

COUNCIL MEETING 12 DECEMBER 2006

Report of Councillor Williams – Leader of the Council

The year has passed quickly and here we are approaching Christmas again, may I take this opportunity to wish everybody a healthy and happy time, enjoy the break that is to come and hope the New Year brings all you desire. I particularly offer the Council's thanks to all staff across the Council for their hard work and commitment that has kept our delivery of services to our community both efficient and economic. We must also not forget the continual process of change and innovation that we are constantly driving forward to create partnerships, improve efficiency and facilitate better services for our community.

I must also include Members in this commendation, those of you who have equally shown dedication in helping drive through what has been a very challenging programme and maintain, what I consider to be justly deserved, our status as an "Excellent" Council. This can only be attributable to the excellent officer/Member working relationship and long may it last. I now update Members about initiatives taken forward from our meeting last October.

Project Taunton

Over the last few months this project has taken a quantum leap forward. On 18 October the Firepool site was advertised in the OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) this being necessary because of the sheer size of contract potentially being let, £600m development cost for Firepool alone, thus requiring under EU rules that it must be advertised in all EU member states. This was followed by national advertising together with the creation of a very interesting web site by Alder King, our marketing agents. As a result at the time of writing, we received in excess of 700 enquiries for marketing material. This can only be regarded as a stupendous response which serves to confirm there is huge interest in our proposals to create a high quality strategic employment site close to the town centre with all the benefits of overall regeneration next to the waterways, a main line rail station and minutes from the motorway.

Expressions of interest in the site close on 15 December 2006, evaluation of potential developers will then take place and a small number will be invited to prepare proposals of intended scope of development and returns for TDBC sites. It is intended to aim for appointment of the final developer by early summer 2007 and for a planning application to be submitted by late 2007.

The Cricket Club has also launched its exciting final proposals for phases 1 and 2 and a planning application for phase 1 is anticipated imminently for a new stand and apartments to be constructed adjacent the Brewhouse Theatre. For this development the Club have requested a small section of the Coal Orchard car park, Members may recall this has already been approved

subject to agreement of final terms. The Cricket Club has set itself a challenging programme as it has to complete phase 1 & 2 ready for the first international one day match already booked for 2009. These development proposals will also consolidate Taunton as the home ground of International Women's Cricket as the new development will provide purpose built facilities and fully cater for their needs as its Headquarters.

This project has been partnership working at its best, we have recently been presented with the Environment Agency studies as to how to provide the best possible flood protection to existing properties and new development. This is an innovative use of offsite floodwater retention which is proving far more economical and allows us to deliver what we have said "to bring the River Tone back into the heart of the development, not turn our back on it as so often we have in the past," This allows development alongside the river bank without the need for high flood protection barriers which would have obscured the view of the river.

Great effort is also being put into resolving the obvious difficulties surrounding car parking within and around Taunton. Total public parking within Taunton amounts to 4,202 places of which 2,436 are allocated as commuter parking spaces. The problem to be addressed is how to carry out the essential regeneration proposals and maintain adequate parking for shoppers and short term business users. I have not added commuters into this equation as park and ride is expanding and should double our present commuter capacity thus cater for this requirement. A Parking Strategy study is presently ongoing and it should be able to offer solutions as to how best we cope during the transitional period and ensure we maintain the viability of the retail and business sector.

In assembling the sites for the execution of Project Taunton we will require substantial funds to purchase the necessary sites for development, infrastructure needs and flood alleviation. Our officers have worked tremendously hard at this and finally have agreed terms for sums in excess of £6m being funded by the South West Regional Development Agency to enable us to procure the necessary land required. A remarkable feat to achieve this and my sincere thanks to all for staying with it through the many trials and tribulations experienced.

Livestock Market Site

At the time of writing this report we still do not have confirmation from Taunton Market Auctioneers as to their eventual site for relocation, I will update at the meeting if we have any positive news to report. The situation remains as previous with a valid Planning Approval for a market at J26, Chelston, and we are aware that negotiations are ongoing for a livestock market at J24, Huntworth.

Ballot for Housing Stock Transfer

All has been done to present to our tenants the experts' view of the best option after they have carried out extensive surveys and consultation exercises. The stock transfer option was the only affordable option within the rules governing us to maintain the excellent services that tenants have come to expect. It is now up to the tenants to decide but if it is a "no vote" I do hope the opponents of transfer will explain why this Council will have to continue to return to the Government £4 million per year, money that will be desperately needed for their own homes but will be sent to the government to subsidise housing in other areas! I welcome the sentiments that we will all work together to secure the necessary funding from Government from Taunton Deane but I cannot hold out any hope of success, we have statements from three different Ministers over a period of time, the most recent Baroness Andrews OBE dated 9 November 2006, and each is as emphatic as the other, I quote from the most recent;

Quote

"Some people have argued that the Government should match the independent borrowing by Housing Associations, with even more additional resources made available to councils, and it has been suggested that the Government is about to change policy to adopt this approach. I want you to know that this is just not the case. We have already increased investment very significantly for local authorities. To provide additional resources on top of that directly to local authorities would be unaffordable and would have a significant impact on public finances"

Unquote

From the letter written by Baroness Andrews OBE dated 9 November in response to a direct request to clarify the question of possible extra financial support to councils following resolutions at the Labour Party conference. An unequivocal reply. Meanwhile the £4 million contribution from tenants rents will continue to be paid to central Government despite a desperate need for it to remain in Taunton Deane.

The White Paper and Potential Local Government Reorganisation

This White Paper contains a whole raft of proposals which merit serious consideration as to how we can embrace them and improve the already excellent services we provide. There is always scope for improvement and this is what we should be seeking. However, the reorganisation part of the White Paper can only be considered as wholly unwelcome and a totally unnecessary distraction.

I refer to the motion being put forward by my colleague Councillor John Meikle and I have to say that it is extremely disappointing that all Members of this Council who are also County Members failed to support their District Council against this predatory Unitary bid. This, despite the clear knowledge that it will create a huge democratic deficit for our communities and consign them to an almost certain, much reduced, level of service as is witnessed by differences in community satisfaction ratings gathered by CIPFA.

Implementation of ISiS

At the time of writing we have received the ISIS (Improving Services in Somerset) bids and they are still subject to evaluation. Initial thoughts are that we have three excellent bids one of which will assist us in that ever more difficult feat of delivering more efficient services to our community for less cost. When related to the issue of local government reorganisation it reinforces our willingness and ability to enter into good quality partnerships that should provide huge benefits to our community. This is definitely the path to follow as it provides the benefits together with the change management, by the use of modern technology, that is strongly promoted in the White Paper.

I am looking forward to seeing the full range of benefits as offered by the bidders as from what I have seen to date we will have quite a menu of added options that will help improve all aspects of life for our communities in Taunton Deane.

Affordable Housing

Without entering too much in the territory of Cllr Garner I would wish to flag up the excellent progress with affordable housing provision, besides the usual gains where possible under S106 agreements we have achieved incredible success on two projects that will boost the provision of affordable housing tremendously, 36 affordable houses to purchase at Ham, Chelston, which will remain affordable in perpetuity and without any contribution from the public purse. The second scheme is 75 dwellings being a mix of rented and shared ownership within the old BT building on the Crescent. This is an incredible good news story and is as a result of dedication and commitment of our Officers in delivering these schemes under very difficult circumstances. Well done to all involved.

CPA Inspection

We have recently received a visit from the CPA inspectors who carried out exhaustive analysis of our submissions and met with many involved parties and partners. We will not know the formal results of this visit until some time next year but from the informal feedback and discussion at the conclusion of the on site inspection, the omens appeared good. I will report further as and when the formal results are made know to us.

Ice Rink

I welcome the return of the ice rink to Taunton which at double the size of last year should provide even greater attraction and huge pleasure for our community. I am aware that some people focus on the perceived benefit this brings for business in the town but I have to say that for me, this is secondary. I feel it provides much needed entertainment and leisure to all ages and sections of our community. In addition it is an extremely popular and healthy

recreation, it has to be welcomed. I wish the rink and the community a very successful time whilst it is operational in Taunton.

Redevelopment for UKHO

As an authority we are in very close contact with the management of UKHO with the Chief Executive and myself meeting regularly to assist where possible and facilitate their redevelopment on site or an alternative location within Taunton. We recognise how crucial the retention of this important employer is to the community in Taunton Deane with its highly skilled, well paid job opportunities and we will do all possible to ensure it remains within Taunton. The key is identifying an alternative available site and providing advice as necessary to enable its development together with the best use of the existing site.

Finally, Government Office South West, Taunton Visit

Only recently we hosted a visit of Andrew Slade, recently appointed Director of Sustainability, Intelligence and Rural Areas and Steve Bone Assistant Director (Somerset) on a familiarization visit to Taunton, particularly Project Taunton. They were very impressed about our clear and well researched plans for Taunton together with the extent of community involvement and consultation. They were equally impressed by the speed with which we had brought these huge and exciting development proposals together in the period 2002 to date. It was a successful visit that clearly demonstrated Taunton Deane's ability and willingness to work on major projects in partnership and most of all the commitment to deliver.

Cllr John Williams, Leader, Taunton Deane Borough Council

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Report of Councillor Gwyneth Leighton – Communications

Consultation

MORI have reported that the response rate of the Best Value General Survey in Taunton Deane and across Somerset has been excellent. We are looking forward to receiving the results sometime in January and the full results will be presented in February 2007. The questionnaire measures residents' satisfaction with the overall authority and some of our specific services including cultural and recreational services, housing services and environmental services.

The Audit Commission uses the information to monitor public services across the country and has made it a statutory requirement for this information to be collected by local councils every three years.

Web Content & Marketing

I am pleased to report that our new Web Content & Marketing Officer will be taking up the post in January, if not before. The initial focus will be making the site more user-friendly and improving the quality of the content and the look and feel of the site. We shall be aiming to increase customer engagement through creating a customer focussed website, whilst at the same time delivering efficiency savings for the Council.

Public Relations

We received a 29% response to the ISIS staff survey carried out during October and November. The results have been analysed and when they have been shared with staff they will be made available for members. The information gained will be used to inform the ISIS Communications plan. The latest joint ISIS newsletter has just been issued. The ISIS bids were received at County Hall at the end of November and we now have the challenging job of selecting the right partner. TDBC will be producing a monthly briefing for members to keep them informed and up to date.

I am sure members will have noticed new information panels around the corridors in Deane House and the full length display panels in the Committee Room which have been produced to ensure that staff and members are aware of the valuable contribution they all make. These highlight that our Corporate Priorities are at the forefront of everything we do. We often hear from members that people do not know enough about the work we do – a view supported by responses to the 'Your Council, Your Views' survey (May 2006). To start addressing this issue we have produced a booklet entitled "Working for the Community".

Media Relations

So far, this has been a busy year and we still have many exciting projects on the go which will no doubt attract the interest of the media. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, members and of course the media themselves for their reporting of Taunton Deane's achievements over the past year. I was sorry to learn of the closure of Taunton Times, they will be missed. On the other hand, I was pleased to learn that the Wellington Weekly News has a new owner and hope it will go from strength to strength.

Finally....

I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Councillor Gwyneth Leighton

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Report of Councillor Mrs Joanna Lewin-Harris – Community Leadership

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER

I attended a White Paper Conference in London in early November, just after the White Paper was published. An interesting line-up of speakers included Ruth Kelly, Caroline Spelman, Lord Bruce-Lockhart and Michael O'Higgins, the new chair of the Audit Commission.

All speakers emphasized the White Paper is only part of the picture for the future of local government. The recommendations of the Lyons Review on funding (due at the end of this year) and the government's Comprehensive Spending Review will both be very significant. There was general agreement the efficiency agenda was paramount and that local government will have to find ways of doing more with less money in future.

There was general welcome for the tone of the White Paper with its recognition that local government is doing a good job. Delegates also welcomed the enhanced role for councils as strategic leaders and place-shapers and the strengthened role for non-executive councillors.

The commitment to deregulation with a cut in the number of performance indicators and target was also warmly welcomed, though there was some concern that, over time, these numbers would start to creep up again.

There was less enthusiasm for the proposals to devolve powers, as in reality they amount to very little. Councils will be given the powers to create parish councils and "other forms of community governance" and to create by-laws.

Concern was also expressed over the three new leadership models proposed in the White Paper. There was no evidence that directly elected mayors, directly elected executives or leaders elected for a four-year term actually provide more effective leadership than other models. The LGA's view is that no specific leadership model should be imposed.

Unitary Status or Enhanced Two Tier Working. The LGA is resolutely opposed to imposing restructuring. Experience shows that imposed reorganization of local government always takes longer, costs more and delivers less than ever envisaged.

POLICY COMMISSION

The Policy Commission was set up by Somerset County Council to consider the nature of the voluntary and community sector in Somerset and how best to enable it to go from strength to strength. The final report of the Policy Commission was considered by the Community Leadership Panel and, on their recommendation, I have now signed up to it on behalf of TDBC. A member of the Policy and

Performance team attends the Somerset Voluntary Sector Funding Officers Group. The role of this group is to implement the recommendations of the Policy Commission.

SCRUTINY VISIT TO TORBAY

As part of Taunton Deane's commitment to improving the way we carry out Scrutiny, a delegation of 4 Councillors and 3 officers visited Torbay Council on 13 October. Torbay has good and improving Overview and Scrutiny, and the Audit Commission have commented positively on it.

We were given a thorough guide to Torbay's Overview and Scrutiny function. A small number of in depth reviews are scheduled every year. These reviews are planned well ahead and the required resources allocated. At the end of a review a report is published, with recommendations. There is also the capacity to carry out a number of smaller reviews, should the need arise.

Officers are now working with members of the Scrutiny Panels to determine how best to use lessons learned from Torbay to develop Scrutiny in Taunton Deane.

NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING

Avon and Somerset Constabulary has recently held a round of Roadshows on the roll-out of Neighbourhood Policing and how this will improve the service they are able to give to local people. The day after the final Roadshow, a letter was received from the Home Office saying they were reducing their commitment to roll out more PCSO's across the country. This means that the total number of PCSO's across the country will be 16,000 rather than increasing to an expected 24,000 in 2007/8. We believe this means about 200 less for Avon and Somerset, but how this will affect Taunton Deane is not yet clear.

Given the public's huge concern over crime and anti-social behaviour, this is a great disappointment. I suggest it might be appropriate for this Council to write to the home office deploring this change of policy.

PLANNING AID

Planning Aid provide free, independent and professional town planning advice and support to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay fees to a planning consultant. It complements the work of the local planning authority, but is independent of them. The Royal Town Planning Institute runs Planning Aid, and Central Government provides financial support.

I am very pleased to have recently been appointed the Borough Council's "Planning Aid Champion". This role involves promoting Planning Aid and encouraging take up of Planning Aid services by disadvantaged individuals or groups in the community. I have therefore suggested that both the North Taunton Partnership and Taunton East Development Trust should consider using Planning Aid's services to help them

challenge Taunton Deane to ensure the benefits of the town centre proposals filter through to those areas.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

I gave background information on the Sustainable Community Strategy in my report to Full Council in July and an update in October. The Community Leadership panel looked at a very early draft of the Strategy in September, since when officers have since been working hard on its development. I will be attending two meetings within the next week to discuss progress on the Sustainable Community Strategy and will then update members verbally at Full Council.

PROMOTING RISKY PLAY

I recently joined around 200 other people in a barn behind a pub near Ilminster for a conference entitled "Promoting Risky Play". The theme of the conference was that play providers, whether local authority, schools, pre-schools or others, need to move on from the "safety first" agenda and allow children to explore, be challenged and take risks.

Joanna Lewin-Harris

COUNCIL MEETING 12 DECEMBER 2006

Report of Councillor Bishop – Planning Policy and Transportation

THE PLANNING PORTAL

1. Introduction

The Planning Portal is the UK government's online planning and building regulation resource for England and Wales.

Using the site www.planningportal.gov.uk access is available to:

- View planning and building regulations;
- Apply for planning permission
- Apply for building regulations consent;
- Search for local/national development using the National Planning Application Register;
- Appeal against a decision;
- Research government policy.

The site is specifically designed for three types of client:

- General Public
- Professional User (e.g. architects, planning consultants)
- Government User

The information is set out on easy to follow screens that clearly directing customers, and is designed as a one-stop-shop.

2 General Public

This section has six main sections:

Planning Permission	Building Regulation	Local Information	Useful tools	FAQs and Helps	Appeals
Learn if permission is required and apply online	Learn how building regulations affect you and your surroundings. It is themed around building projects, such as extensions, loft conversions etc.	Contact details and links for Local Planning Authority	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Antenna Guide• Online application Service walkthrough• Volume Calculator• Visual Guide for householders• Visual guide to local development frameworks• Fee calculator	Solutions to common questions and submit new queries to the support team for an answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planning appeals• Enforcement appeals• Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) appeals

3 Professional

This section has 12 main sections:

Applications	Building Regulation	Appeals	Policy and Research	News	Local Information
Allows creation, management and submission of planning applications online	Aimed at users with a degree of familiarity with the Building Regulations and the Building Control system. The technical guidance here is organised around the "Parts" A to P of the requirements of the Regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning appeals • Enforcement appeals • Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) appeals 	The Policy and Research section provides access to the chief legislation produced by the government and planning research documents	Latest planning news	Identify local planning information for a development site. This includes local authority information and planning restraints

Jobs and Training	Info for Planning Agents	Glossary	Links	Useful Tools	FAQs and Helps
Prospective employers and employees have the chance to advertise and search for jobs in the planning sector	Information	This glossary is a summary of around 500 phrases relating to land use and spatial planning matters	Obvious sites from the great number of social, economic, cultural, architectural, environmental and governmental organisations we could refer to	Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antenna Guide • Online application Service walkthrough • Volume Calculator • Visual Guide for householders • Visual guide to local development frameworks • Fee calculator 	Solutions to common questions and submit new queries to the support team for an answer

4 Government

This section has 14 main sections:

Applications	Building Regulation	Appeals	Policy and Research	News	Local Information
Download planning applications submitted to your local authority electronically	Aimed at users with a degree of familiarity with the Building Regulations and the Building Control system. The technical guidance here is organised around the "Parts" A to P of the requirements of the Regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning appeals • Enforcement appeals • Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) appeals 	The Policy and Research section provides access to the chief legislation produced by the government and planning research documents	Latest planning news	Identify local planning information for a development site. This includes local authority information and planning restraints

Jobs and Training	LPA Forum	Info for LPA	PARSOL	Glossary	Links
Prospective employers and employees the chance to advertise and search for jobs in the planning sector	The Planning Portal has set up this forum to help local planning authorities maximize the benefits of their e-planning solutions	Information	PARSOL is the Planning and Regulatory Services Online National Project funded by ODPM. It is developed by local authorities, for local authorities, to support the delivery of a faster, more effective and more efficient planning system, through the implementation of e-enabled services.	This glossary is a summary of around 500 phrases relating to land use and spatial planning matters	Obvious sites from the great number of social, economic, cultural, architectural, environmental and governmental organisations

Useful tools	FAQs and Helps
<p>Includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antenna Guide • Online application Service walkthrough • Volume Calculator • Visual Guide for householders • Visual guide to local development frameworks • Fee calculator 	Solutions to common questions and submit new queries to the support team for an answer

5 How does this link to the Planning Delivery Grant 2007/08

For 2007/8, Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) is provisionally £120m. Detailed information on the proposals can be found in the Planning Delivery Grant 2007/08, Proposed Allocations Criteria Consultation Paper.

As well as rewarding provision of good quality website facilities, it is proposed to introduce more challenging criteria for assessment. The selected standards would reward activity in three key areas:

- Continuing quality of online systems and information provided to applicants and the public.
- Take-up of services – measures designed to promote and facilitate the use of **online services**.
- Monitoring and tracking of planning applications and other information for public use and in the back office.

The table below sets out the proposed bandings of selected standards. For a list of the complete PARSOL standards please see www.parsol.gov.uk.

Banding	Standards (brief headings – see PARSOL standards for full definitions)	Proposed PDG weighting
Band 1	1.11– DPDs viewed online 2.10 – Online access to general information 3.18 – Reports etc online 3.24 – Appeals published online 4.7 – Search for enforcement notices online	20%
Band 2	1.2 – Interactive proposals map 1.3 – IT based policy and consultation 2.5 – Online pre-application advice 2.13 – Online application advice and checklists 3.11 – Online application ‘map’ 3.12 – Application status details online 4.1 – Report alleged breaches online SM 1.1 (1*) – 10-29% of representations on DPDs online SM 3.1 (1*) – 10-19% of applications received online SM3.4 (1*) – 20-39% of application consultation comments received online	40%
Band 3	3.2 – Active promotion of online applications 3.4 – Online applications update the back office 3.7 – Electronic ‘case file’ online 3.16 – Online comments update the back office 5.1 – IT based system for capturing application performance data SM 1.1 (2*) – 30-49% of representations on DPS online SM 3.1 (2*) – 20-39% of applications received online SM3.4 (2*) – 40-59% of application consultation comments received online	40%

The national average for planning applications being submitted online is 7%. For the South West the average is 4%. With funding being linked to applications received online it is important to encourage our agents and the general public to use this system.

The first stage in encouraging our Agents to use the online facility was the Planning Agents Forum which I attended at the Deane House on 13 November 2006. Fourteen architects and other professionals who regularly submit planning applications attended. The Forum has been set up to improve communication and share best practice. The guest speaker was Scott Alford from the Planning Portal who gave a presentation outlining how to submit applications electronically and answered numerous questions on how the Planning Portal operates.

On 23rd November DCLG issued a statement confirming that the National Standard Planning Application Form (1APP) will become the only official method of submitting planning applications for most types of consent (except for Minerals consent and Building Control applications) for all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in England.

1APP is a key part in the DCLG's commitment to make the planning system simpler, faster and easier to use and will also enable planning services to be provided online and give applicants certainty about the information they need to provide.

The phased implementation between February 2007 and September 2007 should help to ensure that the migration to 1APP is achieved smoothly and will give LPAs the opportunity to trial the new application service.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS3)

This long awaited Statement has just been issued setting out the national planning policy framework for delivering the Government's housing objectives, the PPS has been developed in response to the Barker Review of housing supply and reacts to the findings regarding housing in all communities including rural areas, informed by the findings of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission.

LPAs are not required to have regard to this statement as a material consideration when making decisions on planning applications until 1st April 2007.

It will be interesting to see what changes will be made to the Regional Spatial Strategy when the Panel Report is published next October following the Examination in Public which will start on 17th April 2007.

Delivering Affordable Housing

A document has been issued by DCLG with the aim of supporting LPAs and other key players in delivering more high quality affordable housing within mixed communities by using all the tools available to them.

The document should be read in conjunction with PPS3. The document are available on the DCLG website and could provide good reading at Xmas!!

Building Control Conference

TDBC Building Control Section staged their 18th Annual Building Control Conference and Exhibition at the Castle School and Sports Centre on Wednesday, 25th October 2006. The response to this year's event was the best ever with 48 companies and service providers represented, many of whom are regular attendees travelling from as far as Paisley in Scotland to be at this event. This year we were pleased to see several local companies present as well.

Delegate bookings were also at a record with 240 registrations. Delegates were drawn from as far as Cornwall and South Wales to Northampton and Milton Keynes. The Conference papers mainly centred on the new Energy Saving regulations that came into force this year, whose complexities builders and designers are still struggling to come to terms with. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, the long-awaited replacement for the 1971 Fire Precautions Act that came into force on 1st October was another topic, while a speaker from the Building Regulations division of the DCLG was on hand to give delegates a foretaste of new regulations in the pipeline and current moves to make sustainable construction a matter for Building Regulations control.

The Mayor, Councillor Chris Hindley, welcomed delegates and opened the Conference, and previewed the Exhibition in the company of the Mayoress.

I must pay tribute to the hard work of the Building Control staff, and in particular to the Conference Organiser, Mary Sims, for the smooth running and high professional standards achieved in staging this event, which promotes the good name of TDBC to a truly National audience. One of the major exhibitors informed me that they regard this conference in the top 5 of the exhibitions that they attend.

Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan

The Borough Council recently commenced consultations on the draft plan. The Action Plan is an important document that will provide the policy support to help deliver the Taunton Vision. It contains proposals for the key regeneration sites at Firepool, Tangier, High Street and the Cultural Quarter (comprising the County Cricket Ground, Brewhouse Theatre and the area around Castle Green).

There has been much consultation activity, including an exhibition in Taunton Town Centre, stakeholder and Parish Council workshops and presentations to various interest groups. These include the Town Centre Company, the Local Strategic Partnership and separate forums comprising of representation from disability groups and women's groups. In addition, the Council for Voluntary Services have helped to distribute information to all in the voluntary sector.

Generally the feedback so far has been positive. Most people and organisations support the overall content of the Area Action Plan. The general feeling is that change is about to happen and that it will deliver positive benefits. The one major concern is the delivery of supporting infrastructure, particularly transport provision and flood alleviation. Project Taunton and all key partners are working hard to deliver all aspects of the Vision, including the necessary infrastructure. For example, Members will be aware that Government Funding was recently secured for the Northern Inner Distributor Road and the Third Way. In addition, Taunton has recently been granted New Growth Point status which should help to secure further Government funding.

The current consultation closes on 7th December 2006. A revised Action Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State during Spring 2007. This will be accompanied by a further period of public consultation.

Park and Ride – East Taunton

Somerset County Council are currently preparing a planning application for a Park and Ride site at Cambria Farm. The current programme is to submit the planning application in the early part of 2007. TDBC will be invited to submit comments to the County Council who will determine the application.

Should the application be approved, the current programme indicates that that work should commence in April 2008 with completion in January 2009. This programme assumes a need for a public inquiry.

The County Council met Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council on 6th December to discuss the detail of consultation with the local community prior to the submission of the Planning Application.

Local Government Ombudsman's decision

North Somerset Council has been criticised over a misunderstanding between councillors and officers. Local Government Ombudsman, Jerry White, found that a planning application for a house was approved by officers under delegated powers even though councillors told two local residents that it would go to the Planning Committee.

The Council was found guilty of maladministration causing injustice by misleading the complainants into believing that the application would be refused or that they would have the opportunity to put their objections to the Committee.

Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING – 12th December 2006.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR DOROTHEA BRADLEY–ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Licensing

One year on from the introduction of the later licensing hour, it is still too early to tell what difference it has made both on a National and Local level.

The judging for the second Drink Safe Be Safe awards is due to start shortly. Last year premises that applied were predominately Taunton Town centre based. It is hoped this year to extend them to applications from across the whole borough.

1.2 Food Safety

The Environmental Health department recently had a visit from Toni Smith, who is the newly appointed Regional Co-ordinator for the FSA. The Regional Co-ordinator is a new post and Toni is based in the Government Office of the South West. The visit was co-hosted by Somerset County Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council and it allowed Toni to explore the work undertaken by the Council's Food Safety Team and visit a local food business which had recently benefited from the Council's Safer Food Better Business project.

1.3 Health and Safety

The Health and Safety team in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive will be organising a Safety Awareness Day for Hairdressers in January. The event will be in SCAT and it is expected that up to 200 Hairdressers will take advantage of the training from across Somerset.

1.4 Environmental Protection.

Smoke Appeal.

The Council recently successfully defended an appeal against an Abatement Notice. The Notice was served on a resident, instructing them to abate a nuisance being caused by bonfire smoke that was affecting many other local people. Local residents appeared in court to give evidence to support the Taunton Deane Borough Council case and to back up the evidence being given by the officer concerned. The Court confirmed that the Council was right to serve the Notice, which had also subsequently resulted in a significant improvement in the situation.

Pollution Incidents

The Environmental Protection Team recently investigated an incident where a number of drums of unidentified chemicals were found next to a reservoir. Officers worked with the Environment Agency and Wessex Water to resolve the problem.

In another case the team are dealing with a heating oil spill that has contaminated a private water supply. The well concerned supplied a single household, and an alternative supply of potable water has been arranged for this family. The contaminated water supply has been taken out of use, and it may take up to 50 years for the contamination to fully clear from the system and allow it to be used once more.

Noise Prosecution

The Council recently prosecuted a person for continual breaches of a Noise Abatement Notice. The successful prosecution resulted in a fine of several thousands of pounds and an award of the Council's costs. The court also made a Deprivation Order in relation to stereo equipment previously seized from the person by the Council. This order deprives the owner of the equipment, which the Council will now dispose of.

2.0 WASTE COLLECTION AND RECYCLING

The question most often asked is why doesn't the Council collect plastic waste for recycling from householders. Put simply, not all plastic packaging is recyclable. Plastic bottles can generally be recycled but like all plastic packaging even these are very light and so do not contribute to the Council's recycling rate which is based on weight not volume. They are also very bulky and therefore expensive to collect. They have low value and so the sale of the material does not provide a contribution to the costs of collection. There is nowhere in the SW where they can be processed. They have to be shredded, baled and transported long distances by roads (and then, possibly exported). Finally, plastic bottles are inert and do not biodegrade. Therefore they do not contribute to the emission of greenhouse gases and climate change when landfilled.

Despite this, we are seeking technical and economic solutions to the problems of plastic recycling through the tendering process for the SWP integrated waste and recycling collection contract. This provides an opportunity to procure best practice and value through economies of scale that would not be available to the individual districts in Somerset. Residents have made it clear that increases in Council tax are a real concern and so it is through this process that we hope to satisfy customer expectation without incurring excessive cost.

Meanwhile there are a number of Bring-Banks available to the public throughout the Deane.

3.0 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Pop-up Urinal located at the Parade end of High Street is now operational, the unit is used on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Evening installation is undertaken by the security company whilst locking the public conveniences and the lowering by the cleansing staff as part of their early morning toilet cleaning rounds.

4.0 NET-WORKING

Quantock JAC: This year has seen the 50th anniversary of this body with a number of successful events not least the publication of The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hills by Hazel Riley. Every £1 of our budget contribution draws in £17.04.

Recent legislation has converted Roads used as Public Paths (RUPPS) to Restricted Byways, extinguishing any public right for mechanically propelled vehicles unless users can demonstrate that they had “lawful authority”. 191 applications by vehicle owners have been received to have a number of these routes upgraded to BOATS (Byways Open to All Traffic). The 3 Somerset AONBs have obtained Rural Renaissance money for a Foodpaths project. The idea is to develop 3 circular walks in each ANOB and identify the potential business opportunities for those landowners and businesses involved. There are continental models and the market is the day and short stay visitor with emphasis on quality.

Safe Stronger Neighbourhoods Roadshow was run by the Avon and Somerset Policy Authority, Avon and Somerset Constabulary. The idea is to have a local presence, preferably with a physical base. This helps bring confidence in the system and encourages the local community to involve themselves in co-operating with the police. The example was given of the equivalent of a Youth Justice Panel for the 18-30 age group which has been set up in Chard with good results and again depends upon extensive community involvement.

The Climate Change: Your Council, Your Climate, Your Action Conference was run by the LGA with the Energy Savings Trust with a facilitator and offers of help and examples of best practice on every side plus the obligatory environmentally friendly Hessian bag. The bottom line is that having signed the Nottingham Declaration which commits a council to preparing a strategy within two years, the rest is back to us. As domestic use of electricity accounts for a high percentage of CO2 we all have to remember to turn off the lights and not leave our TVs and computers on standby rather than head for high tech solutions to global warming.

How to Manage Town Centres run by the DCLG took place in the Albemarle Centre which I would recommend as a conference venue. This was very much an interactive how-to-do event with participants from right across the country. It flagged up the necessity for a town centre manager and town centre plan and backing from both police and council. Taunton has to compete against some heavy players and offer a quality product with a difference.

Cllr Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 12th DECEMBER 2006

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM

Wellington Food Town

The Project was launched on 2nd December – with 35 stalls, cooking demonstrations and music laid on for those attending between the hours of 10am to 4pm. A high level of publicity covering at least 50 mile radius of Wellington was achieved.

The event was very well attended with stall holders extremely busy and visitors extremely positive in their enthusiasm. It will be very interesting to analyse the exit sheets, and see how far people had travelled to attend the event. Early indications show that people had travelled from Exeter and Bristol. All in all the event must be considered as a great success, and a tribute to all involved.

A two day event is now being considered for next year, which will include food trails and the creative arts.

TTCCo

The Town Centre manager and team now operate out of a new office in Unit 12 f first floor, Fore Street. The phone and email remain the same.

A busy schedule of events has been organised in the run up to Christmas. There will be a Christmas Craft Fair 14th - 17th December and the Nativity Play and Carols will take place on 14th in the Town Centre. The Ice Rink will have a launch party on 5th and then will be open to the public from 6th to 2nd January

Taunton Town Centre Business Improvement District Bid has now received an offer letter from SWERDA confirming £35k for 06/07 and 07/08. The launch bid night at the Brewhouse was well received; so far over 140 local businesses have attended focus groups to discuss and promote the BID scheme. The response has been positive. BID is a scheme approved by Government to allow businesses in a defined area to pay an extra 'levy' on their business rates for a three year period to finance an enhanced level of services/service improvement in the area. Of all businesses within the area eligible to vote, 51% must do so, and 51% of them must vote in favour of a BID for it to be successful. It is anticipated that the formal vote will be held in September 2007. The EcDev Team has been supporting the Town Centre Manager throughout the process as part of our ongoing partnership work with TTCM Co

Young Enterprise Primary Programme in Taunton Deane

At the moment 9 schools have signed up to the scheme. These schools have indicated that they wish to run the Programme in late Spring/Early Summer terms. Young Enterprise is confident that 20 schools will sign up, and that those located in (or serving) those areas of multiple deprivation in both Taunton and Wellington will be included.

Industrial Sites

Blackdown Business Park is now complete and open for business. Three units have been let and expressions of interest received on some of the others.

A new planning application is expected on the Wiveliscombe site in the new year, and a wildlife survey has been commissioned. The present developer is considering whether a new access could be created rather than the present proposal which joins the Taunton Road.

Business Development Grants

The second judging round for this financial year's Business Development Grant took place on Thursday 16th November. The panel was in a position to award grants to six of the twelve applicants instead of the usual five because only four were awarded in the first round. The quality of the business plans in this second round was of such a high standard that, after a great deal of deliberation, all six grants were given out. The winners include both rural and urban businesses from towns and villages such as Wellington, Stoke St Gregory, Wiveliscombe, Fitzhead and Taunton. This brings the total amount of business grant funding awarded this year to £20,000. The final round for this financial year will take place in February 2007.

Rural Regeneration Team

10 Parishes Centre Wiveliscombe: the consultant's report now received suggests that £0.9m is the cost of just the Community aspects of the Complex, which will include County Council's Children's' Centre. Fundraising for capital grants is underway.

Wellington Market & Coastal Towns Initiative Application

The EcDev department has given considerable support to Wellington Economic Partnership in submitting an application for Wellington to be chosen as one of 27 'new' Market and Coastal Towns in the next round of announcements. A successful application will result in a small amount of funding for two years. This can be used towards the costs of community consultation on a programme of action to improve the Town's economy, but more importantly will open the door to significant funding from SWERDA.

Tourism Development and TIC

60,000 copies of the 'Heart of Somerset' Tourist guide are in the process of being mailed to the Councils' ever growing list of enquirers, and is being distributed to trade and agency outlets throughout the UK. This is being backed up by a national marketing campaign. Currently demand for information appears to be higher than in recent years.

Work to establishing the Somerset Destination Management organization (DMO) is progressing well. The DMO will, if agreed, provide a better service on information and access to information for both residents and tourists alike. To date a branding exercise has been completed and a marketing plan is under construction. In addition a business case and 3-year business plan is being prepared which is expected to be presented to SPTED during late Spring 2007.

Creative Services:

Work is continuing to support the success to date of Creative BOOST and the Creative Industries Development Agency (CIDA) established in September 2006 which are located in the Brewhouse Theatre.

The Brewhouse Theatre is preparing a three year business case and financial plan as part of its planned growth. The Council's Financial Services Division is providing advice and support to the Brewhouse Theatre as it prepares a three-year business case and financial plan.

Councillor Norman Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING 12 DECEMBER 2006.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN CLARK, LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE

Youth Opportunities

The Sports Services Manager has produced an A4 document outlining some of the Facilities For Young People that exist in Taunton Deane. The document provides a photograph of each facility together with a description of what it is and how it was funded. Copies of the document have been placed in the Members Room.

The facilities range from the new Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) in north Taunton to a number of Youth Shelters and Free Football Goals across the Borough. A number, but not all, of the facilities have been provided by TDBC.

Blackbrook Tennis Centre

The new framed fabric structure has been open to the public for more than a month and will be officially opened on 12th January 2007 by Roger Draper, Chief Executive of the LTA.

The courts are already proving hugely popular and are a good example of partnership working with funds having been secured from the LTA to add to commitments from TDBC and Tone Leisure Ltd..

As part of the enhancement work on the Tennis Centre, the Reception area is being upgraded with the installation of a purpose built Reception and automatic doors. Following the completion of these works the Reception area will be staffed at peak times which will provide an improved service for bookings, club member liaison and additional services such as re-stringing will be offered.

Taunton Green MUGA

The MUGA at Taunton Green was officially opened to the public on 21st October 2006. Young people enjoyed football, basketball and mini tennis coaching whilst the official opening itself took the form of a 'penalty shoot out' involving the Mayor, the Portfolio Holder, a representative from Barclays and the MP.

The facility is proving to be very popular with local people and is of course free to use. The £50,000 cost was met by a grant from Barclays and it is hoped to secure a further £20,000 for equipment and coaching.

Pavilions at Hamilton Park and Galmington Playing Fields

In January 2007 TDBC will be applying for approximately £600,000 from the Football Foundation in order to replace the ageing wooden sports pavilions in Hamilton Gault and Galmington Parks. The balance of the funds needed for this project will be found from developer contributions.

It is anticipated that the Football Foundation will respond to the application by the autumn of 2007 and if the application is successful then work could start immediately thereafter.

Both pavilions are well past their sell by date and the facilities are not up to the standard expected in the 21st Century.

The Deano

The Christmas edition of the Deano is currently being sent to every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane a copy has also been published on the TDBC web site.

Green Flag

The Parks staff are currently working on next year's Green Flag applications for Wellington Park, Vivary Park and Victoria Park. The deadline for the applications is 31st January 2007. Judging of the three parks will take place sometime in June 2007 and we will know if we have successfully retained the awards in July 2007

French Weir Park

The application for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards developing the ideas into a costed project has been submitted. The outcome is expected in March. The community group, which has worked with the Council through out this year, has now decided to adopt a constitution and has elected its officers. As this group grows, we will be working very closely on the development of the park and on their planned family fun day next summer. Even if the application is not successful, the Council will use its match funding, coming from local house building developments, to build a new play area.

Victoria Park

Tree and shrub planting will take place around the new children's playground and multi use games area during the winter months. New bollards are to be installed at the end of Wilfred Road to define the entrance to the park and to prevent cars being parked within the park.

New designs for the former children's playground areas are being worked-up and will include a community garden dedicated to Lloyd Fouracre.

Wilton Lands

The silt has been removed from the lake during November and improvement work on the island is currently underway. This involves thinning of the overcrowded trees to allow more sun light onto the lake area to allow marginal plants to become established around the lake and on the island for the benefit of wildlife.

Beechgrove Playing Field

During the summer months the field was successfully drained; one or two isolated wet areas that are off the proposed playing pitch will be drained as soon as possible. Further improvement work is now underway around the perimeter of the field. This includes tree surgery and the creation of a bark footpath to link the sports centre with the Wellington Recreation Ground. The footpath will be constructed through the trees at the bottom of the field.

New Parks Nursery, Stoke Road

Plans are being drawn up for the new nursery site so that construction can commence during the spring of 2007. It is hoped that the new nursery will be open for business during July 2007.

TONE LEISURE LIMITED ACTIVITIES

●Blackbrook Pavilion “Zone”

●The Young Persons’ Physical Activity Zone was formally launched on 27th September, as part of the Tone Schools Partnership Sports Festivals. The festivals were held over two days, attracting around 2,500 school children to a wide variety of activities including archery, climbing, tennis, fitness classes, cycling and orienteering as well as the opportunity to be among the first to try out the machine dance mats and range of interactive activity equipment.

The early indications are that the Zone has been very well received by young people and a comprehensive programme of activities is being developed. Regular bookings have been secured from a number of schools and specialist user groups including Barnardo’s and the MS Society, as well as the regular classes being targeted at young people.

●Wellington Sports Centre

The Centre hosted a very successful open day on 8th October, attracting hundreds of new and existing customers to a packed day of junior and adult activities, including taster sessions of a new junior fitness class programme.

Following discussions with the Youth Service in Wellington a twice weekly fitness session is being started in January, for young people who are not in employment, education or training. These are daytime sessions and the aim is to engage the young people in exercise, by seeing positive benefits and to reduce their anti-social behaviour.

●Wellsprings Leisure Centre

The last quarter saw further improvements in Wellsprings programme delivery. For the children the Centre launched ballet and tap dancing, both proving very popular and approaching capacity as we approach the end of the Autumn term. In October the Centre held its annual Open Day and used this opportunity to launch the new Sports Wall and ‘Why Weight’, Tone Leisure’s weight management programme. Both have been a real hit. Why Weight was full for the first course and the Sports Wall is being used by Ladymead Community School and has been promoted further to local primary schools through the Tone Schools Partnership.

Sporting Events - September saw the Taunton Tigers basketball teams commence their new season, with the senior men gaining an unexpected promotion into National League Division 2. Early signs suggest they will more than hold their own in this league, raising both their profile as a top basketball team and Wellsprings as a superb venue. The ladies team are also now playing national league and using Wellsprings as their home venue. Wellsprings has also hosted the NBTA (National Baton Twirling Association) championships for the first time and continued to host the NAME (National

Association of Majorettes England) local and regional championships. In November the Centre hosted the South West Trampolining Association's regional grading competition.

Commercial Events - In September Wellsprings hosted the Devon and Somerset Air Ambulance Summer Ball. This event went very well and the charity raised a significant sum. However, it was not as well supported as hoped. Tone Leisure staff also arranged the first annual Tone Wedding Fair. This was put together in partnership with the Somerset County Gazette and was very successful, with 39 exhibitors attending and over 400 attendees on the day. This will almost certainly become a regular annual event.

In October we were lucky enough to feature on Jim Davidson's 'Back from the Desert' tour. A nearly full house packed out the Centre on a Wednesday night to enjoy this show, which was very well received by all. Wellsprings was also on the tour list for David Dickinson's new ITV show, 'Dickinson's Real Deal', now showing every weekday afternoon. On the same weekend we hosted 'All American Wrestling'; this family event was not as popular as expected but still a real hit with the 200+ that attended.

Finally, in November we hosted the Round Table's annual speaker evening with Sir Henry Cooper entertaining the 415 members who helped raise £16,000 for St. Margaret's Somerset Hospice. The Toy Dog Society also visited the Centre and Taunton ASDA hosted their Christmas Party for 250 staff members.

Forthcoming Events - Wellsprings has its Big Christmas Party nights in December, with also a concert and children's pantomime to entertain its users. 2007 is also taking shape with all sporting events from 2006 already re-booked and repeat visits from Jethro and Jim Davidson programmed and new attractions such as Freddie Starr and ABC in the pipeline.

Arts

Consultation is taking place with the public and stakeholders on the Town Centre Area Action Plan and designs for the Cultural Quarter. Responses are encouraged via consultation workshops, public displays, talks and promoted through the local press and website. Besides supporting the economic development agenda, the arts can have a strong role to play in creating safer communities and reducing crime and disorder, particularly when it comes to young people. A short video commissioned by the Somerset Arts Local Authorities (LA) Partnership highlights the exceptional quality and rewarding opportunities that arts organisations offer many communities in Taunton Deane and across the County. The Somerset Arts LA Partnership in association with the Arts Council England are also commissioning research into the social impact of the authorities arts investment. This follows the economic impact study into the creative industries which provided the evidence base for the successful Rural Renaissance application for a Creative Enterprise Resource Centre based in Taunton.

COUNCIL MEETING 12 DECEMBER 2006

Report of Councillor Greg Garner – Housing Services

Housing stock transfer

It well known that the ballot is currently in progress and will close on the 18th December 2006, the results will be announced the following day on the 19th December.

On the 19th December there will be a special meeting of the Executive followed by Full Council to debate the result and make recommendations.

I do not intend to go through the various arguments for or against transfer/retention, this debate has had sufficient airing from a number of quarters and our tenants have either made up their minds and voted or will hopefully soon to do so. I think it was right to continue to ballot and to allow tenants to decide and vote and I am pleased that Full Council supported me in this.

Officers are currently working on the housing budgets for 2007/08. We know that if tenants vote no, there is less money available and cuts will be necessary. Officers are therefore working on a number of scenarios regarding a “yes” or “no” vote. I am working with officers on these budgets but in particular I want to minimise the adverse impact on the housing department and service levels to tenants in the event of a no to transfer vote.

Regardless of the outcome, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all council members, members of staff, the tenants forum, the shadow board and members of the public for their contributions to the housing stock transfer process and ballot. It is something that we were required to do and I commend our officers for the professionalism and diligence with which they executed their duties.

Other projects

In addition to housing stock transfer project the day to day business within housing services has been maintained with minimum disruption although it is also recognised that this has not been easy.

Our bed and breakfast figures for singles and families remain under close scrutiny and are currently manageable i.e. Singles = 13 Families = 1

There has also been much good work and progress in the areas of energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives, also affordable housing. These details are currently being finalised but will feature in my next report.

Cllr Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 12 DECEMBER 2006.

Report of Councillor Terry Hall - Resources

PERSONNEL

We have just finished a very successful programme of Change Management training involving all staff in TDBC. All of the service managers helped to design and facilitate this very important programme

Workforce Planning is now complete and will be published in January. A great deal of work has gone into this plan which will set out the way the organisation plans to ensure the right people resources are in place to meet future service needs and challenges.

Work is continuing on implementing our new Job Evaluation scheme in time for Spring 2007. Managers and staff have been briefed for the task of re describing jobs and all the necessary new job questionnaires have been distributed with about a third now being completed.

10 evaluation panel meetings have so far been held and have gone well. Strategies and implementation terms are being designed and discussed with employee representatives to ease the transition and design an effective job grading and pay scale for the future

The unit continues to provide a high level of professional HR support to the ISIS, Housing Stock Options and Waste partnership initiatives. The refocusing of our activities and structure to dedicate specialist resources is working well.

SICK ABSENCE

An impressive number of strategies involving training, monitoring, management support and the engagement of other specialist support have been implemented in an attempt to reduce absence levels and increase productivity. We are now experiencing a reduction in absence levels but more needs to be done to improve the position further.

I requested a progress report from David Woodbury on the Management Standards initiative TDBC is involved in with the Health and Safety Executive. The objective of the initiative is to achieve a reduction in sick absence through reduction in stress related illnesses

His report is reproduced below

“HSE partner, has sat in to observe delivery of:

- a) The introduction to the management standards presentation.
- b) The feedback workshop to a DLO team, with action plan.

- c) The feedback workshop to an office team with them developing their management action plan.

His response was positive and supportive and has been fed back into the National HSE Team who are pleased that we are getting results.

Pete Weaver has also presented our approach to the North-West CIEH conference where it was well received.

I have used the 'Management System Action Plan' approach to assist in some individual and very local team issues and clearly it has a role in the return to work situation for any employee off with 'stress'.

I think that we have a really useful tool particularly when linked to the leadership and Healthy Workplace initiatives.

A presentation on TDBC approach was given to the South West Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (Bristol Branch). This was well received as clarification on how the standards could be made to work.

HSE have invited TDBC to make a presentation at a number of National workshops. Details to be confirmed. “

CORPORATE SUPPORT

The restructure of Property Services has resulted in Facilities Management and Corporate Administration being merged to form one Facilities team (although at present they are still in different parts of the building). All “In Scope” staff are in the Corporate Services Headship of Kevin Toller

This merger meant that we had two Facilities Managers effectively carrying out the same role. Therefore it has been decided that Angela Eldridge will continue to manage this team and Gwyn Carter will become a Customer Services Manager to assist Claire Bramley in running the contact centre service and work with her on customer access issues.

“ISiS ” – (IMPROVING SERVICES IN SOMERSET)

Members will know by now that each of the three bidders has provided their detailed bids. By the date of this meeting 12th December, each will also have given presentations to the Evaluators. The process of Evaluation will by then be in full swing and continue on into February with visits to sites where each of the bidders currently has a contract.

The amount of the effort put in to the ISIS project by managers from both Councils and now the Police has been enormous and will continue to be so for the next two months. That they have done so with so little impact on the “day job” is remarkable and I congratulate and thank them all for it.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

As previously reported, the Member Charter is a joint initiative between the IdeA and South West Provincial Employees. Its aim is to develop elected members and provide learning and development opportunities that will help them become effective and efficient. It is awarded in the same way as Investors in People where we carry out our own self- assessment and are then externally assessed.

Although voluntary it will be recognised as a standard by which all local authorities will be measured. Since its launch was reported to Council in October the first steps have now been taken towards achieving the required standard. It is intended to form a member steering group very soon.

On the civic front, November saw two very successful civic ceremonial occasions led by the Mayor. The public very well attended the Armistice Day commemoration in Taunton Town Centre on the 11th of the 11th. The usual Remembrance Day Civic Services and Parade were equally as successful.

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the end of the Falklands conflict and in recognition of our successful track record in being involved with events of this nature the Somerset Branch of the Royal British Legion have asked if Taunton Deane will work in partnership with them to organise a commemoration event in Vivary Park.

Boundary Changes

As members know the Electoral Commission have agreed that the final recommendations of the Boundary Committee will be implemented as published. This means we will be publishing a new Register showing the new Wards once the order has been signed. The new register showing the new Wards will be published in January or February 2007. The Register being published on 1st December will be published on the current Wards.

PROCUREMENT

A workshop was held with the Resources Review Panel in September to find out councillors' priorities for what Procurement should deliver. The outcomes identified were value for money, supporting the local and rural economy, encouraging environmental sustainability, promoting equalities and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises.

We are now writing a Joint Procurement Strategy with Somerset County Council that will provide a three-year action plan to develop procurement and deliver these outcomes. We have also agreed an 'Equalities Guide for Suppliers' to ensure that firms and organisations acting on behalf of the Council will follow current equalities legislation and best practise.

We will take these reports to the Resources Review Panel for further challenge in February 2007 and then to the Executive for approval.

Over the next couple of months we will review our low-value areas of spend and the use of Purchasing Cards to make some 'quick wins' in consolidating spend and reducing the volume of invoices and orders to reduce processing costs.

ISiS is expected to provide a more robust and longer-term solution to streamlining procurement processes.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

The main activity within Financial Services is now centred round the production of the budget for the Council for 2007/08. This includes the General Fund services, the Housing Revenue Account and our capital programme.

Members will receive their traditional budget consultation packs just before Christmas and a representative from financial services will be visiting the various political groups in the new year to discuss the Executive's budget proposals.

On top of this there is also a significant amount of work going on in support of some of the major projects that the Council is involved in such as the Waste Contract Integration Project and of course ISIS with both the Stage 1 and Price and Affordability streams requiring significant financial input."

REVENUES

The following activities are underway in the Revenues Group

Preparation for ISiS bid evaluation

Council Tax conversion backlog – now cleared & current post being processed within 3 weeks

Council Tax collection – slightly behind target, but recovery notices are now being issued from the new system

NNDR system conversion – scheduled to take place 4 Dec 2006

New year billing for 2007/08 – planning has now started – bills to be printed & packed off site

BENEFITS

We have made significant progress in clearing the work that accumulated as the result of our conversion to new Benefits systems. At it's peak, the number

of outstanding cases totalled nearly 2,600. At the end of November, we reduced the number of cases to just 746 and are turning around work in under 3 weeks.

Staff are becoming more confident in using the software, but our performance against BVPIs has suffered as the results are calculated based on an average cumulative achievement for the whole of 2006/2007. However, we expect to considerably improve our speed of processing performance in Quarter 4.

The Benefit Service E-Alert issued to all Members on 27 November 2006 provides a breakdown of the unit's performance and on-going initiatives to tackle fraud.

INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICES

The current quarter is being spent focussing on the Managed Audits (The Council's core financial systems), which are undertaken to reassure management that adequate controls are operating within those systems. The Council's External Auditor's can place reliance upon this piece of work in forming their overview of the Council's Financial Systems.

The team has also just finished auditing the Council's performance indicators that were included within the Public Services Agreement with the other Somerset Districts and the County Council.

This piece of work has resulted in Internal Audit being able to sign-off those indicators enabling both the County and supporting districts to claim a performance grant from the Government having demonstrated continuous improvement across a basket of indicators from 2002/03 to 2005/06.

The section continues to play a vital assurance role in the ISIS project and has been involved with the implementation of the replacement Revenues / Benefits and Housing Systems.

CORPORATE PROPERTY

Work has commenced in producing user-friendly information regarding the energy and water consumed in the councils buildings. In the past there has been a considerable amount of information available, but it has not been in user-friendly form. The intention now is to provide quarterly consumption figures together with the actual cost in simple straightforward language. We will back date this information over the last two years together with the annual consumption figures for five and ten years ago. This information should be available on the Internet in the early spring within the Asset Management Plan. It is hoped that staff, armed with this knowledge will take on board the costs involved and do their bit, in helping to reduce costs and damage to the environment.

Asset Management. This years Asset Management Plan (AMP) has now been completed and will be published on the Internet early in the New Year.

The intention is that the AMP will be continually updated as changes occur to the council's assets.

Registration of land.

This project, led by the Councils Solicitor but with involvement from the GIS and Asset Holdings Teams is progressing well. It is anticipated that the work will be completed by the end of March 2007 thereby saving the council a considerable sum of money. The Government wishes all land to be registered by 2012.

Digitising the Terrier.

Although the copying of ownership information from maps to computer has been completed the next task soon to commence will be the digitising of hard copy written information relating to the terrier. This will commence in the spring.

With the likely transfer of the Property Services Group to ISIS, work has commenced in sorting out unnecessary information- files, drawings etc and in rationalising our systems and procedures etc.

Terry Hall