

Part II Reports from the Executive

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. The Budget

- 1.1 There is no doubt that Councils all across the country are facing the most difficult of budget rounds this year. The fair economic wind which helped Councils in the last five years or so has been totally replaced by an economic crunch which we have not seen for a generation.
- 1.2 If you had said 18 months ago that many of our banks would have been nationalised and household name retailers like Woolworths would be in administration then you probably would not have had many agreeing with you. On top of this we face huge increases in utility bills and a significant drop in interest rates, which has had an adverse affect on the Council finances, then you get an idea of the problems we face.
- 1.3 It is important that we all act sensibly at this time and put politics aside and work together at this budget time. No one political party has an exclusive right to all the right ideas and solutions and we are more than willing to include any sensible ideas that any Councillor has whatever the political party to ensure that Taunton Deane has a robust budget position for the coming council year.
- 1.4 The administration has already identified several new ways to sensibly reduce our costs and we are currently working on other potential efficiency savings which we will introduce in the very near future. However, it is not only incumbent on the ruling group to do this and I look to the main opposition party as well this year to do the same and work with us and help us through this period and set aside previous party political differences for the good of all residents in Taunton Deane.

2. Core Council Review

- 2.1 I believe it is right that we are now taking this process onwards to the February Full Council cycle. Much work is being done on this process and Members are very much involved in this as well via the Change Group. Briefings will have been provided to all political groups before this meeting to give all Members the opportunity to hear the latest news on this initiative and to ask questions as well.
- 2.2 It is vital that every single Member of this Council is engaged in this process and comes to the February Full Council having attended briefings and made themselves aware of all the relevant information to make a decision at that time. I do want to state at this time that the Senior Management Team have worked

extremely hard to get where we are with this review. There is still much to do but I am confident that we can complete this review on time.

3. Pioneer Somerset

- 3.1 A report which the Somerset Leaders Group of all Councils in Somerset have been working on is near completion and will be presented to all the Councils very early in the New Year.
- 3.2 Much work has been done by Members at all levels on this and our Chief Executive has done much work alongside the other Chief Executives looking at different alternatives and workstreams. I thank Penny for her commitment to Pioneer. The joint scrutiny meetings are yet another part of the Councils working together and can only be a good thing.

4. Telephone Boxes

- 4.1 We have heard from BT that they have accepted our objection to the removal of 14 phone boxes in Taunton Deane. This is a great success and shows that sometimes objections can be successful.
- 4.2 Shirlene Adam, Marc Hole and myself met BT two weeks ago and following this we sat down and considered the responses from Ward Councillors and Parish Councils. We have decided to continue to object to the removal of 24 out of 25 of the remaining boxes at risk. These are a public service and we will campaign to keep them in service.

5. New Gyms

- 5.1 It has been a great pleasure to open the new gyms at Blackbrook and Wellington Sports Centres. These new wonderful improved facilities are a credit to this Council and Tone Leisure and we should be celebrating their completion. I challenge Members to look at these new facilities and then say we have not made the right decision.

6. Ice Rink

- 6.1 The Taunton Ice Rink returned to the town on the 4 December 2008. This is a welcome return for a much loved part of Christmas in Taunton. This year of course it is here without a large subsidy from this Council and just shows as we always said that this could be delivered without the Council having to find money to underwrite the rink.

7. Wellington Monument

- 7.1 I met with the National Trust earlier this year to discuss the ongoing problem of the future of this iconic local landmark. A survey of the monument was carried out during the summer and I am awaiting the results of this. We will then meet the Trust again to discuss the way forward.

7.2 This is an important issue for many local people and I want to reassure residents that the Borough Council will continue to lobby the National Trust to ensure protection of this landmark

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

1. Choice-Based Lettings (CBL)

- 1.1 Homefinder Somerset goes live to the public on the 10 December 2008. All five District Councils are on target to implement the last Abrisas IT Module, called Choice Based Lettings.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane Borough Council have banded over 3,700 applicants who have re-registered.
- 1.3 All applicants who have re-registered have been notified of their banding together with a guidance leaflet explaining how to use the system.

Re Registration Applications as at 24 November 2008	Total
South Somerset District Council	3293
Taunton Deane Borough Council	3725
West Somerset Council	1121
Mendip District Council	1698
Sedgemoor District Council	2402
Total of Local Authority	12239

- 1.4 CBL training has been provided for landlords, and specialist training has been given to support agencies which assist vulnerable households. Surgeries have been held throughout the area to give advice and help.
- 1.5 The first set of properties will be advertised on the www.homefindersomerset.co.uk website on 10 December. No advertising will be posted for the holiday weeks of 24 December and 31 December 2008.

2. Affordable Housing

- 2.1 The proposed Holyoake Street development is progressing well and a Planning application will be submitted shortly.

- 2.2 The projected number of completions for 2008/2009 was 35, but the end result could be significantly higher because current financial difficulties in the market have helped increase the projected numbers. Two open market sites have been sold to Registered Social Landlords and will now provide 16 and 14 units respectively. Completion of one of the sites is expected in this financial year. Other sites which were expected to roll forward into 2009/2010 have the potential to be completed in this financial year. The Enabling Manager therefore anticipates that the projected completions for 2008/2009 could therefore approach 70.

3. Norie House, Taunton

- 3.1 I am pleased to confirm that the construction of Norie House, the new Rough Sleepers' Unit, has been completed on time and residents are now beginning to move in. The unit has emergency accommodation for six persons and also seven self-contained bed-sits. It is very pleasing that this additional facility is coming into operation as the winter sets in and temperatures drop.

4. Collection of Rent Arrears

- 4.1 The Estate Management team has been successful in reducing rent arrears by £70,000 in the past 12 months, and hope to reach their target of reducing arrears to £300,000 by the end of March 2009. Specialist debt and benefit advice is available to tenants who fall into arrears and every effort is made to reach installment arrangements with tenants in difficulty. In a very small number of cases homes may be repossessed, but as Housing Executive Member I have the final say and will ensure that repossession only happens as a last resort.

5. Tenant Consultation on the Core Council Review

- 5.1 I am pleased to report that 29 tenant representatives attended a consultation and information-giving session to hear the Director leading on the Core Council Review, Brendan Cleere, talk about progress with the review and the principles behind it. A further consultation with tenants' representatives will take place early in the New Year when more specific outcomes of the review should be known.

6. Lifetime Tenancies

- 6.1 I am pleased to hear that the new Housing Minister, Margaret Beckett, has distanced herself from reports that she is considering scrapping "lifetime tenancies". Mrs Beckett dismissed newspaper reports that her Department was drawing up proposals to make social tenancies subject to regular reviews of tenants' finances. The idea of forcing people into proving they are poor in order to remain in their home is morally repugnant.

7. Transfer Removal Grants to “Downsize”

- 7.1 The Council assists people who wish to move from family homes into smaller accommodation by the provision of Transfer Removal Grants. So far this financial year 15 under-occupied houses have been released by this method and re-let to families with children.

- 7.2 I have asked the Chief Housing Officer to look at improving and extending this scheme in order to make it even more attractive to those older people who wish to downsize.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith – Corporate Resources

1. Democratic Services

- 1.1 The Remembrance Civic Services and Parade were well attended. Thank you to everyone who put in such effort organising them.
- 1.2 The Member Development Charter status is well on track to being achieved. We have already passed several of the milestones and making good progress towards the others.
- 1.3 Tonya Meers will be attending Group Meetings over the next couple of months to explain further changes which are being proposed to the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.
- 1.4 We are in the process of recruiting a replacement for Alastair Higton, initially this is being done internally.

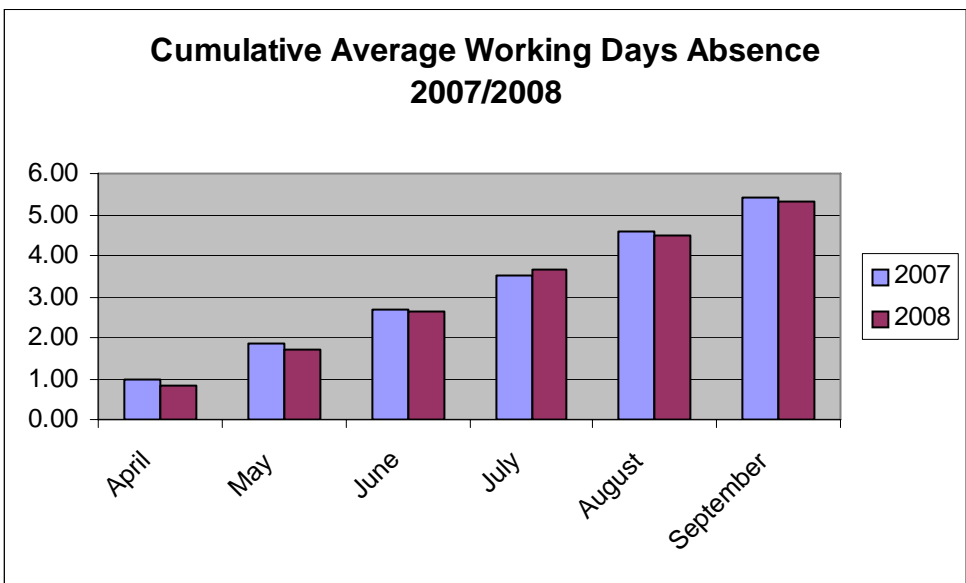
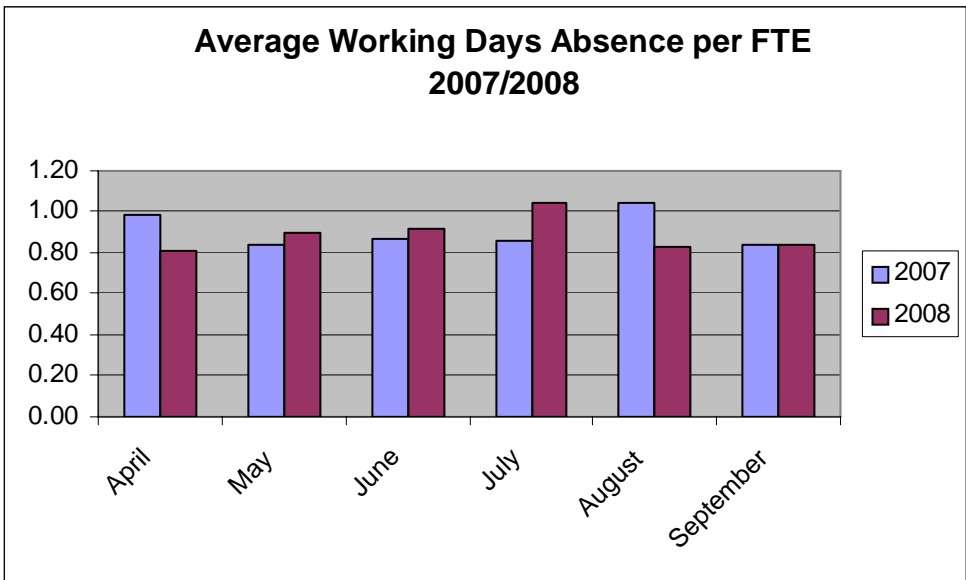
2. Personnel

- 2.1 Staff changes - We welcome Laura Holland who has joined the team to replace Karen Scott as HR Manager and Linda Kirchin (HR Officer) who has joined the team on a fixed term contract until 31 March 2009 to help with the Core Council Review.
- 2.2 Job Evaluation (JE) - The project to implement the new JE scheme is all but complete. There are still ongoing discussions with Unison to achieve a collective agreement. Due to the delay specific legal advice is being sought.
- 2.3 Sickness Absence - This month we have reviewed the monthly absence figures from previous months and have established that there has been a significant amount of late reporting each month. In future, we will recalculate the cumulative absence figures each month to take account of absence reported late. We have also highlighted the issue to managers and explained the need to report absence promptly in order to make sure that absence figures are as up-to-date and accurate.

The figures in this month's report have been fully reviewed and updated. Please find below the latest figures currently available which relate to August 2008, allowing comparisons for the period April - August. The comparisons for the figures to date for the current financial year are shown with comparisons for the same periods last year. These figures show that the cumulative figures for the current year are broadly similar to last year.

April – September

	Average Working Days Sickness Absence Per FTE		Cumulative Average Working Days Sickness Per FTE	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
April	0.99	0.81	0.99	0.81
May	0.84	0.90	1.83	1.70
June	0.87	0.92	2.70	2.61
July	0.86	1.04	3.53	3.65
August	1.04	0.83	4.57	4.49
September	0.84	0.84	5.40	5.33



- 2.4 SouthWest One - The HR Manager continues to be involved in regular meetings with IBM, Somerset County Council and the Police. The organisation design of the HR Services has now been finalised and is being communicated to those it affects. Once affected employees have been informed the structure will be communicated to the wider community. The HR team will be involved in testing the new SAP system for implementation in April 2009.
- 2.5 Core Council Review - The HR Team are working closely with the Retained HR Manager to prepare for Core Council Review.

3. Revenues and Benefits Service Unit

- 3.1 Against a backdrop of continuing economic decline, I am pleased to report that at 31 October 2008, the Revenues and Benefits Service were slightly ahead of their collection targets for Council Tax and Business Rates (NNDR). However, as reported to the Strategy and Performance Panel on 11 November 2008, we need to be mindful that currently collection performance is volatile. The Revenues and Benefits Service must balance the needs of customers facing financial difficulties against their statutory duty to collect local taxation. We will always be sensitive in agreeing realistic payment arrangements and we encourage customers to contact us quickly so we can offer advice and signpost relevant support.
- 3.2 As members will be aware from the Core Brief, we re-launched our Investigation Newsletter explaining how we are combating benefit fraud. This month we have been reviewing and updating our Anti-fraud Policy and Strategy and our Prosecution Policy. We will be asking for scrutiny of these updated documents through the appropriate panels/boards before final endorsement. It is important we develop an ever-stronger culture that benefit fraud is illegal, irresponsible and we will not tolerate it.
- 3.3 I told you in my last report that I hoped to provide some headline results from our customer survey for Benefits Administration. While we are still awaiting the return of the last few forms, I am delighted to say overall satisfaction with the service has slightly improved from last year's excellent results. We will conduct a full analysis and present a comprehensive report on the key findings early in the New Year.
- 3.4 Finally through our "Make a Difference" initiative (outlined in my last report), we have increased Housing Benefit for 26 customers providing extra benefit of £31,300 - average extra income for each customer of over £1,200 a year!

4. Financial Services

- 4.1 Financial Services have been concentrating on working with managers around pulling together the budget for 2009/2010 - this includes proposals for savings, fee increases and the detailed assumptions to be used for costing services. In addition we have been starting to look at some of the financial consequences of some of the Core Council Review proposals.

- 4.2 Financial Services have also been liaising with the SAP Team and the Procurement Team verifying procurement savings proposals. Finally work has started with the other Somerset Districts on the 2009/2010 Council Tax leaflet where we are looking to make the leaflet more user friendly across the county.

5. Performance Management

- 5.1 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) - the service has met with the Audit Commission's CAA Lead and External Auditor to further understand requirements and expectations. The Council responded to the Audit Commission's national CAA consultation. The service has now received draft 2007/2008 external audit reports in respect of Data Quality and Use of Resources and is currently finalising the content with the Auditor. Work will shortly start on identifying improvements resulting from the reports and the new guidance that has recently been issued in respect of Use of Resources for 2008/2009.
- 5.2 The Quarter 2 performance monitoring report is currently being produced for the Strategy and Performance Panel of 11 December 2008.
- 5.3 The Corporate Strategy is currently being refreshed for 2009-12. A special Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting is being convened to assist with the process. The updated strategy will need to take account of a number of items including the LAA indicators and targets, budget position and Councillors and community priorities.
- 5.4 SouthWest One - The shared services model is coming to fruition. The combined Somerset County Council/Taunton Deane Customer Contact Centre relocating to The Deane House will be operational from January 2009, slightly later than planned due to supplier delays. We now need to report our first Southwest One Key Performance indicator failure. This relates to Finance in respect of the following KPI - Statement of Accounts – Accuracy – Closing entries made in Compliance with agreed Accounting Treatments and Standards where these exist.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all staff and Members
a very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

1. Community Safety

- 1.1 The Community Justice Panel (Restorative Justice) in Wellington continues to be well received. Following a lull in cases, agreements have been put in place with Taunton Deane Housing and Knightstone Housing to look at cases outside of Wellington on a pilot basis. It will be interesting to see how this develops and further news of progress will be given in due course. In the meantime, funding options are being explored to secure the future of the project beyond April 2009.
- 1.2 Somerset West Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership will be holding its next meeting in December. Items under discussion are likely to be projects supported by funding during 2008-2009, changes to the County Community Safety structure and progress against targets within the Local Area Agreement and against the Strategic Assessment priorities.
- 1.3 The Energize project continues to hold monthly discos in Taunton Town Centre, which attract in excess of 600 young people. In the lead up to Christmas, Energize has also put on free activities for young people in Goodlands Gardens on late night shopping Thursdays. Activities include climbing walls, a DJ and food stalls.

2. The Children's Champion

- 2.1 The new Hawthorn Play Area on Higher Holway Open Space, Taunton opened at half-term to great acclaim. It is the first of the new style of more natural and integrated play spaces that the Council has built. A film crew from Playbuilder came down from London last week, to record the success of the facility as the children arrived after school to be joined by two Play Rangers.
- 2.2 The children love the challenging equipment and the logs, rocks and hummocks and there is plenty for those with disabilities.
- 2.3 The planting is a mix of wildflower meadow grass, shrubs and bamboos that will provide sound, colour and texture for the children to enjoy. It has no hard surfacing, except for the paths - there is bark, gravel and a huge sand play area for under 5 years all of which provide more things for children to play with (which rubber and tarmac don't). We have retained the old play and basketball area at the top of the hill as an additional space for teenagers.

3. Community Partnerships

- 3.1 The Local Strategic Partnership took the difficult decision to cancel the latest round of Community Partnership meetings. There were some concerns over the buy in of all the required partners/agencies, along with agreement as to how the meetings should be run.
- 3.2 It was felt that without the above agreement/buy in, pressing ahead with the Community Partnerships would not be in the best interests of the public and would undermine their credibility more than cancelling them.
- 3.3 It had been intended to hold a multi-agency workshop to review the above issues prior to this round of Community Partnerships. However this did not prove possible and the Local Strategic Partnership would have been criticised for ploughing ahead with another round of meetings prior to addressing the above issues.
- 3.4 This workshop (to include Taunton Deane, Somerset County Council, the Police, Primary Care Trust and others) has now been arranged for mid December and will hopefully enable us to iron out the above issues and ensure the Community Partnerships move forward on a much stronger footing. I will endeavour to keep Members up to date and informed through the Weekly Bulletin.

4. Pioneer Somerset

- 4.1 Following on from the previous paragraphs, creating a “fit for purpose” management structure to deliver the Somerset Councils’ aspirations for all six Councils Local Strategic Partnership’s is a key consideration of the Pioneer Somerset discussions.
- 4.2 To have all the local government “family” working together in partnership with other key agencies and organisations would strongly support the delivery of services which matter most to residents, businesses and communities.

5. Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service

- 5.1 Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) continues to go from strength to strength. The move to Flook House has been a positive one and CVS are now seeing, on average, 30 new volunteers coming forward each month.
- 5.2 All the CVS’s in Somerset have come together to work collaboratively as an Alliance to bring added strength to all the CVS’s and improve the service to the voluntary sector. The Alliance has already secured over £430,000 from Capacity Builders, a public body set up in 2006 to improve the work of the voluntary sector.

6. Place Shaping Day

- 6.1 On the 5 November 2008, Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership held a Place Shaping Day, which was organised by Taunton Deane Borough Council.
- 6.2 As we all know the district is likely to undergo some major changes over the next two decades, particularly in light of Government-set targets for housing and employment growth, as well as the changing demographics of the district and the likely effects of climate change.
- 6.3 Students from the Somerset College of Arts and Technology used this information to put together a presentation that predicted how Taunton Deane could look in 20 years and their imaginative, time-travelling ideas spurred discussion among delegates.
- 6.4 The event pulled together a wide range of people from diverse organisations. The aim of the day was to strengthen partnership working in the district to shape Taunton Deane in a positive way in future and to provide delegates with a real understanding of the issues facing the district in the 21st century.

7. Regensw

- 7.1 I recently attended the Renewable Futures : Stepping up a Gear Conference in Bristol.
- 7.2 Among the many renewables discussed was a project recently completed by Bristol Port Authority who have built three Wind Turbines situated in a river basin, not on hills. In the first year they produced 17.5 GW of electricity.
- 7.3 Of course the sceptics will say they are inefficient, only work when the wind blows (it's free and creates no carbon). Goodness knows how many Gigawatts we will get if the wind starts to blow!
- 7.4 Wessex Water has three turbines at the planning stage, but what do these businesses and their shareholders know about economics and energy production?

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Steve Brooks – Communications

1 Public Relations

- 1.1 We are working on an increasing number of partnership projects: Somerset Fuel Poverty Partnership, Pioneer Somerset, Project Taunton, Taunton Association for the Homeless (TAH) and Somerset Waste Partnership.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane is the lead for communications on the Fuel Poverty Partnership which brings together Somerset's six local authorities, the Primary Care Trust, Age Concern, the Centre for Sustainable Energy and the Citizen's Advice Bureaux.
- 1.3 We are currently working on a leaflet that will be widely distributed throughout the County – in doctors' surgeries, libraries, community centres and Council Offices. The leaflet provides very basic information on what help is available and signposts people to useful sources – such as Warm Front and Warm Streets.
- 1.4 With TAH, we are working on the reopening of Norie House, the new rough sleepers' unit, while with Somerset County Council we will be promoting the Taunton Unparished Fund.
- 1.5 We continue to promote the new Council Nursery with a feature in the Western Daily Press on its importance to the Britain in Bloom campaign and its significance as one of the few remaining nurseries of its kind in the South West.
- 1.6 We are trying to establish stronger links with Parishes by ensuring all have a copy of Deane Dispatch – some have asked for multiple copies of the page – and through articles in Parish Magazines. We recently had success in promoting the free low energy light bulbs using Parish Newsletters.
- 1.7 If any Member is aware of any newsworthy stories they feel should be covered, please contact Debbie Rundle.

2. Website update

- 2.1 We are making good progress on the development of the new Council Website. We now have website authors in every service and they have all been trained in writing for the web. They are now in the process of rewriting their existing website content ready for the new website. Our aim is to complete the majority of this work by the end of January 2009. This is an ambitious timetable which everyone is committed to achieving.

2.2 We have now completed the designs for the new website and if any Members would like to have a look at the proposed design, please contact John-Mark Strange, Web Content Officer.

3. Place Survey

3.1 We have now exceeded the Government requirements for responses for the Place Survey which is very good news. So far, we have received 1209 replies back.

3.2 We are still expecting the final Report in early 2009 and will receive a detailed analysis on a County-wide basis as well as for each Somerset Council. We are currently working on a timetable for sharing those results with Members and Partners.

4. A-Z of services

4.1 We have now signed off the designs for the next A-Z of Services which will be distributed to all households in Taunton Deane in January 2009.

Councillor Steve Brooks

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Development Management

- 1.1 The key milestone for the operation of the Development Management Service over the last month has been the successful introduction of the ACOLAID IT system.
- 1.2 The transfer of the data and introduction of revised registration procedures have taken place with minimal interruption to the processing of applications. Whilst there have been issues relating to the speed of the application search facility on the website, we are confident that this has now been resolved.
- 1.3 Members may have also experienced problems opening images in recent weeks. However, this is not a problem linked to ACOLAID, but is one that South West One has been asked to address as a matter of urgency. There have been a number of changes to the consultation letters produced in association with applications as a result of the ACOLAID introduction. Any constructive feedback upon these changes will be welcomed.
- 1.4 The recent economic downturn has only reinforced the need to shift emphasis of the Development Management Service away from the traditional themes of negative control and regulation towards the management of the end to end development process to help deliver the sustainable growth we need as part of the Council's place shaping agenda.
- 1.5 A number of actions are in the process of being undertaken in support of this shift in emphasis:-
 - A Planning Support Officer post has been frozen as a result of an internal restructure of the teams. This is in response to the potential reduction in the number of householder applications as a result of recent legislative changes.
 - A Development Team is being set up to ensure earlier engagement with key stakeholders in relation to pre-application submissions. The initiation meeting for this group will have taken place on the 4 December 2008.
 - Our Development Manager, Tim Burton, is liaising with representatives of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) to introduce Building for Life Standards as a means for both officers

and Members to assess the quality of all major residential developments, both as part of the Council's assessment and in its subsequent monitoring. Building for Life is a way to assess the design quality of homes and neighbourhoods. Its 20 criteria provide a practical framework which clearly demonstrates if you have a good housing scheme or not. Members will be given more guidance on how the scheme operates at the training session to be held on 8th January 2009.

- We are working with other Somerset authorities as part of the Pioneer Somerset Supporting Major Schemes and Regeneration Delivery Work Stream to standardise validation procedures and find better ways of delivering major developments. Ideas include the introduction of a countrywide protocol for the use of Planning Performance Agreements, sharing of expertise and standardising validation requirements.
- A review of Taunton Deane's approach to pre-application discussions is taking place to take into account recent Planning Advisory Service Guidance and also the need to focus our limited resources on those proposals that realise corporate ambitions and aspirations that deliver for partners and are locally important.
- In the current economic circumstances, it is inevitable that we will be approached by developers, agents, landowners and their friends all wanting to renegotiate schemes. The need for the Council to take on board a more positive approach to Development Management and to get the tools in place to respond positively and to continue to maximise the available benefits from new development is even more important than ever.

2. Forward Planning

- 2.1 Following consideration by the Local Development Framework Steering Group and Executive, the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document is coming to Council on 9 December 2008 for adoption.
- 2.2 The Community Engagement workshops facilitated by Bakers and 2MD are going well and will continue into early December. A number of rural parishes have also taken up the opportunity to use the toolkit. Stakeholder meetings are also taking place. The response from the workshops and stakeholders will make an important contribution to the content of the Core Strategy that will be subject to formal consultation next year.
- 2.3 The Strategic Housing Land Area Assessment work currently being undertaken by Bakers is now expected to be finished towards the end of the first quarter of 2009.

2.4 The Secretary of States final decision on the Regional Spatial Strategy is not now expected until probably the end of the first quarter of 2009. This is due to the unprecedented number of individual comments made, in excess of some 36,000 I believe.

2.5 The annual Retail Monitors have been published. The Annual Monitoring Report will be completed by the end of December.

3. Residents' Parking

3.1 The proposals for changes in Residents' Parking in Taunton have gone through the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Executive and will be advertised as part of changes to a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in due course and will probably go forward to a TRO Panel for further consideration in the near future.

3.2 The success of the Ringo Parking System in our car parks continues unabated. I am pleased to report that more and more customers are signing up to use this system month by month.

4. SouthWest One

4.1 I am delighted to report that the Society of Procurement Officers in Local Government (SOPO) has recently awarded the prestigious "Outstanding Achievement Award" to SouthWest One recognising its work in saving considerable sums across the partnership.

4.2 In mid November a very successful Members Briefing was held which was an excellent opportunity for Councillors to meet SouthWest One's newly appointed Chairman, Sir Jay Tidmarsh who with colleagues was able to bring Members up to date with the progress of this very important partnership.

4.3 I am also pleased to report that under the "Kidsmart" programme two pre-school learning computers along with ongoing support and training packages have been given to schools in Yeovil and Bruton.

It just remains for me to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Safe, Prosperous and Happy 2009.

Councillor Simon Coles

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development and the Arts

Part 1

1. Project Taunton

1.1 Firepool

- 1.1.1 There is little more to report to Council since the Press Release made on Tuesday, 18 November 2008. We are working closely with one of the preferred developers to see if we can reach agreement which will ensure that headway is made despite the almost complete standstill in the construction and development industry.
- 1.1.2 Both the Steering Group and the Advisory Board are working hard with all the stakeholders to ensure that we procure the infrastructure funding and start work on this. The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and the County Council have reconfirmed their support for the project and are assisting us with submitting bids for both the river frontage and the entrance to the site.
- 1.1.3 When calmer and more propitious times return we may be able to move straight towards signing up companies to take advantage of what is an unique site for commercial development. There may well be an emphasis towards us undertaking a major part in the marketing of Phase 1 of the site alongside or independently from the preferred developer. The Member for Parliament has been briefed and is using his support to promote Project Taunton.
- 1.1.4 I will update the meeting verbally on any further developments on this matter.

1.2 Tangier, the Cultural Quarter and the Retail Area

- 1.2.1 Most of these are proceeding satisfactorily. The County Ground is making rapid headway as we can see for ourselves. The programme for the Museum and Castle Green is on schedule and there is progress on the future of the retail development.

1.3 Infrastructure

- 1.3.1 Work is likely to start on both the Third Way and the Northern Inner Distribution Road on schedule.

2. Culture

- 2.1 We are preparing our response to the draft Somerset Cultural Strategy. It fits in with our local requirements. Our emphasis is more likely to be about delivery than intentions but it is important that the overall policy is embedded in the Somerset Strategic Partnership.
- 2.2 On 21 October 2008 Gerry Sutcliffe M.P. Minister for Culture visited Taunton and met John Williams and myself. Taunton has been identified through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as a pilot scheme for "Living Places" with the prospect of further funding for development of the Brewhouse and to the widening of involvement with all sections of the community into the Arts. It is vital that we are seen to be playing our part in the cultural offer if we are to draw upon central funding for our projects in the future.

3. Into Somerset

- 3.1 I attended the Somerset in Business Conference held in Yeovil on 27 November 2008 sponsored by SWRDA and organised by the Somerset Chamber of Commerce. The theme was the progress made by the Into Somerset Board towards promoting inward investment in the County.
- 3.2 We are targeting carefully the following aspects to enhance economic activity in the county:-
- the 19 to 44 year olds
 - businesses employing from 5 to 20 people
 - the use of existing businesses to promote the Somerset Brand
 - the sectors within the industry as follows:-
 - (a) aeronautical and advanced engineering
 - (b) creative industries i.e. I.T, Communications and Media as well as the more traditional ones.
 - (c) Food and food related products
 - (d) Service Industries and niche markets.
- 3.3 This list is by no means exclusive and should not be interpreted as complete. There are significant local differences – for example West Somerset's inclination towards tourism.
- 3.4 There are still problems on the governance and structure of the way Into Somerset will operate and we have still to set targets for measuring its performance. I think it is fair to say that Taunton Deane will play a less active part in its operation and devote more time to using the Project Taunton Team to undertake our own inward investment programme in the near future especially with the difficulties of getting the Firepool site developed rapidly.

4. General Economic Climate

- 4.1 It is important that we monitor carefully the impact of the downturn in economic activity on the local economy. The Government Office of the South West (GOSW) has asked us to provide them with anecdotal evidence of this.
- 4.2 It is reflected in many ways. Our own budget preparations show that our Council Tax Base only grew at 0.6% against an anticipated 1.7% growth adding further to the budget gap we have to fill next year. It also reflects on our inability to build new homes.
- 4.3 The CAB figures show an alarming growth in the number of people in three areas which reflect the crisis:-

Number of enquiries 4 months to 31 October 2008

	2007	2008	%increase
Benefit Claims	1364	1699	24.7
Employment Issues	707	805	14.3
Debt Management	1469	1840	25.1

- 4.4 The picture is not all gloom and doom however. There is a belief that the town centre will not suffer unduly this Christmas from my attendance of the meeting of the Town Centre Company on 28 November last.
- 4.5 What we have to do is retain flexibility at all times to meet the needs of business and commerce to assist all in retaining the standard of living we have and come to expect.

Part 2

5. Employment and Skills

- 5.1 The remit of the Project Taunton Skills Group is being extended to form a Taunton Deane Employment and Skills Group, which will be a sub-group to a countywide Employment and Skills Board reporting to the Economic Leaders Group. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) chair the group.
- 5.2 Discussions are underway with Business Link to open an outreach service in The Deane House, which will also be supported by the Business Rates section and Environmental Health who will promote the new service to businesses in Taunton Deane.

6. Networks and Events

- 6.1 The Better Business Group held a discussion meeting on "point of sale promotion", and "improving the client experience", attracting 10 members.
- 6.2 The Quantock Sheep Group has held three meetings, in which:-
 - 1) Well-known national sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings came to give us a talk and farm walk looking at management of grazing systems and pasture disease control (23 members);
 - 2) The group visited Shearwell Data to find out more about electronic tagging and flock recording (soon to be arbitrarily imposed upon the industry at some considerable cost (13 members); and
 - 3) A practical workshop with a sheep vet looking at worm-burden assessments and accurate worm egg counting (15 members).
- 6.3 The annual winter series of workshops "I.T. for Farmers" has been arranged and all places sold - a "full-house" of 25 farmers in total, 11 weeks of 5 hour workshops per week, starting on 16 January 2009.

7. Local Action for Rural Communities

7.1 Blackdown Hills and East Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 7.1.1 The first meeting of the wider Local Action Group (LAG) has been held – an Executive Committee has also been formed and planning for 2009 and beyond is underway.

7.2 Western Somerset

- 7.2.1 The first LAG meeting has taken place.

- 7.2.2 A network meeting has been arranged for the 4 December 2008 at which all of the Somerset Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) groups can meet up to share lessons learned and discuss possibilities for collaboration.

8. Wellington

- 8.1 The Vision for Wellington has been launched with the Wellington Economic Partnership taking responsibility for delivering the Economy and Business related aspirations. The Town Council are due to adopt the plan (in the same way that Parish Councils adopt a Parish Plan) and Taunton Deane must now recognise the Vision for Wellington as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- 8.2 Wellington is also making best use of its membership of the Somerset Market Towns Forum and will shortly be taking advantage of 'mentoring' sessions – a chance to learn from the towns who produced Vision documents some years ago and have now seen many of their project aspirations realised.

9. Ten Parishes

- 9.1 A 'Community Plan Review' has been completed – this looks back at the 2003 plan and evaluates progress made and the impact of the document.

10. Somerset Tourism Partnership (STP) Activities

- 10.1 Taunton Deane's Tourism Officer continues to coordinate the Somerset Tourism Partnership on behalf of all Somerset local authorities, including North Somerset.
- 10.2 Car free day-out itineraries have been produced, promoting 'car free' days out in Somerset. ('Willows, Walk and a Mump', 'Scrumptious Somerset' and 'Countryside, history and Coast' feature Taunton Deane and can be viewed at <http://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/site/things-to-do/days-out>) and a 'Cider Lovers Guide' has been produced.
- 10.3 To date over 120 pieces of national media coverage for Somerset have been generated by the Partnership, many including Taunton Deane.
- 10.4 The second annual tourism conference for Somerset Tourism businesses will be held on 26 February 2009 at Brean Leisure Park.

11. Tourist Information Centre

11.1 The team have refreshed the office to make it more 'customer friendly' and 'sales focused', and are preparing a business plan that is exploring ways to expand activities and introduce new services.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

As we near the end of 2008, I present my report herewith:-

1. Community Leisure

- 1.1 The Christmas edition of The Deano has been sent to every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane, plus libraries and sports centres. A copy has also been published on the Taunton Deane Website.

2. Play

- 2.1 Hawthorn Play Area in Holway - The Department for Children, Families and Schools has been filming this new play as an example of best practice for other Councils. The official opening was well attended and the play space is now being well used. My thanks to Councillor Alan Wedderkopp for going to this event in my absence and to all Taunton Deane Staff for the hard work they have put in.
- 2.2 Play Ranger Service - This service is now running every week from 4pm to 6pm in North Taunton at Taunton Green, in Higher Holway at the Hawthorn Play Space and in Halcon at Hamilton Gault Park. Despite the dark evenings attendances are still good with over 30 children and 8 parents attending the Holway session every week to climb trees, make dens, play games, get muddy and now light a fire. The Play Rangers are reporting a very positive response from both children and adults with parents welcoming the chance for their children to play outdoors.
- 2.3 French Weir Play Facilities - The contractor will commence work on the long awaited new play space at French Weir on 5 January 2009. Funded with developer contributions from a number of Section 106 Agreements, this scheme is actively supported by the Friends of French Weir Park. The Friends have been fundraising for other improvements to the park and undertaking small projects such as the recent bulb planting session.
- 2.4 Wellington Play Area - We are currently looking to provide a play area in Wellington under the same scheme as the Hawthorn Play Area in Taunton. The community and local schools are being consulted.
- 2.5 Skatepark - The Taunton Unparished Fund has awarded £23,000 towards the construction of a concrete wheels park at Hamilton Gault. This is the first step on the route to funding this facility with several other funding applications in the pipeline. Once sufficient funding is secured a tendering exercise for the project will be undertaken.
- 2.5 Free Swimming – As all Councillors know, this issue has been discussed

at both the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Executive. We are still looking to move this forward in the coming year.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

3.1 Health Development

3.1.1 Flexercise Leader Training took place on 12 November 2008 in Taunton. Tone Leisure is working in partnership with Age Concern Somerset's Fit as a Fiddle Initiative to deliver the training. Flexercise is fun, chair-based activity for older people that promotes mental well-being. Eleven individuals were trained and are now able to start delivering Flexercise activity sessions to older people in Taunton Deane.

3.1.2 MEND - Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!
Tone Leisure has been invited to contribute to a short film about Healthy Weight, which is being made to support the promotion of The Healthy Schools Programme in Somerset. The film, which is being made by Somerset Film and Video, on behalf of Somerset Primary Care Trust and Somerset County Council, will be shown to primary school teachers, parents and governors. The film will feature Tone Leisure's MEND Programme in action, an interview with Tone's Health Development Officer, and also a child and their family who have recently seen great success as a result of participating in the Taunton MEND programme.

3.1.3 Children and their families are now being recruited to take part in MEND when it starts again in January, at Blackbrook Pavilion in Taunton and Wellington Sports Centre, Wellington.

3.2 Fitness Development

3.2.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre has been extended with brand new equipment and a new area dedicated for weights. This new area has been created by removing the poorly utilised sauna/steam rooms and changing area. This work was completed at the end of September.

3.2.2 Wellington Sports Centre, have also extended their gym and put in new equipment, including a new weights area. A particular unique feature at Wellington is that much of the new cardiovascular equipment has individual personal viewing TV screens, so you can select your own channel and watch your favourite programme whilst you work out. Visits to the new gym facilities have been very strong in September.

3.2.3 At Blackbrook Pavilion, there is a brand new fitness gym with 75 items of equipment, a boxing fitness zone, new equipment throughout including new weights equipment area and new features such as Power Plates and Pilates type Gravity Machines.

- 3.2.4 The Power Plates and Gravity Machines are located in a dedicated private and quiet room away from the main gym. Power Plates are vibration training equipment. The Gravity Machines offer a fast and effective total body workout. This type of equipment is widely used in Pilates exercises and can benefit both the new and advanced user. The gentle controlled exercise programme is delivering great results particularly in America. Relatively new to the United Kingdom, Blackbrook Pavilion is one of the first facilities in the South West with these innovative solutions to improve fitness in a wide audience. The dedicated private studio opened on 28 November 2008.
- 3.2.5 The Blackbrook Gym also boasts a new six plasma screen TV and music entertainment system in the main gym to help those who find it difficult to motivate themselves to maintain an exercise routine (let's face it - that's most of us!)
- 3.2.6 There is also a new aerobics studio at Blackbrook, completed on 24 November 2008. The main gym development opened mid-October and in the first two weeks of opening, participation levels increased by 45%. Even with the declining usage as Christmas looms, levels of usage still continue to be up by over 30%.

3.3 Facility News

- 3.3.1 **Wellsprings Leisure Centre** - The activity programme at Wellsprings continues to grow, with Ballroom and Belly Dancing being added to the programme in November. These were launched with taster sessions and following very positive feedback have become a permanent fixture.
- 3.3.2 The series of successful events at Wellsprings Leisure Centre has continued into the Autumn with the third Tone Wedding Fair, held in September, attracting over 100 exhibitors and a good level of viewings, despite it being on one of the hottest weekends of the year.
- 3.3.3 Wellsprings is quickly developing a reputation for attracting top comedy acts. A full capacity audience saw Mock The Week's Frankie Boyle appearing at the Centre during October.
- 3.3.4 The staff and customers are now looking forward to a packed Christmas programme, which includes the performance of Mud and Slade and the legendary Big Christmas Parties, which will be catering for over 2,000 guests over 4 nights in December.
- 3.3.5 **Taunton Pool** - Due to the success of last year's Swimathon, Taunton Pool has been asked to be a 'host' site for next year's event. This will mean that the pool will receive greater recognition and publicity for the event and hopefully have more people enroll. Also, through Swimathon the Pool has been given the opportunity to put in a bid for some training funding which will go towards developing staff and improving their service.

3.3.6 **St. James Street** - Milestone at St. James Street Swimming Pool exceeding 1,500 swimmers on its "Learn to Swim" scheme. The Learn to Swim scheme is based on the Amateur Swimming Association's National Plan for Swimming. Swimmers can start on the programme from as early as a few months old right through to adult classes. The driving force behind this success has come from many months of dedicated focus from all departments within St. James Street in offering an exceptional high level of customer service. This balance has been achieved from creating a scheme of work balancing both stroke and skill development making child progression through the programme more streamlined.

3.3.7 **Blackbrook Pavilion** - Phase two of the exciting Health and Fitness development is now open. On Monday, 24 November 2008 the new GOgx Studio opened its doors to for the first time. The initial comments and feedback have been positive, here are just a few:-

- "It's bright and colourful; a real pleasure to exercise in this environment"
- "The air conditioning is fab"
- "Wow, what a music system and the head mic is loud and clear"
- "The sprung floor is great on the old joints"

3.3.8 The new Wellness Studio opens on Monday, 1 December, 2008. This will give members the opportunity of sampling the very latest in fitness equipment, ranging from Power Plates to Gravity System Machines.

3.3.9 **Wellington Sports Centre** - The newly extended and refurbished 'GO' Fitness Gym at Wellington Sports Centre has proved to be an instant success - usage of the facility has increased by an average of 15% (approx 100 more users per week).

3.3.10 Wellington Sports Centre is currently working on a funding application for the development of a permanent Young Person's Fitness/Activity facility within the building, and has successfully progressed to the second phase of this process. The Centre currently attracts approx 50 children to weekly fitness activity sessions and it is hoped that many more local children will be encouraged to participate in regular exercise by having a modern fully equipped facility run by specially trained instructors.

3.3.11 A new weekly Friday evening Youth activity session started in November and, due to external funding, the Sports Centre is able to offer this sports/fitness session free of charge for 12 months. Young people who are most at risk of being involved in crime or disorder are specifically invited to attend these sessions, and a regular 20-30 youngsters have participated each week so far.

3.3.12 On closing my report, I just want to say that on 8 December 2008, I will

be attending the official opening of the Blackbrook Pavilion GO fitness gym. May I offer my good wishes to you all for the forthcoming festive season.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting – 9 December 2008

Report of Councillor Mel Mullins – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Health

1.1 General

1.1.1 Staff Training - A short Training session was held in mid-October for all Environmental Health staff. Subjects included important changes to the out of hours emergency service, fuel poverty, the implications of the new Enforcement Policy and safe lone working procedures. Staff were also updated on the situation regarding progress on the Transformation Projects and the Core Council Review.

1.1.2 Website Re-Write - Work has started on the re-write of the Environmental Health website pages. This is a major Project for which four staff members have received training to be able to migrate information to the entirely new format required.

1.2 Licensing

1.2.1 Taxi Licensing - Work is underway on a full review of the Council's arrangements and policies in relation to Taxi Licensing, which require some significant updates. Several meetings have been held with trade representatives and a consultation document has been produced and continues to be refined prior to formal proposals for change being created and then considered by Members, initially at the Licensing Committee.

2. Taunton Deane Cemeteries and Crematorium

2.1 Cremators

2.1.1 All three cremators have successfully undergone independent emissions testing. The triplicate testing demonstrated compliance with regulations by each of the three cremators.

2.1.2 A complete cremator re-bricking has been completed.

2.1.3 Tendering will begin shortly for Mercury Filtration equipment.

2.2 Book of Remembrance

2.2.1 Tenders are being sought for inscribing and digitally archiving the Book of Remembrance. The Book is available to view every day of the year with online inscriptions viewable through the service website.

2.3 Chapel Repairs

2.3.1 The Crematorium Chapel has successfully undergone roof repairs without disruption to funeral services. Scaffolding was erected over a weekend and the work accomplished outside of normal working time.

2.4 General

2.4.1 Taunton Deane Cemetery extension and Wellington Cemetery extension have yet to be progressed, as finance for these projects has not become available.

2.4.2 Two Remembrance services were held at the Crematorium during November - "A Time of Remembrance" on Saturday, 1 November 2008 and a Catholic Mass on Saturday, 8 November.

3. News on Recycling from the Somerset Waste Partnership

3.1.1. The release of the audited national recycling figures by The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has highlighted strong performances for Somerset and Taunton Deane in particular.

3.1.2 According to the figures Taunton Deane is now the highest recycling district in the County.

3.1.3 Somerset is No.1 in the list of County, Metropolitan and Unitary Disposal Authorities, and Taunton Deane has the highest district recycling rate in the County, with a figure of 49.3% of collected materials recycled. This places Taunton Deane 19th in the list of 273 collection authorities in England. Taunton Deane also performed strongly in tackling levels of residual waste (refuse that goes to landfill), placed 4th in England, with a residual waste per household figure of 375kg/hh. Previous figures from Defra have been based on recycling and residual waste per capita, rather than per household.

3.1.4 A review of the figures by our collection contractors suggests that had this year's figures been based on a per capita calculation Taunton Deane would have returned the highest recycling rate in the country.

3.1.5 Whichever way these figures are calculated it is clear that the roll out of the SORT IT recycling system has proved an unqualified success for Taunton Deane.

Councillor Mel Mullins