

Part II Reports from the Executive

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. Pioneer Somerset

- 1.1 Pioneer Somerset continues to evolve. I know many of you attended the Somerset Summit at the Brewhouse Theatre on 16 June 2008. This was a good event which was able to showcase the aims and aspirations of Pioneer Somerset and inform Councillors from across the six authorities of the work that the Leaders and Chief Executives have been carrying out since the unitary decision last year. It was also a great opportunity for networking as well.
- 1.2 Pioneer offers us all the chance of greater partnership working at a reduced cost to the taxpayer. This is what we all signed up to in our original Team Somerset document last year. There can be no running away from that objective and we must not be sidetracked by those would like us to fail. We can replicate the success of the Somerset Waste Partnership and use that as a template as to the way forward.

2. Tone Leisure

- 2.1 I am disappointed that local residents have been misinformed by someone that Taunton Deane Borough Council has plans to stop all Old Age Pensioner subsidies. This Council, of course, has no plans whatsoever to do this. Is it any wonder that people become concerned when such blatant inaccurate stories are shamelessly spread?
- 2.2 I can assure you that any local resident who has contacted this Council on this matter has been informed of the real facts of this matter. We will be discussing with Tone Leisure shortly how the small saving from this budget will impact on specific services they provide. Some services will not be affected at all and of course all on low incomes will not be affected in any way. I can also say that if Central Government do introduce a national free swimming scheme for all over 60s next year, we will be participating in this venture.

3. Green Issues

- 3.1 Last month, I asked Officers to look at green initiatives which could be introduced into this Council. A ten point report has been presented to me with specific green ideas which will be passed on to Members shortly. Some of them deal with the specific problem of fuel poverty which I feel is

one of the major problems of our time. We will be proposing ideas as well to support a site specific renewable energy scheme and help for householders wanting to install renewable energy in their homes.

4. Southwest One

4.1 This week ITV are running a television programme highlighting Southwest One. I am concerned that this has been prompted by the Member of Parliament who keeps making statements about Southwest One under Parliamentary Privilege but is less keen to repeat his views outside of Parliament.

4.2 I and the Chief Executive have decided to issue a statement for the programme but will not be interviewed on the terms offered by the broadcaster. I am more than happy to be interviewed live or have an interview recorded where we were able to view the piece before broadcast. Southwest One is about saving the taxpayer money and being more efficient and its time for all to focus on that.

5. Telephone Boxes

5.1 The campaign to save telephone boxes in Taunton Deane has really taken off and captured the imagination of the public. I have been interviewed by ITV West Country and also BBC Points West. I was also interviewed by the Daily Express on the subject. I believe that BT has misread public opinion on this . To remove 46 phone boxes from our area seems extreme to me.

5.2 Some of the boxes on the BT list are very surprising. Why would BT want to remove a phone box in Rockwell Green which has been used 2200 times in the last year or a box in Bishops Lydeard which has been used 1000 times last year? Did anyone at BT check the usage figures before producing this list? It does make you wonder.

5.3 Many of the boxes we are proposing to save are in rural areas and are of the classic red box variety. Many of these are part of our heritage and should stay. On top of that the mobile coverage in some of our villages is very poor and these boxes remain a vital rural service.

6. Oxen Lane, North Curry

6.1 Since our last meeting we have had the result of the planning inquiry into the site at Oxen Lane, North Curry which has been used for nearly 4 years by some gypsies. This has been a very long and difficult process for the residents of Oxen Lane and the people of North Curry. I thank them for their patience.

6.2 The result of the planning inquiry was much later than hoped for due to the proceedings being deferred for several months. The result when received was well worth the wait. A clear cut decision in our favour.

7. **Affordable Housing**

7.1 I took the decision recently to withdraw plans for affordable housing at Enmore Road Green in North Taunton. I did this after talking to local residents and Ward Councillors. The challenge to deliver affordable housing gets tougher and its time that we as a Council start to get behind some of our proposed affordable housing schemes. The challenge to deliver is not going away and we have to acknowledge this.

8. **Constitutional Changes**

8.1 At this meeting we will discuss proposed changes to the way we conduct our business. I applaud Tonya Meers for tackling this issue head on and coming up with some bold ideas. I suspect that we will not agree with every single thing outlined but it is right that we have been made to think about our structure of meetings.

8.2 We cannot go on with this cycle of meetings which run for three or, in the case of full Council, four hours plus as a matter of course. Many other Councils have much shorter meetings than ours and still get through the business in hand. We should learn from this and adopt similar good practice.

9. **Question Time**

9.1 A couple of months ago, I appeared as a panelist on a version of the TV show "Question Time" run for staff at The Deane House and hosted by Greg Dyke. This was an event attended by many staff and had a panel of myself and some directors as well. We faced a barrage of serious and some not so serious questions on a variety of issues. Thanks to Steve Hughes and Greg for putting this on. Another of these events is due to be held very soon.

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

1. Local Area Agreement (LAA)

- 1.1 The LAA is the centre piece of partnership work. Somerset's new LAA has been approved by the Executive and is due to be signed off by Government ministers by the end of June.
- 1.2 It is based on the democratic role of Councillors in leading and representing their neighbourhood. It includes a legal duty on other public services to co-operate to deliver on the agreed targets. There are 34 agreed targets plus 16 education targets agreed with the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

2. Community Partnership

- 2.1 I feel that we are making good progress in setting up a way of working, where we can engage with the public and address their concerns. Flexibility is all-important; money whilst important is not paramount.
- 2.2 The three partnerships within Taunton Deane must be relevant to those people who attend and should be able to work across and within their boundaries. The Community Partnerships sit under the Local Strategic Partnership. The Somerset County Council is due to consider the future of their Area Working Panels in July 2008.
- 2.3 All five district councils are currently considering their position regarding community engagement. Taunton Deane's draft was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 3 July 2008 and included recommendations about improving the Community Partnerships and rationalising the various engagement structures.
- 2.4 Attendance of the public has to be improved partly by better PR (Deane Dispatch in the Gazette) and by press releases stressing things that have been achieved from information received at the meetings.
- 2.5 We need to encourage the Equalities and Diversity agenda, as well as the Disabled Forum; we need them to be more involved. "You are part of Taunton your problems are not necessarily unique". Meetings should remain informal as at present, but there could be a topic towards the end of the meetings discussing a specific subject.

3. Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Services

- 3.1 I attended a meeting of the Council of Voluntary Services (CVS), from

across Somerset, Chaired by Miriam Maddison from the County. It was very much a preliminary meeting to discuss all the CVS's across Somerset working together wherever possible.

- 3.2 David Baker, Chair of Taunton Deane (TD) CVS, said he was in support of the work being proposed but wanted to retain TDCVS as his priority given the difficulties experienced in recent times. It was felt around the table that some districts were stronger than others and that to share experiences would produce nothing but good and better services for all, within Pioneer Somerset.

4. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

- 4.1 I attended a meeting of the Crime and Disorder Partnerships (CDRPs) from Taunton Deane, Sedgemoor District Council and West Somerset District Council.
- 4.2 It has been agreed that the three CDRPs will merge to form one CDRP called "Safer Somerset West" covering the whole of the west side of Somerset - Taunton Deane, West Somerset and Sedgemoor. The first joint meeting will take place in September 2008. This again is work across Somerset as set out in Pioneer Somerset.

5. Restorative Justice

- 5.1 We have been successful in recruiting 14 volunteers for this project in Wellington. All fourteen have had an initial one-day training course and taken an exam - results to follow. The first case conference has now taken place in Milverton.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Steve Brooks – Communications

1. Gazette Visit

- 1.1 I recently paid an all-day visit to the Somerset County Gazette by kind permission of the Editor in Chief, Ken Bird, on their press day. The day started with a meeting with Ken, the News Editor, Alex Cameron, the reporters and sub-editors on what stories should be featured on the front page. After long discussions it was agreed that the possible flagship polyclinic, open from 8.00 am-8.00 pm, would be used. This would include comments from General Practitioners on the effect the new unit might have on some surgeries in the area.
- 1.2 But, by 2.00 pm, it was decided to run the story about Somerset County Council's proposals regarding the possible closure of Blagdon Hill School, including comments from school governors and pupils with a picture of pupils and staff to run alongside the story. I was privileged to see the new website that the Gazette hopes to launch in the next few weeks. It has a wider format to make the page easier to read and allows for more stories to be carried.
- 1.3 I chatted to Ken Bird asking whether he had considered editing an evening or daily paper but he likes the area and the series of papers that he edits. He had asked the editor of a daily paper how he coped with the pressures. When Ken told him he edited eight papers, the daily editor said he should be asking how he coped with the pressure of producing eight papers every week. The majority of news items sent to the Gazette come in via email either by members of the public or local authorities such as Taunton Deane Borough Council. News Editor, Alex Cameron, said Taunton Deane's communications team was among the best in co-operating to get answers to questions asked.
- 1.4 At 6.00 pm I saw the final proof of the Gazette before it was sent to the print centre. It was a worthwhile visit, providing an insight into how the newspaper is produced and meeting those involved. I would like to thank all the staff at the Somerset County Gazette for allowing me to spend time with them.

2. Public Relations

- 2.1 Over recent weeks, we have been working closely with the Somerset County Council and the other District Councils to develop a partnership approach to communications to support the Pioneer Somerset project. We have also been working more closely with the Somerset Waste Partnership's new Senior Communications Officer to develop a more integrated approach across Somerset.

- 2.2 On the home front, the telephone box campaign has drawn considerable media attention, both locally and nationally, with the story being picked up by radio, TV, local and regional newspapers and the Daily Express.
- 2.3 We have also been working closely with Chris Mulcahy and his team involved in the new nursery project, generating coverage in the mainstream and specialist trade press. We continue to work on the campaign, planning a new leaflet for the nursery and the launch. You may have noticed that we now have a regular update from the new Nursery on the website. I would encourage you to have a look.
- 2.4 The Deane Dispatch page in the Gazette is proving a very useful vehicle to provide updates on Council news and to promote activities such as the Affordable Housing Day and Sort It Plus.

3. Other Communications

- 3.1 Since my last Full Council update, Charissa de Zeeuw, Consultation and Information Officer, has moved to Cardiff County Council to manage a Scrutiny Research Team. Sarah Cooper, who has been temporarily covering this post, is also leaving for a new post at Somerset County Council. We are now working on the priorities for the team. In the meantime, Helen Phillips is leading on the new Place Survey.
- 3.2 The new Place Survey is a statutory survey which will be sent out at the end of September 2008. This replaces the Best Value Users General Survey and will provide data for 19 of the new national indicators, all focused on the citizen's perspectives. The survey will ask people what they think about their "local area" and how satisfied they are with the way in which the Council runs things. The survey also focuses on how well local people feel informed about how their Council Tax is spent and how they can get involved in local decision-making. This survey will be jointly delivered by the five Somerset Districts and Somerset County Council. We hope to be able to share the results of the survey early next year.
- 3.3 On 19 June 2008 we hosted a Local Government Communications Conference entitled "Communicating in a Partnership Environment Agenda". To open the conference, the Southwest One partners, including ourselves, Somerset County Council, the Avon and Somerset Constabulary and IBM went through the communications process and lessons we have learnt over the last three years from working in partnership.
- 3.4 One of the biggest challenges at the moment is making sure that effective communications are embedded into all the Transformation Projects. Ruth James is working closely with Southwest One, the Taunton Deane Change Managers and all partners to make sure that communications across the

programme are co-ordinated over the next 12 months. To enable this, a comprehensive Communications Plan has been developed.

Councillor Steve Brooks

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Forward Planning

- 1.1 We are planning a major community engagement this autumn on the Core Strategy and Site Allocations. There will be opportunities for Councillors to become involved.
- 1.2 The aim of the engagement is to articulate a vision for each neighbourhood/community in the context of the locations identified in the Regional Spatial Strategy for growth. The response we get from this engagement with our partners and communities will inform proposals for place shaping, to create sustainable communities.
- 1.3 Proposals for the Core Strategy and Site Allocations will be the subject of full public consultation in February and March 2009.

2. Monkton Heathfield

- 2.1 The Inspector has now completed his report on Monkton Heathfield and passed it on to the Secretary of State. Her decision is expected to be with us sometime in August this year.

3. Staffing Levels

- 3.1 I am delighted to report that in terms of staffing, the Planning Administration Section is now up to the full complement.
- 3.2 The Area Planning Manager (East) post has been filled by Bryn Kitching who starts with us on 28 July 2008. I am sure all members will join me in welcoming Bryn to our Authority.
- 3.3 This means that we are now fully staffed in terms of Planning Officers. This in turn permits us to look at introducing new practices to ensure that we have adequate and suitable cover at all times to respond to both telephone and personal callers.
- 3.4 The post of Conversation Assistant remains vacant and it is anticipated that it will need to be re-advertised, which will happen this month.

4. Residents Parking

- 4.1 The awaited paper outlining proposals for some changes in the current arrangements for Residents Parking within Taunton is having the finishing touches put to it.
- 4.2 It is anticipated that, this paper will go to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration probably for the August 2008 meeting.

Councillor Simon Coles

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development and the Arts

Part 1

1. Project Taunton

- 1.1 The appointment of a developer for Firepool has been delayed slightly in order to ensure the town gets the best scheme possible, but significant progress is still being made and the focus remains on ensuring the very best scheme for the town:
- 1.2 The objective is to deliver a scheme that will be of the very highest standards with regard to design, sustainability and deliverability. This has meant that the procurement process involved challenging benchmarks that potential developers must meet to be considered to be the Council's development partner. The completion of the competitive dialogue has been a considerable task and I am extremely pleased with the work to date.
- 1.3 The Project Taunton Team are now scrutinising in significant detail the proposals of the three potential development partners, all of which have proposed schemes that are of a fundamentally high standard. I would now expect a final decision to be made in October 2008.
- 1.4 Regional Infrastructure Funding of up to £2.4m has been received from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) for the flood alleviation scheme at Longrun Farm, Bishops Hull. Planning consent has also been achieved and I would hope that construction will start in August 2008.
- 1.5 Work on the design of Castle Green is underway and will be available for consultation in the autumn.

2. The Brewhouse

- 2.1 The Chief Executive Robert Miles, and the recently appointed Finance Director, John Buckley FCA, reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on the financial and business plan for the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre.
- 2.2 It is anticipated that the Brewhouse will achieve a breakeven position by the end of this financial year through continued audience development work and diversification of delivery activity, notably increasing the level of work in the community, but also giving consideration to generating new income from sponsorship of performances.

3. Into Somerset

- 3.1 We have still not made an appointment of a Chief Executive but the contract with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce is working well. I visited Think London in early June to “pick their brains” on inward investment.
- 3.2 Work continues with the preparation of the legal documents to form the organisation under the direction of the Shadow Board. A project to determine the marketing strategy is nearing completion with the consultant’s reporting to the Board with their initial findings on 25 July 2008. A website design company and a PR agency have been selected and engaged to the work of interpreting the marketing strategy.
- 3.3 Into Somerset will be launched at the annual Somerset business event in November 2008.

4. Culture

- 4.1 The Taunton Cultural Consortium was formed three years ago to bring together all the major players in the development of the Cultural Quarter including Taunton Deane, County Museum, Somerset County Cricket Club, Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, Somerset College, Town Centre Company, Richard Huish College, Somerset County Council, and other arts organisations.
- 4.2 The second year review reports on the progress to date of the development of the Cultural Quarter, and the Consortium will be giving a presentation at the Brewhouse on 10 July 2008.
- 4.3 We will require a more narrowly focussed group to assist in drawing together all the stakeholders and putting in place a team to attract funding for the Cultural Offer. Preparatory work on this has started.
- 4.4 Somerset County Council are holding a workshop to consult on the Somerset Cultural Strategy in Taunton Deane on Monday 21 July 08 from 9.30 to 11.30 at County Hall. All are welcome to attend.

5. Pioneer Somerset

- 5.1 Somerset County Council and the five Districts submitted a joint response to the latest consultation paper. A separate letter of support was submitted from Taunton Deane to add further emphasise the level of joint working already achieved by economic development activities across Somerset and the substantial role of District authorities in the management and delivery of economic development, social development, and regeneration activities.

6. General

- 6.1 A new fixed term appointment to the role of Economic Development Manager has been made to replace Steve Kendall who departed at

the end of April 2008. Philip Sharratt worked for Business Link Somerset as a strategic adviser to businesses in Somerset and latterly was the interim Somerset Operations and Partnership Manager for Peninsula Enterprise, the organisation that now delivers the Business Link service.

- 6.2 A new Town Centre Manager (TCM) has been appointed by the Taunton Town Centre Company. Paul Haynes started on 30 June 2008 having previously been the TCM in Leamington Spa and replaces Lucy Ball. I have a meeting scheduled with him on 15 July 2008 and will report verbally on that meeting to full Council.
- 6.3 I would belatedly like to thank Lucy Ball for her hard work and success with the Town Centre BID application and wish her every success for the future.

PART 2

Pioneer Somerset

2.1 Into Somerset

- 2.1.1 The pace of the legal review into the formation of the Company has prompted the Into Somerset Officers Group to review the type of organisation required to commence delivery of the project in October 2008. A sub group has been established and would hope to report to the Shadow Board at the end of July 2008 with options.
- 2.1.2 The consultancy project to undertake market research and develop the marketing strategy, including recommendations on branding and promotion, is on schedule and the first stage recommendations will be reviewed on 18 July 2008 followed by a workshop with the consultants, the website designers, and the PR company. An enquiry handling protocol to deal with investment enquiries from outside of Somerset has been agreed with the intention that the protocol will be extended to include enquiries from within Somerset as the organisation develops operational competency.
- 2.1.3 The Chairman of the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) group and the Taunton Deane Tourism Officer will present to the Economic Leaders Group on 17 July 2008 to inform the discussion on the integration of the DMO into the Into Somerset organisation.

2.2 Destination Management Organisations (DMO)

- 2.2.1 A total of 315,000 Somerset Visitor Guides, of the 350,000 print run, have been distributed and a Public Relations agency has been appointed to deliver regional and national Somerset tourism PR on behalf of the Somerset Tourism Partnership.
- 2.2.2 A total of 1,200 tourism businesses have been engaged and influenced by the DMO training coordinator and business planning for 2009-2012 is underway.

2.3 Local Area Agreement (LAA)

- 2.3.1 The economic development targets for Somerset have been agreed and the LAA has been submitted to GOSW for approval.
- 2.3.2 Delivery plans to achieve the targets are currently being developed in conjunction with local authority and other delivery partners. These plans will give consideration to the impact of the rationalisation of business support through the Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP).

2.4 Somerset University Partnership Project (SUPP)

- 2.4.1 A Somerset University Partnership Project (SUPP) has been established to explore the feasibility of establishing a coordinated

university level delivery programme to enhance the Level 4 and above educational provision available in Somerset.

2.4.2 The executive group has been formed with representation from Somerset, Bridgwater and Yeovil Colleges, Plymouth and Bournemouth Universities, SWRDA and the County Council. Input into this project, and reporting on the progress to District authorities, will be through the Somerset Economic Leaders Group (SELG).

2.5 Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) Funding Bids

2.5.1 Three bids crossing local authority administrative boundaries into Taunton Deane were submitted to SWRDA for consideration. The bid teams will be advised whether the bids have been successful or not by the end of July 2008.

The 'Vision' for each bid is as follows:

- **Levels and Moors:**

Promoting sustainable development in the Levels and Moors to strengthen the economy, vibrancy and environmental quality for all residents, businesses and visitors.

- **Blackdown Hills and East Devon (BHED) Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty:**

The aim of the BHED Strategy is to use the outstanding environmental quality and local human potential of this area as a springboard for sustainable economic growth. The common threads running through this strategy are:

- The importance of using the rich local environment as a springboard to new and improved local economic activity, including the development of social enterprise and community initiatives;
- The need to strengthen local connections and existing business and community networks as a base for collaboration and profitable exchange of ideas.

- **Western Somerset:**

By 2014 Western Somerset will be a vibrant, sustainable community showing significant progress towards the benefits of a low carbon economy. Local people will have opportunities to use skills and innovation in work, social enterprise and volunteering to develop local businesses and community initiatives. There will be a strong economic foundation that will provide growth in high value jobs, connectivity that is an exemplar for remote rural areas and a demonstration of the benefits that can be offered by the special landscape qualities of Western Somerset.

3.2.1 All of the threatened Post Offices have been visited to discuss the likely future of the retail business following the announcement of the closure of the PO business by PO Limited on 28 May 2008. A county wide working group has been working with the sub-postmasters and considering the best way forward in each case.

3.2.2 None of the threatened POs in Somerset would wish to take up any business support. However, there were two POs where it was felt there could be an opportunity to challenge the closure proposal as follows:

- **West Monkton Post Office.** Councillor Cavill expressed concern about the closure of this PO and steps were taken to investigate options. PO Limited were prepared to reveal the costing implications but then the owner felt he had experienced a long enough period of uncertainty and had now accepted the closure as a preferred option. He was visited again and the decision had been made to close the PO/Shop on Friday, 4 July 2008. The owner is looking to move forward with a change of use for the business premises to convert the shop back to residential usage and reintegrate into the main accommodation.
- **Churchinford Post Office** is to be replaced by a mobile outreach service for 13 hrs per week. In discussion with the sub postmaster it was revealed that they would have kept the shop open (for reduced hours) if they had been offered the 13 hours of PO Outreach time. The neighbouring sub postmaster at Buckland St Mary has recently retired and that PO had also closed although it was not on the closure list. PO Limited were contacted and it was requested that the outreach hours were reallocated to Churchinford PO/Stores and that the closure notice should be lifted. We are currently awaiting further guidance from PO Limited.

3.2.3 It is believed that there is the prospect of up to another 3,000 PO's (a quarter of the total number) closing nationally if the Post Office fails to gain the contract next year to run the new card account for benefits and pensions. This service is currently used by 4 million customers on a weekly basis and can make up to 12% of the sub postmasters pay.

3.2.4 Alan Jones of Somerset County Council is now coordinating a group of officers from each of the District authorities who are working to develop a proactive strategy to respond to the reduction of rural services.

3.3 Wellington Market and Coastal Towns Initiative

3.3.1 Funding from the Market and Coastal Towns Association for Wellington has now completed the 'Vision for Wellington' document setting out the aspirations of the community for the next 20 years. The Vision focuses on the town boundary area (3 wards) and is designed to complement and add value to Taunton Deane's own 'Wellington Area community Strategy'

3.3.2 Construction of the vision involved themed meetings with community group representatives, consultation with key service providers, working with schools in the area, and appraisals of wider strategic documents.

3.3.3 The Vision for Wellington is being printed now and in the next few weeks will be launched in the local press and sent to all who were involved in the consultation process. The document will be available from the Town Council offices at 28 Fore Street and for download from <http://www.visionforwellington.org.uk/>

3.3.4 Next steps will include production of an implementation to plan to enable the town to achieve their Vision.

3.4 Wiveliscombe MCTI refresh

3.4.1 In 2003 a Wiveliscombe area community strategy was produced with funding from the Market and Coastal Towns Association (covering the area known as the Ten Parishes). This strategy is now out of date and a 'refresh and review' process has begun. This work will assess the impact and achievements of the plan and set out a new action plan for the next few years. Initial consultation work is now underway.

3.5 Tone Mill

3.5.1 The Economic Development Unit (EDU) is continuing to take an enabling role to ensure that the Tone Mill Trust are able to meet their objectives and that this heritage asset is not lost. Over the past month this has involved investigating sources of funding, keeping all partners informed of the latest situation, and investigating actions that Taunton Deane can take to support the transfer of assets to the Tone Mill Trust.

3.6 Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

3.6.1 Taunton TIC continues to develop and promote its new operation of being Taunton Tourist Information, Travel and Ticket Centre to residents and visitors.

3.6.2 The TIC Manager is in contact with agents to source a new, more prominent town centre location for the centre and with the appropriate Change Manager to ensure that operations in Wellington are aligned with those in Taunton.

3.7 Business Support

3.7.1 Farmers continue to be supported by the Agricultural Business Support Officer in looking at opportunities to add new income ("diversification") to their core farming business. This post has worked closely with the South West Rural Enterprise Gateway (SWREG) project officer and supported a number of farming and rural business groups concerned with enhancing their business competence, and

adding value to diversification activities through vertically or horizontally integrating their operations.

- 3.7.2 Funding for this post ceases in September 2008 though first indications from SWREG, who are currently renegotiating their contract with SWRDA, are that local authority agricultural and rural officers will continue to play an important role in supporting the agricultural sector.
- 3.7.3 The EDU has continued to support the Wellington Food Town initiative, developed to support economic activity in Wellington and provide an additional route to market for farm gate producers within a 30 miles radius of Wellington. The third annual event occurred over two days on 5 and 6 of July 2008 however, it is recognised that the financial subsidy provided by Taunton Deane to underpin the cost of these events will not be available for a fourth year, and Wellington Economic Partnership (WEP) are progressing their strategy to raise sponsorship investment to fund future events.
- 3.7.4 The role of local authority economic development activity in enabling direct business support activity in Taunton Deane within the scope of the BSSP is being explored as part of the LAA delivery planning process. For the present time the EDU will continue to respond to investment enquiries from Somerset based businesses but the recent reduction in capacity resulting from the redundancy of an EDO has resulted in the decision to abandon the internal Taunton Deane database of available sites and premises in favour of referring enquirers directly to agents and external databases.
- 3.7.5 The EDU will continue to work in partnership to develop strategies to support key business sectors, including developing an incubation/innovation center in Taunton as part of the Somerset Incubation Centre Strategy, which when progressed will further enhance the Pioneer Somerset objectives.

3.8 Forward Planning and Development Control

- 3.8.1 The EDU is collaborating with the Forward Planning team to conduct an initial review of Employment Land availability to support growth point requirements.
- 3.8.2 To further support collaborative working between Portfolio Holders, EDU, Forward Planning, and Development Control Unit Managers have scheduled weekly meetings to discuss planning applications.

3.9 Inter-departmental working

3.9.1 Inter-departmental working has been further boosted with the secondment of a Forward Planning Officer for 20% FTE to lead on the skills agenda within the EDU. This officer attends EDU team meetings and provides a strong communications link into the Forward Planning Team.

3.10 Impact of Economic Slowdown on Physical Development and Regeneration

- 3.10.1 The Project Taunton team has acknowledged the challenges that economic slowdown creates for the country as a whole. However, the Project Director feels that Taunton is as well placed as anywhere during this period of reducing economic activity. Project Taunton is a 10 year project and will invariably experience economic peaks and troughs during its lifecycle. The team has worked closely with developers to ensure sensible provision is made and delivery will be to agreed phases and timelines.
- 3.10.2 The EDU will continue to monitor the situation and, in conjunction with partners, will consider revising strategies to support the changing economic conditions as necessary.

Community Development, Deprivation and Regeneration

4.1 Taunton East Development Trust (TEDT)

- 4.1.1 The proposed funding to TEDT has been reviewed in line with the Trust's ability to deliver on Economic Development. Several meetings were held with the Trustees to discuss their aspirations for the Charity, financial position, and the continuance of running costs for the Link Centre.
- 4.1.2 The Link Centre is now seen as a community development project in its own right and as such has achieved funding of £5k from the Local Strategic Partnership and £5k from Housing Operations. A further £3k is has been identified from Somerset County Council and EDU has funded a further £5k for the provision of resources to support economic development activity to reduce deprivation.
- 4.1.3 This funding will allow the project to continue for this financial year, during which the Development Trust will be wound-up in order to shed the limited company status and therefore the financial responsibility and administrative burden from the Trustees.
- 4.1.4 The intention is to set up a multi-agency community partnership group, so that partner organisations are the trustees and no one individual has to take financial responsibility. It is felt that this organisational structure will give additional benefits through greater collaborative working between groups delivering social development activities within East Taunton.
- 4.1.5 Housing Operations will provide a staff resource to work closely with the Link Centre Project to investigate ways of attracting funding for the future and the growth of the project as a whole.
- 4.1.6 The EDU will work alongside the Link Centre Project as a partner that will inform economic development activity and promote subsequent projects.

4.2 North Taunton Partnership

- 4.2.1 The North Taunton Partnership (NTP) continues to deliver well against community development objectives but there is negligible economic development delivery.
- 4.2.2 Funding for the NTP Project Co-ordination Worker, who is undoubtedly responsible for the success of the project, is through the EDU and was scheduled to run for 2 years, a period that expires end September 2008. It is not believed that sufficient emphasis has been given by the NTP Trustees to develop reserves and ongoing funding to continue with the funding of this post beyond the end of the funding period.
- 4.2.3 The EDU plan to work alongside NTP in the same manner as with TEDT, but a review of the EDU priorities against available resources and capacity will determine whether it is feasible to continue funding the project worker from the economic development budget, which may ultimately effect the work to reduce deprivation.

4.3 Arts

- 4.3.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council runs a small community arts grant scheme to improve access to, and increase participation in creative activities in the borough especially by those currently disadvantaged in accessing facilities.
- 4.3.2 Arts grants totalling £7,245 (and leveraging approximately £130,000) have been awarded to the following groups and projects in the first round of applications this year.

High Spirits Wheelchair Line Dancing Group
Flux Disability Arts Festival 'Count Me In' drumming workshop
Halcon Lane Art Group
Step Change, a community dance project with Take Art
Bath Place Arts Festival
Somerset College students for Appledore Festival
Taunton Agricultural Market documentation and exhibition

- 4.3.3 Other organisations supported this year include The Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, Take Art, Actiontrack, Somerset Art Works (SAW), Somerset Partnership of Arts in Education (Spaeda), Somerset Rural Music School, and the Westival (which is running from 18th to 27th July at various venues across Taunton and has a multicultural aspect to it this year).
- 4.3.4 The Brewhouse are also currently working with Taunton East Development Trust to develop diversionary arts and media activities for young people in Halcon and Lambrook.

4.3.5 As an integral part of the budget review process consideration will be given to continuing annual core grants to key arts organisations (input funding) to funding arts organisations to deliver specific projects to meet Corporate and LAA objectives (output funding).

4.3.6 The Deane Arts Update has been revived, and will be published monthly in the future on the Economic Development website as well as being emailed to creative individuals and organisations.

4.4 Inter-departmental Working

4.4.1 The Housing Department Communities Officer is now working closely with the EDU team, and will be supporting the development of economic development activity through supporting community development work, particularly with TEDT and NTP.

4.4.2 The Community Officer attends EDU team meetings and benefits from this closer working relationship are already being felt in terms of improvements in efficiencies and communication with the Housing Department. It is felt that there are greater benefits that could be derived from even closer working between the two departments, which will be explored by the review of EDU and the restructuring change project.

General

5.1 EDU Delivery Planning

5.1.1 The new Economic Development Manager has undertaken to prepare a framework ED delivery plan by 31 July 2008, which will review the present structure of the unit and assess priorities for the remainder of this year.

5.1.2 However, it is recognised that the ED Plan has not been refreshed for two years, and with the significant shift in policy, organisation of ED delivery, changing economic climate, and emphasis on Pioneer Somerset and developing greater corporate efficiencies through greater inter-departmental working and organisational change programmes, it is felt necessary to engage external consultants to undertake a research project to meet the following objectives:

- Provide an ED Plan to underpin future Growth Point Funding, including review of employment land and business requirements.
- Review the role of the Economic Development Unit including:
- Review Economic Development Unit structure and priorities against available resources and capacity in order to achieve Corporate and LAA delivery targets, giving due consideration to changed delivery environment.

- Provide recommendations on the relationship between economic development, community development, physical regeneration, and the correlating inter-departmental policy and delivery activities to support the TDBC restructuring change project.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

As always, plenty has been happening in my Portfolio's area. I, therefore, present my latest report to Council as follows:-

1. Community Leisure

- 1.1 The summer season of Vivary Park Sunday bandstand concerts have been programmed to run from 1 June and continue until 31 August 2008.
- 1.2 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 has been sent to all primary school aged children in Taunton Deane.
- 1.3 In June, a Fun Day took place in Victoria Park in conjunction with Victoria Park Action Group and we now see the famous "Toads" installed in the park much to the pleasure of the Borough.
- 1.4 A family fun day is planned to take place in French Weir Park on Sunday 10 August 2008. The event is being organised by the Friends of French Weir Park with assistance from the Leisure Development Team.
- 1.5 Party On Limited will be providing a music night by Kiss FM Radio in Vivary Park on Saturday 12 July 2008. The fancy dress charity event is expected to be popular with the 18 – 35 year age group.
- 1.6 On the 3 July 2008, with the local Ward Councillors, I met up with children of Ladymead School, Friends of Vivary Park and officers. We discussed and were shown models of suggestions of how the Sensory Garden in Vivary Park might look like. I was delighted with the suggestions of the young people, as the others were too. The Friends of Vivary Park are now applying for funding so that this project can move further forward.
- 1.7 The annual fair visit by Anderton and Rowland has taken place at Moorfields, Taunton. This year the fair was run on a theme park style whereby a single entrance fee was paid which gave unlimited rides for a set number of hours.
- 1.8 Applications for capital grant aid assistance from the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme have been received and are currently being assessed. Applications have also been received for assistance from the Council's capital scheme, for voluntary village halls and community centres and sports clubs and are being processed.

2. Play

2.1 Play Ranger Service

2.1.1 The contract to provide the exciting new Big Lottery funded Play Ranger Service for the Council has now been signed. Barnardos officially commenced the service on 1 July 2008 and is currently making arrangements to put Play Rangers into 3 wards in the Borough – Holway, Halcon and Rowbarton.

2.1.2 Play Rangers provide children with a friendly, safe environment for play and social interaction. They help children to experience some of the play experiences earlier generations of children took for granted but which are not generally available to them. As part of the contract Barnardos will be working with the Children's Society to ensure that not only are children and young people encouraged to engage with Barnardos staff but that the whole community becomes aware of the scheme and of the opportunities to engage with it, to learn new skills and to understand the value of the learning that play provides – the life skills that cannot be taught in a classroom.

2.2 New Play Facilities in Galmington

2.2.1 The replacement play equipment for older children and young people is currently being installed on Galmington Playing Field. It includes exciting new equipment based on the physical experiences of skateboarding and wind surfing chosen by the young people at Galmington Massive youth club.

2.3 Higher Holway Open Space

2.3.1 Construction work on the comprehensive new play area on this open space has now started. It is already being held up as an example of good practice in the involvement of children in play design by the national body Play England.

2.3.2 The Council selected the equipment supplier, before starting the design process, selecting on ability to provide exciting equipment and willingness to work with young people as well as on price and technical abilities. The Landscape Architect and the Play and Participation Workers provided by Barnardos worked with the company to engage young people from three local schools in the design of the space. The result is the first landscaped, natural play area the Council has commissioned. The primary schools also worked with an artist to create two friendship posts for the play space which will be located at the entrance.

2.3.3 The work will take 6-8 weeks to complete with the final touches and tree planting, being a community event planned for September 2008.

3. Sport

- 3.1 The new sports pavilions at Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields are both now nearing completion and opening ceremonies are to be arranged.
- 3.2 A capital grant application has been received from Wellington Football Club and is currently being processed.

4. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Facility News

- 4.1 Blackbrook Pavilion and Taunton Tennis Centre
 - 4.1.1 Multi Sport Magic took over Blackbrook Pavilion and Tennis Centre on 11 June 2008. Frisbee and Volleyball were new additions to the activities enjoyed by 1,200 children from schools in Taunton, Wellington and West Somerset. Each Year 5 child had the opportunity to sample 2 of the 12 sports available .
 - 4.1.2 Lucy Mowlem, of the Partnership, said, "It was absolutely brilliant, one of the best we've done, and I think the good weather helped".
- 4.2 Wellington Sports Centre
 - 4.2.1 Gavin Brooks has been promoted from Operations Manager at Wellsprings to Centre Manager at Wellington Sports Centre and takes up his post at the beginning of August.
 - 4.2.2 Swimskool is running at 90% occupancy and still growing. Working towards implementing the new National Teaching Plan from the Amateur Swimming Association. The local schools gala ran during the week beginning 30 June 2008.
 - 4.2.3 Kids Zone is running at Wellington with over 55 children enrolled upon courses run over two afternoons, ages 7-15 years. Vive outdoor activities are running again this summer. So far 55 kids are attending per week.
 - 4.2.4 An application for funding has been submitted to transform the old bar area at Wellington into a secondary teaching room to cater for children's activities; currently utilising the space with second-hand reconditioned kit that has been secured and donated to the scheme.
 - 4.2.5 GO Fitness - GOgx (Group Fitness) has just undergone the first official customer survey in some time, with over 200 surveys handed out across day and night classes including dry and water based sessions.

- 4.2.6 GOgx at Wellington is still achieving 77% occupancy over 60% of all our classes, which is above the official 'World Class' standard as defined by Fitness professionals, which is 60% occupancy across 60% of classes.
- 4.2.7 The GO Fitness department at Wellington Sports Centre was successfully re-accredited to the GP Referral Scheme for a further two years.
- 4.2.8 George Stark, the Council's Corporate Property Officer, is working with Wellington Sports Centre to resolve issues with flooring within the changing rooms. Projects that have been completed include re-sealing both upper and lower hall floors and remedying an ongoing lighting problem within the gym.
- 4.2.9 MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!) has been launched and is going through its second cycle at Wellington Sports Centre. The Development Team secured funding to implement and run this programme for two years.
- 4.2.10 The Women's Running Network have organised free local training for anyone interested in leading running groups at Hestercombe House this July.
- 4.9 Wellsprings Leisure Centre
 - 4.9.1 Dan Webb has been appointed as Centre Manager at Wellsprings Leisure Centre and will take up his post at the beginning of August 2008.
 - 4.9.2 Tone Gymnastics Club held a competition at Wellsprings Leisure Centre recently, which saw medals being awarded to Wellington Gymnastics Club members.

Sports and Health Development

- 5.1 Walk Well in Taunton (Tone Leisure's Health Walking Programme) has recently been awarded "Accredited Scheme" status by the Walking the Way to Health Initiative. The "Accredited Scheme" status means that the scheme meets high standards in terms of safety, offers good quality walks, especially for beginners, and has the credibility associated with being part of a nationally evaluated scheme. Walk Well in Taunton continues to grow in popularity, currently attracting an average of 33 participants per walk.

Business Plan

- 6.1 Tone Leisure has produced a business plan recently, and whilst some Councillors may feel that what they are proposing is difficult to accept, they brought this Business Plan to the Council, it went through the

appropriate channels where there was very little if any opposition. It is my firm belief that we should allow Tone Leisure to get on with their own Business Plan and continue providing a very good service throughout the Borough.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Mel Mullins – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Health

1.1 Food Safety

- 1.1.1 The Food Safety Team identified and wrote to approximately 30 “failing” businesses asking them to contact us to discuss the poor hygiene standards found at the last visit and to offer our advice, training and assistance. Four came into Taunton Deane to discuss how they have already made improvements and one wrote a letter. No contact was made by the other businesses. Visits are being made to the remaining businesses in accordance with our inspection programme and where poor standards are found, appropriate enforcement action is being taken.
- 1.1.2 Following a complaint, The Blue Ball at Sampford Moor was closed for a few days in April 2008. Food Officers found a mouse infestation, dirty food preparation areas and decomposing food and promptly served a Prohibition Notice, which was confirmed by the Magistrates Court. Officers worked closely with the proprietor to ensure he was able to reopen the pub once it reached acceptable standards.

1.2 Environmental Protection

Draft Somerset Air Quality Strategy

- 1.2.1 The six Councils in Somerset have produced a draft Air Quality Strategy which is a culmination of the air quality management work carried out over recent years in the County. The Somerset Air Quality Steering group appointed a consultant to produce the draft strategy from the document written by the group. The document sets out strategic recommendations for improving air quality in Somerset and protecting areas of good air quality.
- 1.2.2 The strategy is now out for consultation over the summer to the statutory consultees, on line at the Somerset County Council web-site or hard copies are available from Somerset Libraries. Following consultation it is expected that all Somerset Councils will formally adopt the strategy.

New Private Water Supply Regulations

- 1.2.3 Following circulation of the new Private Water Supply Regulation draft consultation document, the Somerset Water Quality Steering Group have been tasked with producing an options paper detailing how the Somerset Authorities will deliver the new service, in line with the Pioneer Somerset objective.

- 1.2.4 The new regulations use a different system to classify private water supplies and the new duties include an increase in sampling, greater enforcement powers, source to tap risk assessment and bi-annual monitoring of public supplies. The options paper will be discussed by the Somerset Chief Officers Group and a way forward proposed once the new regulations have been published and further detail has been provided. Options range from, each district to provide a service similar to the one already provided to contracting out the sampling, analysis and risk assessment to a single contractor.

Gull Control Programme

- 1.2.4 The programme is now in its fourth year and it has been two years since the Council introduced the artificial egg replacement programme. Last year's programme was 100% successful and so far this year we have replaced 132 eggs and the most recent visit has revealed that no new eggs have been laid.
- 1.2.5 Complaints from members of the public have dropped considerably and although Taunton continues to support a significant Gull population the prediction of a 3% population increase year on year, has been prevented by the programme

1.3 Licensing

Caravan Site Licensing

- 1.3.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government has produced new model conditions for caravan site licences. These conditions can be attached to all the caravan site licensed premises in the District; the conditions also relate to mobile or park homes sites. The Licensing Unit will be gradually rolling out the applicable model conditions over the new few months, after consulting with site owners and residents on the caravan sites.

Licensing Statement of Intent.

- 1.3.1 Taunton Deane is about to sign a statement of intent which will also be signed by the other four District Councils, the Police and County Council, which will lead to a more consistent approach to dealing with premises licensed for the sale of alcohol and providing regulated entertainment across Somerset.

1.4 Health and Safety Team

Asbestos Workshop

- 1.4.1 The Health and Safety Team held their first Asbestos Workshop on 2 July 2008. All those attending gave positive feedback and the team forged useful links with local trade associations.
- 1.4.2 The Workshop, part of the Health and Safety Executive's Disease Reduction Programme was aimed at those responsible for repairing and maintaining

buildings. The aim of this is to safeguard the health of staff, public and tradesmen using or working on buildings.

- 1.4.3 Delegates were told that the law requires amongst other things an Asbestos Management Plan to be drawn up. After outlining the law the team helped individuals start producing the written records they need.
- 1.4.3 In a separate survey, 68% of local tradesmen reported that they are never or rarely told about asbestos in a commercial building before they start work. The team hope that, by highlighting the issue, tradesmen will be given the information they need when starting work and asbestos related disease will be reduced in this sector.

1.5 Smokefree Anniversary

- 1.5.1 The 1 July marked the first anniversary of the Smokefree law in England. Taunton Deane has had enforcement responsibility for one of the most significant public health developments in the last 50 years. The Council's experience from inspections and compliance building work, has been that this is a popular measure and is embraced by businesses and the general public alike.
- 1.5.2 In the months from 1 July 2007 to the end of May 2008, Council Officers have inspected 1150 premises and vehicles and no evidence of smoking was found in 99% of these visits. The law has quickly become self-enforcing.

1.6 Environmental Health - General

- 1.6.1 I recently attended a training day for all the Environmental Health departments at Taunton Race Course. The day featured a mix of updates on technical matters such as new legislation, and information on corporate issues such as SW One and Pioneer Somerset. One of the main speakers was from a local legal firm on Prosecutions and Court Room Skills. The day was very successful and enjoyable.

2.0 Taunton Deane Cemeteries and Crematorium

Contingency Arrangements

- 2.1 Taunton Deane Crematorium and Yeovil Crematorium are considering a potential agreement to establish reciprocal arrangements should either crematorium experience major equipment failure. A draft six-point plan has been drawn up to further this proposal.

Councillor Mel Mullins

Council Meeting - 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

1. Affordable Housing – a New Way Forward

- 1.1 As members we need to find a way to work together in the interests of those in housing need, and I have asked Officers to work on a completely new approach to consultation on proposed housing sites which can be debated and hopefully gain cross-party support. We need to find a way to avoid unnecessary disagreement on each individual site which is brought forward if we are to genuinely serve the interests of those in housing need.
- 1.2 I am asking that members of all political persuasions support the principle of a new approach to consultation, and commit to engage in constructive debate on ideas brought forward by Officers.

2. Decent Homes Work

- 2.1 I am pleased to report that the Council installed 608 new kitchens in Council properties during 2007/2008.
- 2.2 Out of interest, I looked back to the Offer Document published to tenants in 2006 as part of the stock transfer consultation, and found that the Council then estimated that following a 'no' vote the Council would install an average of only 327 kitchens per year over the first five years, and if a 'yes' vote occurred the new housing association would install 564 per year.
- 2.3 I am sure tenants and members will be delighted that we have exceeded all expectations in an area of work which is proving especially popular with tenants.

3. Tenant Empowerment

- 3.1 I would like to congratulate the Tenants' Forum on bringing forward ideas on how they can be more effectively involved in monitoring performance in the Housing Landlord service. I think the idea of monitoring groups looking at specific areas of work is a very good idea, and fits in excellently with my wish to see greater tenant empowerment.

4. Rough Sleeper Unit at Norie House

- 4.1 The construction work for the new 6 bed Rough Sleeper Unit and the remodelling and renovation of Norie House is likely to start in the next few weeks and be completed in the Autumn, so that the unit can become fully operational before winter sets in.

5. Choice Based Lettings

- 5.1 This is a major partnership project involving the introduction of new allocation policies and procedures for all the 20,000 plus social housing dwellings in Somerset. The project, involving five local authorities and over 40 Housing Associations in Somerset, required the joint procurement of new computer systems.
- 5.2 In August the Council's 4,800 housing and transfer applicants will be invited to re-register their applications on the new on line, web based system called "homefindersomerset.co.uk". The individual applications will then be banded into one of 3 bands (gold, silver or bronze) on the basis of need, before vacant properties go onto the system early in December 2008.
- 5.3 On the 15 December 2008 the system will go "live" with applicants having the ability to register their interest in a particular vacant property in their band (or a lower band). The successful applicant will typically have been on the waiting list for the longest period of time amongst those who have expressed interest.

6. Bed and Breakfast and Temporary Accommodation Statistics

- 6.1 I am pleased to report that on Friday, 4 July 2008 there were only four single people and one family in bed and breakfast, the lowest figures in over 10 years.
- 6.2 The success of the Council's investment in preventative measures is further evidenced by the figures for those in temporary accommodation. In the last quarter of 2007/2008, for the very first time, the Council achieved the target figure for those in temporary accommodation, with only 47 people in temporary accommodation, compared to the current target figure of 55 and the baseline figure of 111 in 2004.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 15 July 2008

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith - Corporate Resources

1. Legal and Democratic Services

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Planning Inspector completed his hearing in relation to the Oxen Lane Public Inquiry, concluding that all four appeals should be dismissed.
- 1.2 There are two new members of staff in Legal Services. Nicola Cooper is the new Solicitor and Jonathan Morren is the new Property Legal Executive.
- 1.3 The scrutiny function has now moved to Democratic Services and Alastair Higton is now based in this team.
- 1.4 The constitution is being updated and there is a report at full council. There are a number of changes but the most significant proposal is probably the three hour guillotine on meetings.
- 1.5 Complaints about Councillors are now to come to the Standards Committee rather than the Standards Board for England and there is a request for an increase in the size of the Standards Committee to 13 to include another Parish Council representative which brings this in line with the guidance. Leaflets are currently being finished off and letters and forms completed.
- 1.6 Wendy Sharland has moved from Democratic Services to go to Housing and her post is not being replaced. Natasha Williams will, very shortly, be going on maternity leave and we will hopefully replace her post for that time with a staff secondment from another department.
- 1.7 The Mayor, Tim Slattery, has had a busy start to his year in office attending all sorts of events, meeting and social gatherings, which are published in the Weekly Bulletin under Mayors engagements.

2. Personnel

- 2.1 Job Evaluation
 - 2.1.1 The project to implementation of the JE scheme is all but complete. There are ongoing discussions with Unison to achieve a national agreement and this is being pursued urgently to draw this to a conclusion.

2.2 Sickness Absence

- 2.2.1 The sickness figures to date are encouraging, with short term absences showing a decrease compared to last year. However, we are still experiencing a problem with long term absence cases still being high.
- 2.2.2 We are holding weekly discussions on managing the long term cases and doing everything we can to support employees back into work, but the reasons people are off are due to serious illnesses.
- 2.2.3 The new sickness reporting procedures are continuing for the next financial year, this is due to the 70% reduction of short term absence in these areas. We have also extended the service areas to include all of Housing and Environmental Health. A well-being event at The Deane House and Deane DLO was held in June 2008. The aim was to encourage staff to participate in physical activity, and provide information on the benefits we can offer to support a healthier lifestyle. Both events attracted a number of employees and received positive feedback.

3. Southwest One (SW One)

- 3.1 The Human Resources (HR) Manager continues to be involved in weekly meetings with IBM and Somerset County Council (SCC). Part of the transformation is looking at the organisation design of the HR services. Any changes will take place gradually over the next eighteen months.
- 3.2 There are two key SW One transformation projects, which HR are involved in. These are SAP and People Excellence Model – PEM.
- 3.3 The SAP project team are working on the first stages of the project, which involves validating the HR and Payroll processes in order for the SAP system to be designed. The HR and Payroll system will go live for Taunton Deane next February 2009.
- 3.4 The People Excellence Model is now live and will enable SW One to have the right people with the right skills and knowledge and motivation, in the right roles, and will provide the means to manage and measure people's achievements.
- 3.5 In scope employees are now part of a PEM community, which is a group of people with similar occupational skills and interests from across SW One. The next stage in PEM is designing a career framework. This is a comprehensive structured framework, which will help employee's, who want to progress, understand the opportunities available. The system will create a working environment which will standardise processes and working practices, provide better information to managers and allow access for employees to update their personal details.
- 3.6 HR are working with the SW One Procurement Team on various procurement initiatives that will involve employees, changes to the lease car scheme, mileage charged for use of DLO vans and finding more efficient ways of managing business travel are underway.

4. Corporate Support Services

- 4.1 The first quarter of the 2008/2009 financial year has been successful in consolidating the work of Corporate Support Services within SW One and monthly client meetings are held.
- 4.2 The new CEDAR financial system for SW One services has required additional training for the service teams particularly in the raising of orders and invoices and this training is continuing, to ensure relevant staff have sufficient training.

Customer Services

- 4.3 We continue to use temporary agency staff to bolster numbers during recruitment processes; however we have managed to turn several agency staff into permanent staff in the past two months. Work continues to co-locate the service with the County Hall teams within The Deane House and considerable work has been carried out to understand the climate control and accommodation requirements for the new 84-seater contact centre which will be sited on the second floor of The Deane House. Managers are working closely with SCC team members to ensure the service is delivered in line with SW One KPi requirements.
- 4.4 Statistical Information - 49,214 calls were managed through the contact centre with an overall abandonment rate of 3.4% and 86% of calls being answered within 20 seconds. A total of 11,642 people have been helped at The Deane House main and planning receptions and 4,319 people visited Wellington Community Office.

Design and Print

- 4.5 The combined SCC and Taunton Deane management of Design and Print was started from 1 June 2008. The Taunton Deane Print Manager Lee Benham has taken on a dual Production Manager role for the combined service and is working closely with his teams at The Deane House and County Hall to provide an enhanced service for both authorities.

Corporate Administration/Facilities/Word Processing

- 4.6 It was agreed that Facilities would move back to Property Services from 1 May 2008 to assist with moving forward on new organisational plans. As a result Accommodation has also moved to the Property Services Manager. The Corporate Admin/Facilities Manager is continuing to assist at County Hall and discussions continue to take place on future arrangements.
- 4.7 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 and working with SWOne colleagues to understand the plan for moving forward on scanning proposals in the coming year.

5. ICT Service

- 5.1 ICT are working hard with several departments including Customer Services, HR and Payroll with the installation of the new SAP system as well as the changes to Procurement which effects the IT equipment that we receive.
- 5.2 One of the major changes has been the merging the Taunton Deane Helpdesk function with SCC's. All calls are now answered by a single team based at County Hall, and whilst this move has led to some concerns from some Taunton Deane users, we are now in fact seeing our 'first-time-fix' percentage at a higher level.
- 5.3 ICT are undertaking further work to rectify the receiving of 'spam emails', (you will be aware of this problem from the number of emails exchanged between Councillors at the beginning of this month), this situation however is always difficult to stop without it impeding the receiving of legitimate emails, as ever increasing sophisticated methods are used by these 'spammers'

6. Revenues and Benefits Service Unit

- 6.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service has made an excellent start to the new financial year for 2008/2009 with delivery in all key areas exceeding performance at this point last year. This is particularly noteworthy in the recovery of Council Tax and Business Rates where undoubtedly the current financial climate will affect our customers' ability to pay. However, through robust recovery processes, we have actually been able to improve collection of debt so that at 31 May 2008 we had exceeded our collection against increased targets from 2007/2008.
- 6.2 Implementation of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) from April 2008 went smoothly and in many cases, we have identified additional income available to Housing Benefit recipients as a result of this new scheme. As well as the extra money raised for our customers through LHA, our joint benefit take-up exercise with the Pensions Service raised over £75k additional income for some of the most needy members of our community.
- 6.3 From July 2008, we will be surveying customer satisfaction and we are using this as an opportunity to invite people to join our Customer Forum to help shape service delivery into the future. We have begun trials on exciting new technology such as document bar-coding to make more effective use of resources and minimise error. We are also planning to implement electronic claim forms later in the year.
- 6.4 We have developed an ambitious but realistic operational delivery plan to ensure we meet all our aims to improve the service as well as address the new requirements of the Audit Commission through the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE). We have built in specific objectives through feedback staff received from customers to ensure we provide services built around customer needs as well as delivering value for money and meeting wider Corporate and Partnership aims. We will be distributing this plan to all Members shortly and we would welcome constructive comment and suggestions for further improvement before final publication.

7. Financial Services

- 7.1 Since Financial Services moved to Quantock House, Taunton in March 2008, they have been concentrating on the closedown of the 2007/08 Annual Accounts (these were approved by the Corporate Governance Committee on 26 June 2008). The external auditors are going to come in during July 2008 and audit the Accounts - a process that takes about 3 months.
- 7.2 Financial Services have just concluded the process of re-letting the Council's insurance contract which expires at the end of July 2008. The Council spends over £400k per year on insurance premiums and with the help of SW One's procurement team and our brokers, Marsh, we will make some significant savings on our new 3-5 year contract.
- 7.3 Finance is also helping out with several other SW One transformation projects, namely the implementation of SAP and helping with the number crunching relating to some of the procurement initiatives that SW One is involved in.
- 7.4 The first quarterly budget monitoring exercise for 2008/2009 is going to start during July 2008 - this will involve detailed meetings with all budget holders.
- 7.5 The budget setting process for 2009/2010 has already started and Financial Services will be spending the latter part of the summer refining budget assumptions in preparation for the detailed budget work which starts in the autumn.

8. Scrutiny and Performance Management

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Pilot Project has been approved to run for a further six months, until October 2008. This will give Councillors and officers a chance to make some changes as well as allow the Task and Finish reviews to be completed.
- 8.2 The Improvement and Development Agency (iDea) has been asked to visit us during the summer to carry out a comprehensive peer review of the scrutiny function.

Performance / Comprehensive Area Assessment

- 8.3 The end of year update of 2007/2008 performance against our Corporate Strategy objectives, performance indicators and budget position was taken to the Strategy and Performance Panel on the 17 June 2008 for Scrutiny and to the Executive on 18 June. Performance Indicator results will now be submitted to the Audit Commission and we will be audited on our performance improvement and the data quality.
- 8.4 This is the last year Best Value Performance Indicators will be collected. From April 2008 we have been expected to collect a smaller number of National Indicators as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- 8.5 We will shortly be publishing the 2007/2008 Annual Report which details our achievements over the past year and our plans for the next year. This will include details of all our performance indicators and targets, a statement on our contracts and details how we plan to address our weaknesses.

- 8.6 Michelle Hale, Corporate Performance Officer, is leaving the Council in July 2008. Her position has been advertised as a 12 month secondment.

Procurement

- 8.6 Southwest One has worked closely with the two councils to develop 'Category Plans' to identify better ways to procure goods and services for various categories of spend. From the Category Plans benefit savings are currently being identified. Simon Lewis, Scrutiny and Performance Manager has now been seconded as a Change Manager for the Procurement Transformation Project for the next 12 months.

Councillor Fran Smith