

PART II REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

COUNCIL MEETING 19 FEBRUARY 2008

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

The Budget

This year has produced a very challenging budget process. So to end up in a position where we can set a council tax rise of just 3 per cent makes me very pleased. This is of course well under the rpi inflation rate . Our proposed rise is well under the 4.5 council tax rises proposed by several of our District Council's in the rest of Somerset. Not only this but we have avoided the financial crisis which has hit at least two district councils in Somerset. We have also not had to make some of the terrible decisions which they have had to make , which have included closing public swimming pools and making redundant nearly 10 per cent of the staff in one district which borders ourselves. We have achieved this position following a long hard look at all of the councils finance issues and prudent efficiency savings. We of course realise that this is an ongoing process and challenge and are already making preliminary plans for next years budget as well. The good news on the budget is not only confined to the excellent council tax figure but we have also been able to move forward some worthwhile development items. I am pleased that we are going to be investing £28k next year in extra PCSO support in the Borough. We will be of course the only district council in the whole of Somerset to be funding this initiative in any way. We also supportive of the fine work going on in Wiveliscombe Community Office . Due to this we are proposing that we increase their grant to £15k a year. We also using this budget opportunity to meet two manifesto pledges. We will be setting aside some of the car park revenues for the purpose of sustainable transport initiatives, we plan to support this to the tune of £22k next year. We will also invest £15 k on climate change initiatives. We have a senior officer of this Council working on new climate change proposals for not only the Council but also for the Borough as well. This is a major step forward for this Council. When you think of the budget gap we have closed and the continuing pressure of concessionary bus fares on our finances I feel we have done really well to be able to deliver this budget tonight.

Concessionary fares

Thanks to all members who attended our discussion item on this issue at the last meeting of the Executive . Thanks also to Mark Pedler from Somerset County Council who was not only informative but certainly answered many the questions we have all asked regarding the scheme. It was good to hear somebody actually explain this whole process in plain english for once. What we do know now is that the new national scheme will put us under even more pressure than we are now.

I intend to raise the issue of the unfair funding of this with Ben Bradshaw our Regional South West Minister when I meet him on March 10.

Post office closures

I continue to be frustrated at this latest round of possible post office closures and will talk more later on tonight in our motion on this subject. We have no list of closures yet but following February 26 we will be in a fight to save several local post offices. I and Cllr Horsley held a recent meeting with our local M.P. Jeremy Browne who will work with this Council every step of the way in the fight against this ill thought out process.

Meetings

Last week I had a meeting with Mike Robinson , Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office. He also gave me a tour of the site. We discussed future plans for the Hydrographic Office in light of the decision to stay in Taunton and in particular discussed the future location of the office which Mike has promised to let us know the result of by the end of the month. I also held a meeting with Juliette Dickinson of Tone Leisure to talk about their future plans and touch base on the very competitive leisure industry in Taunton Deane. Once again thank goodness we still have leisure facilities of good quality here in Taunton Deane. I feel very sorry for the residents of Burnham-on-Sea and Minehead who face the loss of their council run swimming pools . Richard Lees and myself also met Mark Edgecome of the Taunton skate park project. We had a good frank discussion and once again stated that this facility cannot be paid for from the Council Tax but the Council will do whatever it can to support the group with its applications for outside funding. Last week I visited Wellington Fire Station and went out with the fire crew on specific exercises. We are very lucky to have such committed and experienced fire fighters in this area. Last month I attended an update meeting and thank you event for Wellington Food Town. This fantastic event attended by so many people was one of the best events we have had in Wellington for years and it was great to see the support this Council gave to the event. I also was invited to meet the new owners of Gerbestone Manor near West Buckland who wanted to share with me his new business vision for this property . Its always interesting to go and meet people like this who want to share their ideas with the Council. I have listened to the latest progress on affordable housing during a meeting I had with Richard Lloyd of Summerfield Developments who outlined some thoughts on this very important subject. Finally I have entered the IDeA mentoring programme and have been assigned a mentor who has years of valuable experience as a district and county councillor in the south west. I am finding this very useful and the opportunity to work with and listen to someone of such experience is a great support to me in my role as leader.

Councillor Ross Henley

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Report of Councillor Steve Brooks - Communications

Public Relations

December saw the launch of the potential affordable housing project at the top of Cheddon Road. We worked closely and effectively with the National Trust (landowners) and Summerfield Homes (developers) to produce press releases and a full media briefing with the opportunity to visit Fyne Court. This resulted in positive coverage in the Gazette, the Western Daily Press and Western Morning News. This was followed by the public consultation event, again covered in the Gazette.

During the month, the communications team worked closely with the team involved in the Rhianna Hardie tragedy. Considerable preparation was made for the inevitable media interest in the inquest into Rhianna's death. The hearing in January resulted in intense media coverage from national and regional TV and radio; the Press Association; the regional press and the local press.

The PRO was present throughout the four-day hearing. A press release was issued immediately after the inquest and Cllr Prior-Sankey responded to media requests. After the inquest, an informal media briefing was held at The Deane House, attended by the regional and local media. This was held to ensure that the key message on immersion heaters and thermostats was effectively communicated.

Scores on the Doors, the new food hygiene rating system attracted significant media interest with the Gazette devoting a page to the scheme following a briefing with Environmental Health and the PRO. The publicity campaign is on going with regular updates provided to the media and the launch planned for the spring.

Deane Dispatch was again prepared, written and laid out in-house, resulting in a financial saving. Distribution is due to start, via Royal Mail, on 3 March. The Spring edition covers a wide range of services from housing and car parking to tourism and Project Taunton. The future of the publication is under discussion, as a result of the reduced budget, with innovative and cost-effective methods of producing and distributing Deane Dispatch being considered.

Between October and December 2007 there were a total of 285 articles in the press about the Council. In the same period we issued 51 press releases. As expected, the area which attracts the most press enquiries is Planning Policy and Transportation (38 enquiries) followed by Environmental Services (12 enquiries).

Website

John-Mark Strange has been employed as a temporary Web Content Officer to provide cover whilst Fiona Baker is on maternity leave. His focus is on making sure that all the Web Content is suitable and accessible. John is currently working on making further improvements to the homepage of the website.

We are nearing the completion of the development of a Corporate Image Library. This Image Library will contain all TDBC photographs and images used for leaflets and on the website. It will enable us to effectively manage all Council images. We have also started work on a Corporate Publications Library which will help us manage the numerous publications we produce.

Consultation and Information

The Customer Insight Protocol has been developed as part of the Local Government Association's 'Measuring Customer Satisfaction' project which Taunton Deane and Somerset County Council are involved in as case studies.

This protocol has been prepared for use by councils, partners and umbrella organisations in designing and analysing future local surveys and in gaining extra value and information from existing data sources.

The Customer Insight Protocol introduces the concept of consistency across survey data collection. If data is collected and stored in accordance with the protocol, councils will be able to:

- share data between different services.
- conduct "segmentation" analyses to understand differences in the views of different communities
- identify the most cost-effective scale for surveys
- benchmark performance against other local authorities or against national surveys.

The Information and Consultation Officer is in the process of discussing how the Protocol could be implemented by Council services.

The new Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007 were published on 6 December 2007. We are currently analysing the data and looking at the trends across Taunton Deane in the context of Somerset, the Southwest region and our Nearest Neighbours. This work will feed into a report being prepared by Scrutiny and Performance and Economic Development on deprivation in Taunton Deane.

Other Communications

We have been actively promoting the Corporate Style Guide over the last few months. To celebrate the beginning of the New Year we produced a vertical desk calendar which summarises the key requirements of the Style Guide.

We continue to work closely with Southwest One, Somerset County Council and now the Avon and Somerset Constabulary to support the ongoing changes associated with the establishment of Southwest One. In January, the County Council's Network magazine, CountyBeacon featured the work with Somerset County Council on the creation of Southwest One as an example of best practice. If you would like a copy of this, please speak to Ruth James.

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Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Restructure

Following the failure to find suitable candidates for the two Area Planning Managers posts, it has been decided to revisit the structure of the Development Management Section. It has been concluded that the best use of available professional resources will be by reverting to two area teams with additional resource provided at Principal Planning Officer level as well as redefining the role of the Planning Admin Manager with a greater emphasis on performance monitoring and enhancing the quality of service provided to our customers. This post will also oversee the introduction of the new Plantech IT system. These changes can be accommodated within the budget already agreed. The additional Principal Planning Officer post and the vacancy as Planning Officer level are currently being advertised, to be followed by the vacant Area Planning Manager's post as soon as possible once the result of the job evaluation appeal for that post is known.

Monkton Heathfield

You will recall that the Consortium of Developers have appealed against non-determination of the original planning application for the urban extension at Monkton Heathfield. At a special meeting of the Planning Committee on 22 November 2007, members resolved to instruct the Development Manager to represent the Council at the appeal and to object to the proposal on a number of grounds. Since then there have been a series of meetings with the Consortium facilitated by ATLAS (a government agency whose role is to assist local planning authorities bring forward major development), with the aim of resolving outstanding issues. However, the Consortium have refused to provide substantive evidence as to why they cannot deliver the development in accordance with the local plan. In the absence of such evidence the Council is continuing to object to the proposal and it therefore now seems likely that the Public Inquiry scheduled for eight days commencing on April 1st 2008 will go ahead.

Validation checklist

Members have recently received a copy of a draft document outlining both national and local requirements in relation to the type of information that needs to be submitted to support a planning application. Any comments you have in terms of the local list will be most welcome. If you wish to comment could you please do so by 21 March 2008 as the final document is required to

be published by 6th April 2008 to coincide with the introduction of the national standard application forms (1-APP).

The Third Way

Somerset County Council Have now submitted the Third way planning application and provided TDBC with a copy for comment. It is intended to refer this to the Planning Committee in the next few weeks in order to obtain their observations before responding formally.

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy

This document has now been published and as members will be aware it suggests the building of some additional 18000 homes in Taunton and some 3800 in the rest of the Borough. This will of course be the subject of much debate, discussion and public consultation, not to mention hard work by all those involved over the coming months, always assuming that, it receives, the backing of the Secretary of State in its current form.

Residents Parking

This thorny and divisive subject continues to exercise contentious views across the borough. I hope to bring forward a number of ideas as to how we can move this issue on in the very near future, following a great deal of work with the Parking and Civil Contingencies Manager and his team.

Simon Coles
Portfolio Holder Planning and Transportation

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Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development, Tourism & Property

PART 1

Property

The Asset Management Plan has been considered by the Strategy and Performance Panel on 5 February 2008 and approved by the Executive on 6 February 2008. During the next 6 months there will be a thorough review not only of the process but also of the policies underpinning our ownership of property. The full report is available in the Members Room.

Project Taunton

I will update the Council verbally as both the Steering and Advisory Groups meet after the deadline for this report. I will also circulate if possible a written report in time for the meeting on 19 February.

General

I am continuing to meet local businesses and network with the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Centre Company, the Wiveliscombe Area Partnership and Business Link.

PART 2.

The Council's Economic Development Team has focused on a number of key activities over recent weeks::

1) Tourism

- a) Taunton Tourist Information Centre continues to successfully negotiate potential new areas of work in ticketing, accommodation and travel booking, with the latest initiative seeking to work with IBM and South West One to tie them into an agreement to use TTIC as a main supplier for these services for all staff.

2) Business Support

- a) The Young Enterprise Primary Programme continues to go from strength to strength across the Borough. A full complement of 24 schools have now signed up to the second year programme, and this includes all primary schools in our 'deprived areas'.

- b) A further round of Business Development Grant applications has been appraised in January, with 12 interested business owners attending business development training sessions delivered by Business Link during February, and it is expected that 6 business proposals will proceed to a formal application for individual grants of £2,000 .
- c) Meetings held with the new Business Link Contractor (Peninsular Business Link) to ensure that the new organisation is taking the needs of both Somerset and Taunton Deane into consideration in its plans for a new and enhanced service from April of this year. Relations with the new body are good, and a commitment has been received to improve and develop levels of partnership working.

3) Rural Economic Development

- a) The EDU continues to support the development of the Wellington Food Town and Market and Coastal Town Initiative Steering Groups.

Cllr J Horsley

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Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Leisure, Arts and Culture

I herewith present my fourth portfolio report to Full Council, as follows:-

The Christmas edition of the Deano was sent to every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane. The Easter edition is currently in hand.

Corfe Village Hall has received capital grant aid assistance and successfully completed their project. Applications for capital grant aid assistance have been received from Bishops Lydeard, Chipstable and Milverton Village Halls. These applications are currently being processed.

Carols around the bandstand was organised again this year by the Friends of Vivary Park, with some financial assistance from the Council. The event was, I am pleased to say, successful.

A season of Sunday bandstand concerts, in the Vivary Park bandstand, is currently being planned.

PLAY

Play Rangers and Wild Play

In mid December we heard that the Council had been successful in its application to the Lottery for funding for two children's play projects over the next 3 years: a Play Ranger Service and a programme of Wild play days will be created.

The Wild Play Days programme is being developed with the Taunton Deane Play Association and will be borough wide. The Play Ranger Service is now out to tender and the successful bidder will manage a service on behalf of 4 of the Somerset district councils from July. In Taunton the service will initially target the highest priority wards for play provision which were identified in the Play Strategy - Holway and Blackbrook, Pyrland and Rowbarton, and Halcon.

Higher Holway

A project to fill a gap in the provision of built play facilities is underway at Higher Holway open space (at the end of Rowan Drive adjacent to the motorway). The project is being used to pilot an inclusive project development technique which reflects the priority of children and young people to be involved in decisions about play provision.

We are employing Barnardos Participation Workers to work with the chosen play equipment supplier, local children and young people, parents and a landscape architect. Together they will decide what play experiences children want, what equipment and landscaping is required to deliver this and how to

achieve it within the budget. Initial consultation with children and young people showed that they want a challenging but natural play environment including rocks, trees, slopes and traditional equipment. The resulting proposal will be shared with the local community who have already agreed to the siting of a play area and then will go forward for planning permission in late March.

PLANNING FOR DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS

In response to the announcement of major housing growth in the borough, we are drawing together evidence to ensure that adequate provision for recreation will be made.

Community Halls Strategy

The first draft of a Community Halls Strategy is nearing completion and will be out to consultation and scrutiny in March. This will propose standards for community buildings and a per dwelling contribution for improving existing and providing new halls to cater for the new residents of the borough.

Allotments Strategy

The Allotments Strategy has taken longer to prepare as issues are uncovered and the scope of the potential contribution to community and corporate priorities are highlighted. This strategy will seek to ensure that new estates are provided with allotment sites and that development in existing communities contributes to local provision or to providing new allotments. This report should be ready for scrutiny and consultation in the late spring

Greenspaces Strategy

The Greenspaces Strategy is now 5 years old and needs updating to reflect the growth predicted for the borough. We will embark on this later in the year alongside the work on green wedges for the LDF

Galmington & Hamilton Pavilions

The Council has been successful in securing £532,656 towards the construction of new sports pavilions on the Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields. The Football Foundation has awarded the grant with the necessary balance coming from Planning Gain contributions. The contract has been won by Morgan Ashford. The Mayor kindly accompanied myself to see the commencement of the work that has now started on both sites and it is anticipated that the buildings will be completed in 20 weeks and certainly in time for the 2008/09 football season.

Community Sports Network

TDBC has taken the lead in setting up a Community Sports Network (CSN) for Taunton Deane. The group involves a range of partners including the PCT, the County Sports Partnership, local clubs and national governing bodies, Tone Leisure and the School Community Sports Co-ordinator. The group has met several times and has an agreed action plan to help to deliver a range of targets including an aim to increase activity by 1% per year. The group takes

the place of the now defunct 'Local Sports Councils' that existed for some years in the 1990's and earlier. It should be noted that finance for the group to deliver the actions has come from Sport England.

Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Facility News

- **Blackbrook Pavilion and Taunton Tennis Centre**

Body Balance - January 2008 witnessed the launch of Body Balance. This instructor led class will now form part of the impressive Group Exercise programme.

MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition - Do it) - Tone Leisure has now launched the MEND Programme in Blackbrook Pavilion and Wellington Sports Centre. The 10 week programme, for overweight and obese children aged 7-13 years old and their families, is being delivered by Leisure Professionals and Community Dieticians from Somerset PCT. The next programmes will begin in April.

Taunton Tennis Club - The first phase of the resurfacing of the four outdoor courts at Blackbrook Pavilion has been completed. Player feedback has been very positive and the final painting will be completed in the spring with the arrival of (hopefully) warm weather.

Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) - LTA representatives visited the club in early December to witness some of the club's most promising juniors. Steven Martens, one of the newly appointed team at the LTA, was delighted with the Mini Tennis display. The club is working in partnership with Richard Huish College in a joint bid to become one of the country's High Performance Centres and visits such as these are going a long way towards impressing upon the LTA the strength of the club's elite junior programme. The LTA return in June 2008 for a follow up visit.

- **Wellington Sports Centre**

New Kids' 'Zone' Gym - With minimal investment, Wellington Sports Centre has been able to create a special youth fitness gym - 'The Zone' - using the original bar area. Since the bar operation ended some years ago the area has only been used for sports hall spectators, children's parties and craft sessions during school holidays. The new kids' gym has proved a hit with the 50 children now enrolled on kids' fitness courses and they particularly enjoy using the rowing machines and boxing kit that it set up for sessions. It is hoped that more significant investment will be possible in future to fully redevelop this area into a fully usable activity space.

New Fitness Equipment On Its Way - Tenders will be submitted in the next few weeks to replace and upgrade the cardiovascular fitness

equipment in Wellington's 'GO' gym. Although the equipment installed some six years ago has coped very well with the high levels of gym usage over the years, it is time to upgrade this key set of fitness equipment and enhance the GO gym facility for the increasing membership.

Body Vive - The new low-impact fitness class, designed for clients who are either less fit or aged 40+ years, has been a great success with classes already full and new classes added to the programme in January.

Vibe - The successful youth activity outreach programme has continued throughout the winter months with a weekly basketball fun coaching session being delivered by Wellington Sports Centre staff to an average 25 youngsters each session. Since its inception last summer, free sports and fitness activities have been delivered to over 1,000 youngsters in the Wellington area.

- **Vivary Golf Course**

In January Vivary launched their first weekly e-newsletter. With over 500 subscribers, the newsletter is an excellent communication tool, keeping members updated with the very latest course news.

- **Wellsprings Leisure Centre**

Forthcoming events include:

- Strictly Dance on 8th March. Matthew and Nicole Culter, stars of the hit BBC show 'Strictly Come Dancing', will entertain you with five spectacular dances. This event has now sold out.
- South West Trampoline 5,4,3 Grading on 9th March. Wellsprings plays host to the South West 5,4,3 Grading. The South West Trampolining Association runs this sporting event and participation is by entry only.
- South West Gymnastics Competition on 16th March. Wellsprings hosts the South West Gymnastics Floor and Vault Competition.
- Ricky Tomlinson's Laughter Show on 24th March. Ricky Tomlinson's Laughter Show comes to Wellsprings for the first time. From the Royle Family to Brookside, Ricky Tomlinson is one of the country's favourite actors and comedians and now his laughter show presents two hours of unbelievable comedy! Including special guests such as Tony Barton from Coronation Street, this show will have you in stitches.

- Comedy Night on 29th March. A full night of entertainment with top touring comedians provided by top comedy agency Avalon, a hot buffet dinner, a disco and a late bar. Headline act - Richard Herring.

Sports and Health Development

- **Community Activity** - Mark Owen, Tone Leisure's new Community Activity and Lifestyles Officer for Taunton Deane, is working with communities in the area to encourage people to include more physical activity in their day to help improve the health of the local population.

Delivering initiatives as part of Active Somerset, a Sport England funded project in conjunction with Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset PCT and Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership, Mark has been helping to set up and promote a range of activities based at local leisure facilities, community halls and in the workplace, all aimed at encouraging people to increase participation in physical activity in line with national government guidelines of 30 minutes, 5 times per week.

Already a range of courses have been delivered as part of Active Somerset, including Tai Chi in Priorswood, which has been very well received by older members of the local population.

- **Cardiac Rehabilitation** - The Taunton Deane Community Cardiac Rehabilitation Team held a Celebration Event at Wellsprings Leisure Centre in January. The programme, which is the result of a successful partnership between Somerset PCT and Tone Leisure, provides exercise, relaxation and lifestyle education to patients who have recently received treatment for a cardiac event. More than 40 people who have benefited from the programme in the last year attended the event at Wellsprings, where they heard about exciting new developments and listened to a guest speaker from the Cardiac Unit at the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

The Laver family has kindly presented a cheque for £2,645.21 to the Taunton Deane Community Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme. The money was raised by a charity rugby match, which was held last year in Taunton. Some of the money has been used to purchase a special exercise bike for the programme, which will benefit patients who have lower limb pain and who find weight-bearing exercise difficult. Some of the money will also be used to print a Home Exercise Pack, which has recently been developed by the Cardiac Rehab. Team.

Somerset Art Week (SAW) is one of the oldest county wide open studios events in the UK with approximately 800 artists taking part at 362 venues in 2006. Total projected visitor numbers reached 137,000 people, with estimated sales of £743,000 between them.

SAW, as it is known, is an artist led organisation, and has recently voted to run annually rather than the biennial festival, every 2 years. This will create more opportunities for artists and increased visitor experiences.

This decision has had an impact on 10 Parishes Festival, a hugely successful community arts festival stretching 10 parishes in West Deane and West Somerset. Around 12,000 visitors attended village halls, studios and community events. Born out of the frustration of the alternative year gap created by SAW, they are rethinking the dates that they run as they do not want to necessarily clash with SAW. I am sure Caroline Corfe, our Arts Officer would welcome any views on potential dates or dates to avoid.

10 Radio launched on Friday 8 February, with their new 5 year licence. Listen up on 105.3fm if you are in the range of Wiveliscombe or go to www.10radio.org. This set up with a £2,500 community arts grant from Taunton Deane Borough Council, self generated funds, and further community sources, the project is providing training for all ages and abilities across the communities with the primary and secondary schools involved. People are playing music, interviewing each other and revealing interests, community history and all sorts of passions! Certainly an interesting project to finish my report on.

Councillor Richard Lees

COUNCIL MEETING – 19th February 2008.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MEL MULLINS–ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Food Safety.

Scores on the Doors

The Food Team are making good progress with 'Scores on the Doors'. Officers have already issued around 175 ratings for the Somerset Food Hygiene Star Rating scheme and have been providing businesses with information leaflets and a window sticker at the end of each routine food hygiene inspection. So far 34 premises have achieved the top 5 star rating, which means they comply with food hygiene requirements and have excellent food management systems in place. The response from businesses has so far been overwhelmingly positive, with only one negative comment received from a disgruntled proprietor. Somerset County Gazette has so far included two long articles on the scheme and intends to make it a regular feature. A fully searchable website will be launched shortly.

Food Trade Event 8th April 2008

All 1200 Taunton Deane food businesses will soon be invited to a trade event on 8th April at Taunton School so they can find out how they can comply with hygiene legislation and therefore get a better star rating for 'scores on the doors'.

"Star performer" businesses will be on hand to tell how they achieve high standards of hygiene, plus local traders will be showcasing their products. There will also be the draw for the Mayor's food themed charity raffle.

1.2 Health and Safety

Christmas Stocking Checks

During December the Health and Safety team conducted a number of retail inspections in Taunton. At this time of year these premises have to manage increased stock movement, which increases the risk of manual handling and slips and trips injuries to staff and customers. The inspections focussed on 5 topics which reflect the Health and Safety Executive's national priorities - Slips & trips, Manual handling in relation to handling of stock, Ladders, Young people and Migrant Workers

Between 12th and 20th December 2007 the team visited 48 premises in Taunton town centre and Hankridge Retail Park. 28 written reports detailing legal contraventions and 2 written reports giving recommended action were left at premises. Serious contraventions (such as stock blocking fire exits) were dealt with at the time of the visit and also referred to the Fire Authority.

The majority of premises welcomed the Officer's visits. Officers found it a very useful exercise and it has given them a good snapshot impression of Health and Safety in the Town centre premises. Most managers were managing the increase in stock movement well and had a good appreciation of health and safety and staff training.

1.3 Smokefree

Smokefree signage compliance visits

On 30th of January 8 officers from environmental health conducted compliance checks on a wide variety of premises across the whole borough. In total 253 premises were inspected and 80% of which were found to be fully complying with signage requirements. As the legislation was introduced on 1 July 2007 it was hoped the compliance figure would have been higher but ongoing inspections and more educational work will be undertaken to address non compliance. The maximum penalty for non compliance of the signage regulations is £1000.

1.4 Environmental Protection Team

Air Quality Progress Report 2007

The Council received correspondence from DEFRA on 18th January 2008 stating that the conclusions of TDBC's 2007 Air Quality Progress report have been accepted, producing the report involves a considerable amount of work so it is rewarding to have it ratified by Government.

Air Quality Strategy

All six Councils that form the administrative region of Somerset have been working together to develop an Air Quality Strategy for the County. The strategy is now in its draft stage and the districts have employed an air quality consultant to scrutinise and consult on the document prior to completion and subsequent request for adoption by all the Councils concerned.

Dog Fouling

Two Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued recently on dog owners for allowing their dogs to foul without picking up. The fines have been paid within the allowed 14-day payment period. This makes a total of four FPN's served for Dog Fouling so far this financial year.

Flytipping.

A member of public has been interviewed following evidence gathered from fly tipped waste indicating that this person was responsible. Although there was insufficient evidence for prosecution, the person was given an official warning and reminded that domestic householders remain responsible for their own waste even if they give it to a third party for disposal.

Light Nuisance

The Environmental Protection Team has been investigating two separate complaints of artificial light nuisance. Statutory nuisance has not been proven in either case, however, agreement has been reached with those responsible to mitigate levels in order to reduce the amount of light at the householders properties. Light nuisance is a fairly recent addition to the list of Statutory Nuisances the team are required to investigate.

New Stray Dogs Legislation.

Changes in the law will come into effect in April, imposing new duties on all Local Authorities with regard to stray dogs outside normal working hours. Until now, this has been the responsibility of the Police. We are adopting a Somerset wide approach to our new duties and the partnership Working Group set up for the purpose under the chairmanship of one of our Officers is making good progress to plan a cost effective additional service to our customers, by the statutory deadline.

1.5 General

Staff Whereabouts.

We have introduced a Service-wide electronic system for staff to record their whereabouts. From any Environmental Health computer, any member of the department can now see who is in, who is out and, for staff not in the office, an expected time of return. This will help us to give a better service to customers who want to speak to a particular Officer, it will ensure that minimum staffing levels are maintained, will assist in planning meetings at short notice and will let staff know if a lone working Officer is overdue return to the office.

Enforcement Guide.

We are investigating the possibility of producing a replacement for our in-house Enforcement Guide jointly with Trading Standards at County Hall. The existing Trading Standards Guide is produced by a standing Working Group and updates are forwarded to subscribers, by email. Whilst many of the Procedures are relevant only to one or other discipline, there is a lot of common ground that could help us to deliver a more consistent regulatory programme within the South West region.

2.0 STREET CLEANSING

Early in February Deane DLO is taking delivery of a "Aquazura" footpath vacuum scrubber, this will be operated exclusively in Taunton town centre and is a joint venture between Taunton Town Centre Company and Taunton Deane Borough Council as part of the towns Business Improvement District (BID). The machine will carry out a continual programme of cleansing footways within the BID area operating a five day week consisting of mainly early mornings and Sundays to avoid conflict with pedestrians.

Councillor Mel Mullins

Council Meeting 19 February 2008

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

Disabled Facilities Grant

I am pleased to announce that as a result of the Housing Service making a bid for additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding, the Council has received an additional £30,000 for this financial year. This will enable us to help an increased number of disabled people to live a better life with the assistance of grant funding for improvements to their homes. Well done to David Whitehead and his team for proactively seeking this additional funding.

Negative Subsidy – the “Tax on Tenants”

Members and tenants are rightly outraged by the news that the Council’s “negative subsidy” ie. the money taken from TDBC tenants’ rent by central government under housing subsidy rules, will rise from £4.6 million in 07/08 to £5.8 million in 08/09. I am extremely supportive of the work of the Task and Finish group looking at negative subsidy, and would urge the group to come up with a plan to lobby government on this issue as soon as possible and in the most effective way possible. This is an additional tax on tenants which should be challenged at every opportunity.

Thermostat Replacement Programme

Members will be aware that following the tragic death of Rhianna Hardie, the Council undertook to replace “old style” thermostats with new type failsafe thermostats. The Programme is nearing completion, with only 57 of the 4,680 properties identified potentially at risk being left to visit. An additional 234 properties require a follow-up visit, and a small number may require court action in order to gain entry. It has been necessary to replace a thermostat or thermostats in 3,078 properties. The figures quoted are correct as of 1st February 2008.

Broken Glass Policy

Officers are conducting a review of the Housing Service’s policy on the replacement of broken glass in Council properties. Importance has been given to ensuring that, where damage has been malicious, the right perpetrator is identified, re-charged the cost of the repair, and prosecuted wherever possible. In cases where a tenant could not reasonably be expected to have avoided or prevented the damage occurring, there will be no charge made to him or her. The policy will be published on the Council’s website in due course.

Deane Helpline – on a Roll!

In December I reported that Deane Helpline had won a contract to provide Telecare services to Devon County Council. This time I am equally delighted to report that Deane Helpline has won the contract to provide the community alarm monitoring service to North Somerset Housing. The contract is for three years, and will be worth approximately £41,000 per annum. I'm sure members will join me in congratulating the manager of Deane Helpline, Bill Tregillus, and his staff.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey
Housing Executive Member

Council Meeting 19 February 2008

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith Corporate Resources

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Work on achieving Member Charter status continues and the Council's Action Plan has now been approved by the South West Regional Assembly. Taunton Deane has therefore, now completed the first formal stage in the process of improving member development.

The Council's Standards Committee has been busy preparing for a change in legislation which will see most complaints and allegations about councillor standards being dealt with and determined locally. No longer will these complaints and allegations be referred to the Standards Board for England but, instead, they will be dealt with by our own Standards Committee. Policies and protocols have been developed and all members have been involved in appropriate training in readiness for the new arrangements which will come into force on the 1 April. Members might like to note that after leading the Committee since its inception in 1999, its Chair, David Baker OBE, will be stepping down as a member in April. David has been instrumental in making the Committee one of the more proactive in the Region and making it as effective and efficient as it is and I hope you will join me in thanking him for his hard work.

I, along with several other Councillors took part in a days training session in public speaking. This was a very valuable and useful training session organised by Democratic Services, and for those of you unable to attend I hope you will take the opportunity to attend when another session is organised.

PERSONNEL

Job Evaluation

The Corporate Management Team has spent considerable time looking at the results of the initial appeals and have checked the consistency of results against the non-appealed results and across the organisation. To check for any inconsistencies, two moderation panels (made up of current panellists and Unison) will do a double check on the posts involved. Once this is done managers will get the opportunity to see the results and bring up any further inconsistencies they may spot. The plan is to get the results out to staff in March, but if the managers raise any issues then this could delay the communication of the results.

Sickness Absence

The sickness figures to date are encouraging, they show a decrease compared to last year. However, we are still experiencing a problem with long term absence cases still high. Weekly discussions are being held on managing the long term cases and Personnel are doing everything they can to support the employee back into work, but the reasons people are off are due to serious illnesses.

The new sickness reporting procedures in the four service units: Customer Services, DLO, Kilkenny and Sheltered housing have all seen a reduction in the absence levels compared to last year, particularly in short term absences. This trial period will

continue until March 08 and will be reviewed by CMT to decide if we continue after this date.

The absence figures from April 07 – December 07 are:

- 8.39 average number of days per employee, last year was 8.72 days.
- Of the 8.39 days 26% is short term, 25% medium term and 49% long term.

Personnel are also launching a well-being event at the Deane House and DLO in March 2008. The aim is to encourage staff to participate in physical activity, and provide information on the benefits we can offer to support a healthier lifestyle.

SouthWest One

The HR Manager is involved in weekly transition meetings with IBM and Somerset County Council. Transition plans to improve and develop the SouthWest One are being discussed and looked at. These changes will take places gradually over the next eighteen months.

CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Corporate Support Services entered SouthWest One in full on 1st December 2007. Since this time each service has been working with IBM Transition leads to ensure contract documentation is verified and updated. The Corporate Support Services Manager has been working 80% of her time dealing with the Customer Contact Transformation programme and, with the input of additional staff agreed by IBM Business Services lead, we are starting to see a marked improvement during the last week of January 2008.

Customer Services:

Two experienced members of the team have moved roles to assist with process mapping the work of Customer Services in preparation for the start of work on the new SAP CRM system in April. Backfill has been put in place and, in addition, extra staff recruited into the team to bring it up to full strength. There is one post still to be filled.

From 1st December – 31st January

22,690 calls were managed through the contact centre with 58% being dealt with entirely within Customer Services. The total abandonment rate for the period was 14.6% (mainly due to the post Christmas rush of telephone calls), however, with additional staffing the last week in January has shown an abandonment rate of 5.5% - the lowest weekly rate ever experienced – with a slight increase in the weekly level of calls. A total of 6,452 people have been helped at Deane House main and planning receptions and 3,641 people visited Wellington Community Office.

Design and Print:

Work continues with assisting services on their professional design and print requirements. Throughput of work is slightly down on this time last year but we are expected to even out by year end. Design team have been commissioned by South Somerset District Council to devise a new style guide for the authority. A customer satisfaction survey is also currently underway within TDBC.

Corporate Administration/Facilities/:

Corporate Administration continue to work with services on providing cost effective solutions for large mail requirements and have been working with services to see how they can assist with new initiatives in the coming year. Significant work has been undertaken to verify the work carried out and ensure volumes are correct.

Facilities continue to work with agency staff covering the morning opening of Deane House, the evening Facilities Assistant is now on fixed term contract. The Corporate Admin/Facilities Manager will also be working with SCC from 4th February to provide management assistance due to sickness issues. Backfill is currently being discussed and should be in place by the end of the first week of February.

ICT SERVICE

Good integration has taken place between TDBC ICT Team and SouthWest One colleagues from IBM.

The helpdesk call reporting system used by TDBC has now changed to one shared with Somerset County Council - the first of a series of changes that ICT will be making to the Helpdesk service as it evolves within the shared services environment of Southwest One. The new organisational structure that will underpin the Southwest One ICT Service is expected to be in place within the next couple of months.

Transformation projects around Customer Access and Back office systems are now being undertaken - and from TDBC's perspective it will be important to ensure we are flexible enough in our ICT ways of working to get the most value from these two projects - each of which has the potential to radically change the way staff work and deliver their services.

Simon Kirkham the ICT Manager has had a series of meetings to discuss the potential formation of a partnership with Sedgemoor in the delivery of Building Control services

REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE UNIT

The Revenues & Benefits Service is on target to meet 10 of the 11 Best Value Performance Indicators for which they are responsible. The only area not on track is in successful prosecution of those who commit Housing & Council Tax Benefit fraud. Unfortunately, this is somewhat out of our hands as it is dependent on the court being satisfied the defendant *intended* to commit an act of fraud. Despite our best efforts in providing robust evidence to support our findings, it comes down to the judgement issued on the day.

On a positive note, the service has demonstrated further performance improvement in comparison to the results announced at the end of Quarter 2 (September 2007) with many areas now falling within the top quartile for District Councils. This shows the service has coped well so far with its inclusion within the Southwest One Partnership from 1 December 2007.

Work is well underway in preparation for annual billing and benefits uprating. The service is particularly busy this year as it also has to introduce Local Housing Allowance and the Empty Business Rate legislation from 1 April 2008. The Benefits Advice Team have proved their effectiveness in dealing with Housing & Council Tax Benefit issues, responding to over 18,000 calls between April and December 2007. In dealing with these enquiries, they have maintained "abandonment" rates at less than 5% and have answered over 91% of calls within 20 seconds.

The service intends to include information about performance and forthcoming legislation as well as advice for customers promoting direct debit and benefit take-up

in the next edition of the Deane Dispatch due to be circulated to all households during March 2008.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit has been working with managers and the Executive on the finalisation of the budget for 2008/09. In particular the preparation of the members budget book, the council tax leaflet which is sent to all householders, and on the final council tax figures for each band. The Unit has also been supporting the Procurement work stream within Southwest One and is also helping Southwest One set up its own internal accounting arrangements. Preparation has started on the Q3 performance monitoring exercise and on the closedown of the 2007/08 accounts. Finally Financial Services have been dealing with a number of complex insurance claims which have been received recently

Legal Services

Land charges in January took an average 5.79 working days to process a local search. The recruitment process for an Assistant Solicitor and for a Legal Executive has started and we hope to interview candidates later this month.

Scrutiny and Performance Management

Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Pilot continues under the new working arrangements and a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on this pilot will be made in April 2008. Two new Task and Finish reviews have commenced on 'Co-ordination of services for elderly people' and 'Review of Housing negative subsidy'.

Performance / CPA

The Quarter 3 update of 2007/08 performance against our Corporate Strategy objectives, performance indicators and budget position will be taken to the Strategy and Performance Panel on the 4th March for Scrutiny.

The Annual 'Direction of Travel' assessment by the Audit Commission finished on Monday 28th January. They will form an opinion on whether we are improving as an organisation and delivering the right outcomes for our community, and this will be published in their Annual Audit Inspection Letter.

Michelle Hale, the Corporate Performance Officer, has returned from her secondment to ISiS.

Corporate Strategy

The Corporate Strategy will be finalised and presented to Full Council shortly. Managers will be requested to develop their 2008/09 Service Plans based on this Corporate Strategy.

Procurement

South West One is working closely with the two councils to develop 'Category Plans' to identify better ways to procure goods and services for various categories of spend. Each of these categories will closely analyse existing spend, suppliers, the marketplace, service needs and options to make savings.

Each procurement category has Taunton Deane Officers involved and a Strategic Director designated to champion and sign off the category plan when it is finished.

The Procurement categories are:

- Travel (Venues, car hire, rail travel, accommodation and hotels etc)
- Transport / Fleet (3rd party public transport and Fleet)
- Estate and Built Infrastructure (buildings repairs and maintenance, housing, catering, cleaning etc)
- Social Care (includes elements of Housing, the Deane Helpline etc)

- Environment (waste management)
- Professional Services (consultants, temporary staff, solicitors and legal advice)
- Quick Wins (easy opportunities to make procurement savings)

Council Meeting 19 February 2008

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

Community Partnerships

We are currently in the second round of the Community Partnership meetings. At the time of writing, the Central Community Partnership has held its second meeting which was very well attended, both by members of the community, and by partner organisations. The outcome of the meeting was that a number of the attendees agreed to work with the partner organisations to try to resolve the issues they raised, for example, one of the attendees agreed to work with the Youth Service to try to address the provision of youth facilities. The Community partnerships are proving to be a useful way of finding out what really matters to our communities.

LAA

We are now in the final stages of negotiating Somerset's Local Area Agreement (LAA). The list of issues which we believe are the most important in Somerset, and thus should feature in the LAA, has been sent to the Government. The new LAA is due to commence June 2008.

Allotments

I have recently approved a number of grants to Allotment Associations from the Unparished Areas Fund – around £20,000 worth of funding for these valuable community organisations.

Allotments quietly contribute on a number of our priorities: they can help improve people's quality of life by promoting healthy food, exercise and community interaction and the Government recognises their unique role as places which bring all sections of the community together often sharing skills across the generations and social groups. They also have a part to play in providing wildlife habitats with undisturbed hedges and ditches.

Facilities for young people

There are Council Properties that will become available for other uses, hopefully during the coming year. It is hoped that the present pavilion in Hamilton Park will be suitable for the use of young people in that area where additional youth provision is needed most. We will be talking to partners, and encouraging local people to be involved through consultation and participation in this project.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

