

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BRYANT - COMMUNICATIONS

Recent changes at the top, meant that we said good bye to Stephen Fletcher who was extremely supportive of the role communications plays in informing our staff, partners and of course our customers and in delivering the Council's services. We welcome our new Chief Executive, Penny James, who although she is no stranger to the Council has been forging new relationships with our corporate partners and with the media – all of this is an important part of the Council's public relations.

I am pleased to report that the work being done on a Communications Strategy for the Council is progressing well, and we are in the process of consulting with staff and aim to take the draft strategy to the Review Board in December for members input. It is intended that the Communications Strategy will be a corporate document that will support the Corporate Plan and it will play an integral role in all aspects of the Council's policymaking and service delivery.

A couple of weeks ago the Council's 'new look' web site went live. The site has more interactive features so that users can quickly find what is important to them – this has already won praise from its visitors, one responded, "this looks very smart now and easy to navigate. I use the site quite often and appreciate the difference" and another "that's much better Taunton Deane, the style is a great improvement." It meets a number of access standards including a text only version.

Although it contained a few disappointments the Local Plan Inspector's report on the whole was very positive with a high percentage of the proposals being accepted. Communications will play a vital role in presenting accurate information to the public in an understandable way.

We have ongoing commitments to a range of partners as well as the everyday concern that our message gets out about the council's aims and achievements. The Freedom of the Borough was a successful major event and we had close liaison with the national media. We are continuing to work closely with our partners to deliver the public consultation phase of the Taunton Vision to the whole community.

Consultation on budget setting is ongoing – the public are reacting well to our "What matters to you" campaign, we have already had a good number of responses. The Deane Dispatch will carry budget consultation, updates and reports back to the community on the difference their input is making. This will help us meet CPA standards. The next issue of the Deane Dispatch will be published during the first week of December.

Gwyneth Bryant