacceptable behaviour happening overnight at this toilet block representations have been received from local residents, Police and Taunton Deane's Anti-social Behaviour group, following discussions it was decided to lock these at night the same as all the other conveniences.

COUNCIL MEETING 17 JULY 2007

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HAZEL PRIOR-SANKEY – HOUSING SERVICES

Water Heaters – Following the tragic incident at 85 Wellington Road 1,690 homes have been visited and ‘fail safe’ thermostats have been fitted in 995 of them. We aim to have completed all these inspections by March 2008.

Decent Homes – So far this year contracts have been agreed to bring 264 more homes up to the “decent” standard. Other contracts will follow.

Choice Based Lettings – This joint project with the other 4 Somerset Districts is progressing well. The requisite 12-week consultation period ends in August. A successful, and well-attended consultation seminar was held at the Wellsprings Centre on 20th June with good participation from all 5 districts.

Respect Agenda – Estates staff continue to develop this different way of working by involving tenants more in the running of their areas and homes. Members will be kept informed of progress.

The Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) – Taunton Deane Borough Council has applied to join this body and Cllr Murphy has volunteered to join its Board. We are awaiting a response. Membership will put us in the forefront of the campaign to ensure councils keep the money they collect in rents and from the sale of Council homes. ARCH is also intent on increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Sheltered Housing and Deane Helpline – Temporary improvements within existing budgets have been made to these two services, but more can be done once ISIS is in place.

Affordable Housing Day – Almost 500 people attended this event held at The Deane House on 8th June, which was entirely funded by the ‘stall holders’. The event again highlighted the demand for affordable housing to rent or purchase in the Deane.

Enabling Seminar – On the afternoon of 21st June an information seminar was held at The Deane House to inform all the participants of the problems and some solutions in the systems available to build affordable housing. Housing Association and Council staff led the discussions. The seminar was attended by councillors, developers, housing association development staff and TDBC staff from legal, planning and housing services. We are still looking for more solutions!

Tenants Conference – This annual event was held at The Deane House on 29th June. Talks were delivered covering a wide range of issues involving tenants: Choice Based Lettings, The Respect Agenda, The life of a Tenant Inspector, Asset Management, Community Development and Creating Community Partnerships.

Completions – 3 rented homes and one shared ownership home were completed in early June at Hatch Beauchamp by Falcon Housing Association. Work has commenced on other small, rural sites and we continue to make progress at Priory, Wellington. Negotiations continue on the larger, Section 106 sites.

Energy Efficiency – In 2006/2007 501 cavity wall insulation installations were completed under the British Gas/Council Tax rebate scheme. Taunton Deane continues to lead the field in England for this initiative. Due to its success TDBC was chosen as one of only 4 ‘pilots’ in the country to pioneer renewable new energy/council tax rebate projects this year, whilst the original scheme continues.

Retirement - After a distinguished career in public service spanning 37 years with this Authority, Malcolm Western, Head of Housing, retires this month. Many others will have paid tribute to Malcolm’s outstanding contribution to the community but I would wish to record a formal word of thanks for his dedication and the manner in which he has discharged his responsibilities, often over and above the call of duty. The devotion of considerable time and effort beyond the workplace, notably as Chairman of Taunton Association for the Homeless, has been the mark of the man and I believe other Councillors will wish to echo my own sentiments of appreciation and gratitude and the hope that he will have a long and rewarding retirement.

Reorganisation – Housing Services will eventually be under the direction of Shirlene Adam once the ISIS project is finalised. Within Housing John Williams will be the “first among equals” once he returns from rowing the Indian Ocean. He will be known as Chief Housing Officer. David Whitehead will be Housing Manager (Strategic Services) and Philip Webb, Housing Manager (Property Services). John will be responsible for housing management, tenants involvement, supported services, rents and voids.

Housing Services remains a large, varied department with over 270 staff including 130 at Priory Depot, and almost 60 at Kilkenny (Deane Helpline) and Dowell Close (Sheltered Housing).

Hazel Prior-Sankey
July 2007

COUNCIL MEETING – 17 JULY 2007

Report Of Councillor Mrs Fran Smith Corporate Resources

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

As this is the first meeting of the Council since the Election in May it is opportune to mention that the election process itself went mostly very smoothly. Craig Morse, the Electoral Services Manager, coped extremely well with the new requirements for dealing with postal votes. The Count, which involved both Parish and District elections, was a complicated affair but again this was carried out efficiently.

As the new portfolio holder for Resources I have attended a Central Services Managers Team meeting and I am in the process of meeting all the Managers on a one to one basis. I hope that by doing this I will be able to develop a good working relationship with them all.

A great deal of learning and development opportunities have been available to members since the elections and I am sure some of the new Councillors must have felt inundated with information, however it is important this information is disseminated as quickly as possible in order to be up to speed. Further training opportunities will continue and members will be kept fully informed.

Senior officers have identified a number of work streams they would like to develop; one involves the continued development of councillors, this will dovetail into the Member Charter work that is already being carried out and members will be asked to contribute and take a leading part in this process.

PERSONNEL

Job Evaluation

The Job Evaluation scheme results were announced on Friday 6th July to all staff. We will have more information over coming weeks as to the numbers of appeals that may be generated and the work that this will involve.

Absence

The absence figures for 06/07 is 11.62 average number of days sick. This is slightly higher than last year, which was 11.5 days. The reason why it has not decreased as anticipated is due to an increase in long term absence by 44% from the previous year. Personnel are looking at some new areas to reduce absence and these are currently being reviewed and discussed with CMT. The absence rate for the 2 months of this financial year is encouraging; the figures show a 1.45 reduction in the average number of day sick.

ISiS

Personnel have undertaken considerable work in terms of the ISiS letters for staff which have all been returned as per their timescales. So far all staff have chosen to second. The final result will not be known until the 14th July. Weekly meetings of the HR governance work stream are held with representatives from IBM, SCC, HBS and Mouchel Parkman as well as the Police. Finalisation of the Output specification for HR within ISiS which will form part of the contract is now taking place.

Smoking

The new legislation regarding non- smoking came into effect on the 1st July 2007 and the new policy has now been put in place having been agreed with UNISON, Staff Side and members of the Smoking Working Group. Smoking in company vehicles will no longer be permitted.

Payroll

The payroll function has now moved across to SCC. There are however, some outstanding P11D queries to be resolved before they are ready for issue.

Professional support

Personnel are continuing to provide professional support to the Somerset Waste Partnership activities.

CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Work on the ISiS project still continues and meetings with preferred bidder on service delivery and work streams (Property and Customer Access).

Customer Services

The first quarter of this financial year has been difficult to manage with large scale consultations on Unitary status and "Your Council Your Views", plus a general increase in the number of calls. The Unitary status vote caused major problems as Customer Services were totally unprepared for the level of calls. Customer Services try to work closely with services to assist with projects (Waste Services Sort It! Campaign is a prime example) but more work is needed to ensure Customer Services are kept in the communication loop.

Almost 41,300 calls were managed through the contact centre last quarter with 61.31% being dealt with entirely within Customer Services. The average abandonment rate for the year was 8.68% which reflects the increase in call levels during consultation periods. A total of 11,366 people have been helped at Main Reception. 7,567 people visited Wellington Community Office.

Design and Print

Customer Services have negotiated with IBM to enable contributions, from TDBC and SCC Design and Print teams, to the branding exercise for ISiS. Contributions from two TDBC members of staff are being taken forward to the next stage. Other

major projects worked on include the Corporate Strategy document, reception signage redesign (still on-going) improving and developing on corporate style for print purposes and working with services to redesign leaflets etc for general use.

Corporate Administration/Facilities/WP

Corporate Administration continue to work with services on providing cost effective solutions for large mail requirements and have been working with policy to provide mailing and scanning services for the “Your Council Your Views” consultation.

Facilities have worked extremely hard to ensure cover for Deane House during a period of staff shortages with two “daytime” members of staff successfully covering opening hours until agency staff were recruited.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Organisational Development has been involved in facilitating the Councils Transformation agenda in the following activities:

ISiS HR - this has involved developing and shaping the cultural and staff engagement agenda for the JVCo (Joint Venture Company). Working as part of the PEM (People Excellence Model) transformation project, with colleagues from SCC, Avon & Somerset Police and IBM. Collaborating with CMT on group development and building leadership capacity and assisting with the structure and design of the organisational change agenda. Working with Service Managers on developing their leadership capacity and skills development, to facilitate the recent restructure and finally liaising closely with Democratic services in supporting the launch, development and initiation of the Member Charter.

Future issues for the coming months for Organisational Development include the continuing support for the above activities, with work intensity increasing once the establishment of the Joint Venture Company from October onwards begins.

ICT SERVICE:

Academy Housing System

The ‘go-live’ target date of 8th August for the new Academy Housing system is now looming large and the intensity of the work in progress to ensure we hit this target is growing. The unfortunate absence due to ill health of the full time project manager has led to some rapid restructuring of resources both within ICT and the Housing services, however ICT remain confident that the timetable will be met.

New Planning Development Management System

The procurement of the new Planning system continues as planned. The short listing exercise has been completed and demonstration and site visits are being arranged with the 2 suppliers short listed.

Building Control

ICT are working on a system which will enable visitors to the Deane House reception to search the Building Control register via a web browser. This is being done in response to the likely demand caused by the new Con 29 land search scheme, which could lead to the Building Control unit being swamped by demands to inspect the register if it were to remain only a manual system.

Student Placement

Liam Wye has recently joined ICT in one of the 2 student placement posts and is already proving a valuable member of the team, this once again emphasises the value of the scheme for both ICT and the universities we recruit from.

Web Site Accessibility Audit

The interim results of a web accessibility audit commissioned for our web site have now been published. Given the complexity of the accessibility guidelines a number of issues were identified - but on the whole the report found no 'obvious' problems on our site, and work is being undertaken with the company who did the audit to solve those issues identified. Accessibility is something that is taken very seriously as we seek to make more of our services available electronically.

REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE UNIT

Information up to the end of Quarter 1 for 2007-2008.

As members will be aware, performance in the Revenues & Benefits Unit in 2006-2007 suffered from the conversion from our "in-house" systems to an external software package. However, performance in Quarter 1 of this year has shown we are on the road to recovery and in some areas actually exceeding our performance in previous years. In the next few weeks a report for the Resources Review Panel will be produced giving detailed information in each of the areas within the Revenues & Benefits Service Unit.

Council Tax administration is generally turning work around within 3 weeks. An increase in the number of staff home working in the Council Tax Team has given significant increases in individual productivity, however long term sickness has meant the true benefits from the home-working initiative are yet to be derived.

Targets for the 2007/08 financial year (subject to agreement between TDBC and the Joint Venture Company) are to collect 98% of the 2007/08 Council Tax and to collect 98.8% of the 2007/08 Non-Domestic Rates by 31 March 2008.

The collection figures at the end of the first quarter suggest they are slightly **ahead** of the target for Non-Domestic Rate Collection and approximately 1% **behind** the target for Council Tax collection.

Council Tax arrears brought forward from 2006/07 have reduced by 25%, from £1.6m at 31 March 2007 to £1.2m at 30 June 2007. Arrears of Non-Domestic Rates reduced by 36%, from £492k at 31 March 2007 to £314k at 30 June 2007.

In Benefits Administration, speed of processing continues to improve. Cumulative performance from 1 April 2007 - 30 June 2007 is as follows:

- the average time for processing new claims was 22.79 days (top quartile)
- the average time for dealing with changes in our customers' circumstances was 8.23 days (top quartile)
- 95.32% of new claims were worked out within 14 days of receiving all the information needed to assess the claim (top quartile)

The number of claims outstanding at 30 June 2007 was 166. In general, work in Benefit processing is being turned around in less than 5 days.

In the self assessment against the DWP's Performance Standards for the first quarter, Revenues and Benefits achieved the maximum score of 4 ("Excellent").

The Investigation Team successfully prosecuted 2 fraudsters this quarter, the most recent of which was fined £300 with an order of £75 costs being made.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit has recently completed the production of the Annual Statement of Accounts which was approved by the Corporate Governance Committee on 27 June. The Audit Commission will commence their audit of the accounts over the next 2 months. Now that the old financial year has finished the Unit will also be sending off numerous statistical returns to the Government on our spending last year. The end of the first quarter of 2007/08 will also see the start of the first major budget monitoring exercise of the year - these figures will be reported to the Review Board along with progress made on performance indicators and the progress against the corporate strategy.

Finally work on the Annual Efficiency Statement, ISIS and other key projects are ongoing.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting 17 July 2007

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

This is my first report to the Council and, as such, is following on the work of my predecessor, Councillor Mrs. Lewin-Harris. Part of my role is to receive requests for grant funding from voluntary groups. I have signed off a number of payments to various bodies, amongst which were “Vitalise”, an organisation who provide holidays for disabled people which was gratefully accepted and will benefit a number of residents in Taunton Deane. I also approved payments to improve play equipment in Blackbrook and Holway.

I am particularly interested in improving youth provision to increase the cohesion in our communities and I am very interested in some of the work being done on youth provision by the Task and Finish Team for the Health and Leisure Panel. Clearly, this is an urgent matter and hopefully their recommendations will be available soon.

I have met with Jeff Brown from the County Youth Service about youth provision in Taunton Deane. We recognised many areas where the Youth Service and Taunton Deane Borough Council work together well. However, we also noted areas to improve. For example, the lack of staff, or members, championing work focussed on youth.

I also welcome Councillor Govier’s initiative in Wellington in running the exciting pilot Community Restorative Justice Project. I will be giving him my full support. This will be the first of its kind in Taunton Deane and a really positive step for the community in Wellington to have more control of what happens in their neighbourhood.

I have had a particular request for help from the Neighbourhood Voluntary Service which is providing gardening and other services to an increasingly (both in age and numbers) elderly clientele.

Their work base increased by 21% last year. I feel this is an area where we can give some help.

Engaging with Minority Groups in the community has been identified as a weakness in previous Comprehensive Performance Assessments.

To address this, work has been on to develop relationships.

One Somerset was a very successful Community Cohesion Event to Celebrate Diversity in Somerset at the Racecourse on 28th April, 2007. Taunton Deane Borough Council had several stalls representing Equalities, IT, Research and Consultation, Housing and Anti-social Behaviour Co-ordination. The Equalities Co-ordinators facilitated a Workshop on the Equalities Programme which was well received.

The Ethnicity Forum is due to be held shortly. Meetings with individual groups have been ongoing, e.g. information exchanges with Housing, Benefits and Equalities Officers have taken place with the Polish Association. Gypsies have also been invited to attend the Ethnicity Forum

A meeting with Gypsies and Taunton Deane Borough Council Services (i.e. Planning and Housing) is being arranged.

The Equalities Officers have been holding a series of advice sessions for all TDBC staff to explain our Corporate individual responsibilities. These sessions were mandatory for all staff.

Wherever possible, I will be helping and supporting Councillor Coles in his work to achieve some progress towards the 60% Single Occupancy Vehicles target, set out in the Corporate Strategy.

And finally, I am very proud that the Taunton Deane Community Strategy for 2007-17 was published this month. The Community Strategy sets out the priorities for the Council and our Local Strategic Partnership partners for the next 10 years.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting 17 July 2007

Report of Councillor Steve Brooks - Communications

Public Relations

We are pleased to announce that Debbie Rundle, the new Media and Public Relations Officer will be starting work with us on 6 August. Debbie has extensive experience of working as a journalist and an editor on several local papers. Until Debbie starts, Helen Phillips will be coordinating media inquiries and sending out press releases, so if you have any queries please contact her.

The Keep Somerset Local campaign has been very resource intensive over the last few weeks and we have been pleased with the media coverage and the public's response to the campaign, with an 82% no vote, the Somerset County Council Unitary proposal. We have also supported the Smoke Free campaign in preparation for the introduction on the 1 July.

We continue to provide communications support to the ISiS Programme. This involves coordinating communications across Somerset County Council, ourselves and the Avon and Somerset Constabulary. To make sure that all our out of scope services are aware of the Programme and the potential implications for their service, a number of team meetings have been visited by members of the Programme Team and this has proved to be particularly successful.

Consultation & Information

Our annual budget consultation survey 'Your Council Your Views 2007' was sent out to a random sample of 5000 residents at the beginning of May. The questionnaires are being processed at the moment and the report will be ready at the end of July.

To supplement the survey we held three Roadshows, one in the Taunton Old Market Centre, one at the 'One Somerset' Event, and one at the Co-op supermarket in Wellington. These Roadshows were successful and encouraged around 320 people to give us their views. At first glance, and not surprisingly, the clear top three priorities that emerged from all three Roadshows were:

- Providing Affordable Housing
- Crime Reduction and Increasing Community Safety
- Domestic Waste Collection and Recycling

The Council, working with Somerset County Council, has been selected to be part of a national customer segmentation project conducted by the Local Government Association and the National Consumer Council.

The aims of this national project are to:

- Develop better measures of customer satisfaction that are appropriate to local public services.
- Explore whether there are broad customer segments that are common to all councils which will allow us to compare and benchmark results between councils.
- Identify a core data set that all councils should collect locally, including customer data, which supports the national performance framework but allows for local flexibility and local ownership of performance management.

The project will help us develop the tools to better understand the experience of our customers in a co-ordinated and structured way. This is necessary if we want to respond to the Local Government White Paper and develop truly responsive services. If you would like to know more about this project, please speak to Charissa DeZeeuw

Website update

An Accessibility Audit has been carried out on the TDBC website by an external company. This was to identify how accessible the website currently is and to support the development of a website strategy and support us in developing a more customer focused website. We have to ensure that our website meets certain standards relating to accessibility and usability and part of this is to achieve Double-A compliance for accessibility.

The results from the Accessibility Audit were not surprising and this feedback identified some quick fixes, most of which have already been dealt with, as well as longer term requirements which will feed into the development of the website.

Improvements to the Heart of Somerset homepage are currently being carried out to improve visitor access. The particular focus has been around improving the navigation options on the homepage and making the information clearer for visitors.

We continue to work on improving the TDBC Web site contents. Our aim is to improve the visitor experience and ensure consistency across the website. We are setting up a network of Content Editors within services who will be responsible for maintaining their own website content. To help support them, we have introduced a training course on how to use website software and write website content.

To give you a snapshot of the traffic to our website, in June we had 29,436 new visitors to the TDBC website, of these 9,782 were returning visitors and together they visited a total of 206,625 individual pages. The planning and look up results page was the most requested on the website, with 29,268 requests and the TDBC website homepage had 15,243 requests.

I was pleased to be given this Portfolio as I feel that communications has to be central to how we work and deliver services, both internally and externally. I would welcome

feedback from any colleague who may have suggestions around how we can improve our communications.

Finally, I would like to thank Emma Brewster for her valuable help and assistance to me in the weeks before she left the authority to move to China. I am sure all who met and talked to Emma, our Media and Public Relations Officer for the past two and half years, will agree that she has helped to improve the Council's reputation and built trust between ourselves and our local community and stakeholders. We all wish her every success in her move.

Councillor Steve Brooks
Executive Councillor for Communications