

## **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

### **Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council**

#### **1. The Budget**

- 1.1 This has been the most difficult budget any administration has faced in living memory - certainly in the 18 years I have been a Member of this Council.
- 1.2 The economic crisis has hit us all so hard much quicker and much harder than anyone thought just a few months ago. Everyone used the term “credit crunch”, now people call it a recession. Some of the budget problems which we have had to face were totally beyond our control.
- 1.3 The recent massive cuts in interest rates have hit this Council by around half a million pounds. Something I cannot recall any Council Executive having to deal with.
- 1.4 Also the hit on the budget from concessionary bus fares. Once again, this Council has had a shortfall in funding of around one million pounds this year. This is a wonderful scheme but it is not free to Council taxpayers as all of us are footing the bill. We need a radical overhaul of the funding of this scheme by Central Government.
- 1.5 In the last two weeks I have attended a meeting with some of the other Somerset District Leaders and senior officers with the Government Office for the South West and took this opportunity to once again raise this issue to express our strong frustration at the unfair funding on this issue.
- 1.6 It is therefore, I think, a major achievement to be able to propose to you a Council Tax rise of only 2.5 per cent this year. Last year we were the lowest tax rise of any of the other districts in Somerset and we are also this year the lowest proposed rise in Council Tax again. We have also been lower than the County Council both this year and last.
- 1.7 At a time of economic hardship it is so important I feel to keep our costs and taxes as low as possible. I know the opposition may say that they could have delivered an even lower figure but at what cost? Is it right to sacrifice much needed funding for much needed environmental initiatives such as doorstep plastic and cardboard recycling simply to save perhaps a further two or three pounds over a period of a year?

- 1.8 Our record is one that clearly stands up to scrutiny. Over the first two years of our administration we have raised Council Tax by 3 per cent in our first year and our proposals tonight take that to a total of 5.5 per cent over the first two years of this Council. The previous administration led by Councillor Williams raised Council Tax by 11 per cent in the first two years of their administration.
- 1.9 As I said earlier, I am proud that we are earmarking substantial funding for plastic and cardboard recycling. We have been totally steadfast in our commitment to this project and to delay now for up to two years does not seem a sensible option to me. Time and again people call for this to be rolled out and it would be a major blow for so many to put the rollout on hold.
- 1.10 I am also pleased to promote the idea of free swimming for all under 16s and all over 60s. I believe this it is the right that we give residents in Taunton Deane the chance to take part in this ground breaking scheme.
- 1.11 This scheme has also attracted monies from Central Government and the Primary Care Trust. Once again Taunton Deane could be setting the way. We are the only district in Somerset to propose this for both OAPs and also under 16s.
- 1.12 We are also setting aside money for specific grants to projects in less well off areas of Taunton Deane.
- 1.13 The proposed budget also establishes support for those wanting to introduce renewable energy in their homes and also discounts for residents in residents' parking areas if they have cars with low emissions.
- 1.14 I am very pleased to promote this budget package in light of the massive economic turmoil which we find ourselves in.

## **2. Core Council Review**

- 2.1 Full Council will make the decision on the Core Council Review. I will never underestimate what a difficult process this is for the Council as a whole. We are having to make very difficult decisions.
- 2.2 It is quite right that this process had been subjected to the appropriate scrutiny both by the Overview and Scrutiny Board but also by the Change Group which was set up to look at this process. Many questions have been raised by both staff and Members and as the process has developed the Change Group, senior officers and the Executive have responded to these points.
- 2.3 I would like to thank everyone for their patience and the way in which everyone has taken the appropriate time to involve themselves as

Members in the Core Council Review. I would also like to thank our Senior Management Team for the work they have done. Having to both take the process through its course and dealing with the day to day issues this entails is not a easy task. The decisions you will take at Full Council are some of the hardest decisions as Members you will have ever been asked to make.

### **3. The Economy**

- 3.1 As we all know these are very challenging times. Since my last report several national retailers have either gone into administration or ceased trading. This has had an effect on both Taunton and Wellington. We have lost both Woolworths and Zavvi which has left prominent empty shop units in our town centres.
- 3.2 I and the portfolio holder for economic issues are working with our staff and partners to see what can be done to have the units filled as soon as possible. In these tough times this Council will continue to do all it can to support the local economy and the economic well being of the residents of Taunton Deane.

Councillor Ross Henley

# **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Mel Mullins–Environmental Services**

### **1. Environmental Health**

#### **1.1 Food Safety and Health and Safety**

1.1.1 HSE partnership event - I recently attended a very worthwhile event held at Sandy Park in Exeter to review and celebrate the successes of the work carried out by the HSE and Local Authorities in the South West in 2007/2008. The event was also intended to review planned interventions in the current year, and looked ahead to other activity in 2009/2010. The morning was taken up by key speakers, including James Barrahan who spoke on the successful Forum for Regional Excellence in Safety and Health (FRESH), an innovative partnership forum for co-ordinating Health and Safety Executive and the Local Authority activities. The event concluded with a series of workshops with demonstrations of what can be achieved and provided information on projects throughout the region.

1.1.2 Food Star Ratings - Taunton Deane has continued to build on the success of the five star rating scheme. So far, over 500 businesses have been rated, and more than half the businesses have managed to achieve a four or five star rating (57%). The Food Standards Agency has recently consulted on the introduction of a national scheme and was offered a choice of a 'three star scheme' or a 'pass/ fail' system. The Agency Board eventually selected a five star system similar to the one we developed in Somerset, as it is used in the majority of local authorities in the UK who use such schemes.

#### **1.2 Licensing**

1.2.1 Taxi Licensing - Following a meeting of a Licensing Sub Committee on 19 January 2009 the hackney carriage and private hire drivers licence of a Taunton Deane driver was revoked. The hearing arose following complaints of inappropriate behaviour. The driver had been investigated by the Police and as a result his licence had initially been suspended from September 2008. Following the conclusion of the Police investigation the matter was heard by the Committee and his licence was permanently revoked.

#### **1.3 Environmental Protection**

1.3.1 Fly tipping - An investigation of fly tipping in the Quantock Hills resulted in a successful prosecution for Environmental Health for this offence. Andrew Austwick pleaded guilty by post but was required to attend court for sentencing. He received a £500 fine, 70 hours community service and ordered to pay legal costs. Articles appeared in the Western Daily Press and Somerset Gazette and also nationally in Environmental Health News.

1.3.2 Air Quality - Following the evaluation of continuous monitoring for a traffic related pollutant, it has been decided to carry out a detailed assessment for Nitrogen Dioxide due to levels exceeding national guidelines. This will assist in the decision as to whether the Council will need to extend existing air quality management areas to those affected areas of Taunton.

1.3.3 Ombudsman Inquiry - Residents in Hoveland Lane, Taunton complained to the Ombudsman about Planning and Environmental Health issues regarding the Musgrove Hospital Car Park, managed by Q Park, and in particular failing to protect amenity. Environmental Health carried out an investigation into the alleged noise nuisance arising from cleaning the car park over the weekends. Monitoring was carried out and although no statutory noise nuisance was found, Environmental Protection Officers continued negotiations between Q Park, Musgrove NHS and the residents to achieve an improvement in the noise from the cleaning. The Ombudsman found no maladministration.

## **2. Taunton Deane Cemeteries and Crematorium**

### **2.1 Cremators**

2.1.1 Tendering has begun for the supply, delivery, installation, commissioning and maintenance of mercury abatement equipment; the successful company will be required to install the equipment during 2010.

### **2.2 Book of Remembrance**

2.2.1 Tenders were sought for inscribing and digitally archiving the Book of Remembrance and Hilton Studios were successful with their tender. The Book is available to view every day of the year with online inscriptions viewable through the service website.

### **2.3 Crematorium**

2.3.1 The Crematorium has opened over a couple of Saturdays during January to cope with the busy winter period.

Councillor Mel Mullins

# Council Meeting – 17 February 2009

## Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

### 1. A new Era of Council Housing

- 1.1 The Government has issued a consultation paper on “Proposals for removing revenue and capital disincentives to Local Authority investment in new council housing.” In short, the proposals will allow Councils to retain all income from Right to Buy receipts on new or newly-acquired Council Housing and for those properties to remain within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) whilst being excluded from the HRA subsidy system (and the effects, in our case, of Negative Subsidy).
- 1.2 A response to the proposals is being prepared, and will be brought to the re-convened Negative Subsidy Task and Finish group and the Tenants Forum for consideration. The response needs to be with the Department for Communities and Local Government by 17 April 2009.
- 1.3 I don't often quote Gordon Brown, but on this occasion I will make an exception. He was quoted as saying, on 29 January 2009, “Today let me be clear: if local authorities can convince us that they can deliver quickly – and cost-effectively – more of the housing that Britain needs, and if local authorities can build social housing in sustainable communities that meets the aspirations of the British people in the 21st century, then **we will be prepared to give them our full backing and put aside anything that stands in their way.**”
- 1.4 The next piece in the jigsaw is the HRA subsidy review. As Members are aware, this Council expects to contribute £6.1 million of our tenants' rent to the national pot in the coming financial year. If we are going to make a significant contribution to the district's desperate need for new council housing, the subsidy review needs to allow us to keep some of that money so we can fund new prudential borrowing.

### 2. Housing Associations feel the pinch

- 2.1 Concerns about the effects of the credit crunch on Housing Associations are growing. In the national press recently it has been reported that six of the larger associations are in serious financial difficulties.
- 2.2 Tenant Services Authority Chief Executive Peter Marsh has issued warnings that when housing associations' file their financial reports in March 2009 the scale to which their fingers have been burned (so far)

will become evident. Those that have purchased land at the top of the market will inevitably be subject to significant asset write-downs, which may trigger renegotiation of loan deals and consequently higher repayment costs. It is hoped that banks will adopt a responsible attitude, but the National Housing Federation (NHF) has warned that banks may indulge in “aggressive attempts to reprice debt”.

### **3. Tenant Empowerment Report**

- 3.1 Members are aware that a Tenant Empowerment Group, working on “task and finish” principles, has been looking at ways in which tenants can gain a greater say in how their services are delivered and how their rent is invested in the Council Housing Stock.
- 3.2 A consultant who is an expert in the Government’s agenda of tenant engagement and empowerment was employed to work with the Tenant Empowerment Group at their fourth meeting, a full day’s event held on the 12 January 2009. Following this meeting a report has been published which I think gives us a clear and exciting way forward for tenant empowerment and which can inform the coming phases of the Core Council Review.

### **4. Tenant Services Authority (TSA)**

- 4.1 The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the new body responsible for social housing landlords. At the moment it is responsible for housing associations and housing co-operatives, but from April 2010, the TSA will be responsible for Local Authority housing too.
- 4.2 The TSA intends to draw up a brand new set of standards for social landlords and believes that these standards should be firmly based on what tenants want. A “National Conversation” has begun, which will see the TSA talking to tenants from across England to help to build a picture of the things that are important to them.
- 4.3 Through questionnaires, on-line surveys, and regional and local events, the TSA hopes to get the views of thousands of tenants. The standards will be based on this work, published in the autumn, and landlords will start to be measured against them in December 2009.
- 4.4 Taunton Deane Borough Council’s Tenants’ Forum is keen to get involved in the National Conversation and will be having its say:-
  - 10 February 2009 – Tenants Forum members will attend a local event at The Deane House. Members will listen to an introductory DVD about the National Conversation and complete a formal questionnaire, to be returned to the TSA;
  - 5 March 2009 – Up to 4 Tenants Forum members will attend the National Conversation regional event in Bristol.

## **5. Consultation on New Developments**

- 5.1 I am pleased to say that a protocol on the Council's approach to proposed new affordable housing schemes, covering those on Taunton Deane land or as part of the Deane's estate, has been developed with the involvement of both of the major parties.
- 5.2 It sets out ground rules for internal consultation on proposed schemes, and sets principles of community engagement which should allow the community to have an opportunity for genuine influence on the design of an individual project. Affordable housing schemes will always have the potential to stimulate controversy, but I hope that having this clear document in place will minimise argument about the process, and help concentrate minds on the merits of the actual proposal itself. I would like to thank Councillor Williams and Councillor Edwards for their input.

## **6. Norie House – Rough Sleepers Success!**

- 6.1 In my December report I announced that the Rough Sleepers Unit had been completed on time and was helping its first clients.
- 6.2 I can now report that 22 rough sleepers have been accommodated since Norie House opened on 8 December 2008. 15 have gone into Norie House and a further 7 have been accommodated by the Council.
- 6.3 Out of the 22 rough sleepers, 15 remain in the various types of accommodation provided for them, and efforts continue to enable them to move into permanent accommodation and establish a normal lifestyle.
- 6.4 This represents a major improvement in rough sleeping in Taunton Deane.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey





# **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Francesca Smith – Corporate Resources**

### **1. Democratic Services**

- 1.1 The Fifth Somerset Standards Committees' Annual Forum was held over at County Hall on Wednesday, 28 January 2009. Taunton Deane's Standards Committee was very well represented.
- 1.2 As well as receiving an excellent presentation from Dr Michael Macaulay on "What makes a Standards Committee effective?", feedback was received from the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees held in October 2008, Local Assessment Case Studies were considered and there was a feature on the recruitment of Independent Members. All in all, a very worthwhile day.
- 1.3 Congratulations to Craig Morse our Electoral Services Manager who has recently taken, and has passed, final examinations towards achieving a Certificate in Electoral Administration. This award has now been confirmed by The Association of Electoral Administrators.

### **2. Human Resources**

#### **Staff changes**

- 2.1 Amy Sutton, HR Officer has returned from maternity leave.

#### **Core Council Review**

- 2.2 The HR team have been supporting the Retained HR Manager and CMT with the Core Council Review.
- 2.3 We have put 29 employees at risk of redundancy and they have all been offered one-to-ones with Linda Kirchin, HR Officer. We have been implementing a care and support plan for the employees at risk, which includes a pension workshop and career planning sessions.
- 2.4 We are continuing to work on the details of the selection process for the new posts.

#### **Sickness Absence**

- 2.5 The latest figures currently available relate to October 2008, allowing comparisons for the period April - October. The comparisons for the

figures to date for the current financial year are shown below, with comparisons for the same periods last year.

### April - October

	Working Days Sick Per FTE		Cumulative Average Working Days Sick 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
October	0.86	0.97	6.27	6.37

- There are currently 7 long term sick employees.

### 3. Revenues and Benefits Service Unit

3.1 As the recession continues the bite, our Revenues staff have had an increasingly difficult job to collect Council Tax and Business Rates. It is therefore pleasing that at the end of January 2009 we are 1.33% ahead of our collection target for Council Tax recovering nearly £47m (96.28% of Council Tax due for 2008-2009). Recovery of Business Rates is volatile and we are now 0.69% down on our target having collected 95.66% of the debt owed.

3.2 In January 2009 the service took part in a workshop as part of the Money Matters initiative. The aims and objectives of this initiative are simple:

- To create an effective network in Taunton Deane to help local people through the economic downturn.
- To explore how different organisations could improve networking to:-
  - Prevent people in Taunton Deane from falling into debt;
  - Encourage benefits take-up;
  - Encourage people to make use of grants and initiatives to reduce fuel bills.

3.3 The contacts established through the workshop will be invaluable in helping the Revenues and Benefits Service reach out to those most at risk or vulnerable in these difficult times.

3.4 I promised you in my last report to provide more information on the results from our survey into customer satisfaction with the Benefits Service. We had over 600 respondents and overall satisfaction

increased to 82.85%. This is a top quartile result and the best recorded in the 8 years of the survey. A detailed report on customer satisfaction is planned for review and scrutiny in either March or April 2009 when the service will set out its plans for future improvement.

- 3.5 Finally, our “Make a Difference” initiative (outlined in previous reports), has now helped 46 households since July 2008, providing extra benefit of £44k - an average of nearly £1,000 extra income for each customer!

#### **4. Financial Services**

- 4.1 Financial Services has recently completed the 2009/2010 budget process - this has included consultation with the business community, preparation of the budget book and getting together the final Council Tax resolutions which are considered tonight on the agenda for Full Council. We are also finalising the content of the leaflet which accompanies all of the Council Tax bills ready for dispatch during March 2009.
- 4.2 Work over recent weeks has included attending User Acceptance testing for the Finance elements of the SAP system which is due to go live on 1 April 2009. We are about to start thinking about how the closedown of the 2008/2009 accounts takes place and the smooth transition to SAP.
- 4.3 The service is also undergoing a period of considerable change as the whole of Finance across Southwest One moves into a shared service environment. This means that some staff will be dealing with work for any of the partner organisations but we will ensure that there is still a dedicated Taunton Deane Advisory Finance service going forward.

#### **5. Performance Management**

- 5.1 The Council has now received final external audit reports for 2007/2008 as follows:-

**Data Quality** – the Council is at minimum requirements. The recommendations are currently being implemented which includes a Data Quality Strategy of which a draft has been produced and manager awareness training provided.

**Use of Resources Assessment** – the Council has scored 2 out of 4. New more rigorous assessment criteria has been introduced for 2008/2009 and a self assessment and improvements are being implemented where practical.

**Direction of Travel 2008** – A thorough self assessment was completed and forwarded to the external auditors. The document details the Council’s achievements and improvements for the

community and service users. The Auditors are currently assessing the extent of the Council's improvement in 2008.

- 5.2 Performance Monitoring - The Quarter 2 performance monitoring report was scrutinised by the Strategy and Performance Panel of 11 December 2008. This showed that 33% of the Council's Corporate Strategy Objectives were on course and 57% had actions pending to meet the objectives, 10% were off course.
- 5.3 A report on the **Analysis of the 2007/2008 statutory performance indicators** was scrutinised by the Strategy and Performance Panel of 10 February 2009. This showed that 67% of the indicators had improved or remained constant over the previous year. It also revealed that 56% of statutory indicators were in the top two quartiles of all districts, a slight improvement on the previous year.
- 5.4 The Corporate Strategy is currently being refreshed for 2009-2012 and nearing completion. A special Overview and Scrutiny met on 12 December 2008; a draft went to Overview and Scrutiny on 22 January 2009 and final draft to Executive on 4 February 2009. The updated strategy reflects the LAA indicators and targets; revised budget position; and Councillors and community priorities for the next 3 years. Full Council need to approve the final draft.
- 5.5 Southwest One - The shared services model is coming to fruition. The combined County Council/Taunton Deane Customer Contact Centre relocated to The Deane House and was operational at end of January 2009, but did experience some teething problems.
- 5.6 We have now passed the first anniversary of service commencement by Southwest One and can look back at the success of the contract. A first anniversary performance report was sent to all Councillors at the end of December 2008.

Councillor Fran Smith

## **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

### **Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership**

#### **1. Local Strategic Partnership**

- 1.1 The Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) published its most recent Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) – Tomorrow's Taunton Deane – in 2007. The strategy itself has a 10 year time frame and therefore runs until 2017.
- 1.2 During development of the SCS it was agreed to include a small selection of 'indicators we will watch' in the main text of the strategy. A baseline figure for each indicator was included and it was agreed to update on performance against each indicator at regular intervals over the 10 year life of the SCS.
- 1.3 The action plan runs on a much shorter timescale – to coincide with the Somerset Local Area Agreement. Therefore the first action plan was intended to run for one year (in line with the old LAA) before being refreshed at the time the new LAA was signed off, to run for a three year period.
- 1.4 It was agreed the action plan would be regularly monitored and refreshed and as such would be a 'living' document, detailing specific actions to assist in delivering the strategic priorities outlined in the SCS.
- 1.5 It is absolutely crucial that the SCS is effectively performance managed going forward. The SCS outlines how partner organisations will work together to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of Taunton Deane. Without effective performance management of the SCS it will be extremely difficult to measure/gauge whether progress is being made. Comprehensive Area Assessment will be coming into force from April 2009 and will in part focus on 'place' and 'partnership working' and will be looking to see that Taunton Deane has an SCS in place that is effectively developed and performance managed.

#### **2. Pioneer Somerset**

- 2.1 The Somerset Leaders Group has asked the Pioneer Directors Group to investigate the scope for a joined up approach to Local Development Framework production across all six local authorities, as part of the shared services agenda.
- 2.2 This note considers whether there is mileage in such an approach and

concludes that:-

- opportunities exist to build upon the already extensive joint working relationships and arrangements across the planning policy functions in Somerset;
- such opportunities should be investigated with a view to achieving better outcomes for the people of Somerset and improving efficiency; and
- a review should be undertaken by the six local authorities to identify options for more effective joint working and to evaluate each in terms of their potential for enhanced outcomes and increased efficiency, their associated risks, practicability and political acceptability.

### **3. Scrutiny Review of Pioneer Somerset**

- 3.1 The Joint Scrutiny Panel is comprised of two non-executive members from each of the six Somerset Councils (for Taunton Deane, Councillors Alan Paul and Terry Hall are our representatives). The Panel reviewed the activity and outcomes from the development phase of Pioneer Somerset and compared them with the intentions within the original Programme Initiation Document (PID).
- 3.2 The Panel agreed that overall progress had been made by Leaders, Chief Executives and officers working together. Members felt that the initial programme plans may have been too optimistic about what could be achieved quickly. A detailed update report had been produced in November 2008 and is being considered by all six Councils.
- 3.3 The Panel's main concerns were about Programme Management and Communications, particularly with elected Members. The Panel made recommendations, which it will now ask the Leaders Group to consider at their next meeting. This report will also be made available to each Council's scrutiny function to consider future scrutiny arrangements.

### **4. Young People and Children's Champion**

- 4.1 The contractor commenced work on site at French Weir Park, Taunton for this new play space on 5 January 2009 as planned. Subject to the weather, the work should be finished by the end of February.
- 4.2 As a follow up, a "chainsaw artist" will create a sculpture for the play area using one of the felled trees. The play space is costing just over £110,000 and is funded from developer contributions from a number of Section 106 Agreements the Council has negotiated over the last few years with local developers.
- 4.3 The second of two new play spaces being created this year with part funding from the Government's Play Builder fund, is underway in Wellington at Howard Road. The play space will cost £45,000 of which £35,000 is Play Builder money accessed in partnership with Somerset County Council and £10,000 is from a Section 106 Agreement negotiated with the developer of a small site on the corner of the

estate. This site will be finished and opened in March for the children of Wellington to enjoy.

- 4.4 Year Two Play Builder sites will be approved by the County Council shortly and are likely to include new play facilities in Oake and improved play spaces at Lyngford Park and Hamilton Gault parks in Taunton.
- 4.5 With so much work going on to create and improve our play spaces, the Leisure Development Officer has led a process to procure a designer for all the play spaces planned in the next two years across four of the five districts in Somerset. It is hoped to appoint in April 2009.

## **5. Provision of outreach family support services 2009-2011**

- 5.1 The potential role of the private, voluntary and independent sectors in delivering the services was recognised. £400,000 was identified by the Council from within the General Sure Start Grant for this purpose. NHS Somerset identified a further £60,000. This gave a contract with a total value of £460,000.
- 5.2 This meant that the value of the services for the year 2009/2010 was such that in order to comply with the EU procurement rules, it was necessary to commission the services from a service provider on the basis of a competitive tendering process. The Children and Young Persons Director and Portfolio Holder were kept fully informed throughout this process.

## **6. Restorative Justice**

- 6.1 Rowena Stratford has left the project after successfully setting the project on its way to success. Jan Hart, well known as a successful trader in Wellington, has previously been helping to administrate the project and will step up to fill the gap. We wish them both well. We are currently exploiting options for the introduction of a pilot scheme of Restorative Justice solutions with social housing providers within Taunton.

## **7. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership**

- 7.1 The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is currently reviewing projects from 2008/2009 and will be looking at next year's budget. This will focus on priorities for crime reduction in terms of serious acquisitive crime, alcohol and anti-social behaviour. It is likely to focus on specific geographic areas across Somerset West which are most in need.



## **8. CCTV**

- 8.1 With help from the CDRP, Taunton Unparished Fund and the Local Strategic Partnership, five new CCTV cameras will be placed into Halcon, Taunton in the coming months. Possible sites are currently being assessed and cameras will come online in phases. This will also depend on contractors being available to carry out the work such as phone lines and electrical works.

## **9. Anti-Social Behaviour**

- 9.1 We continue to support successful projects such as Vibe and Energize, as well as Taunton Youth Paintball Project. This project is currently expanding 'back to its roots' in Wellington, where the project originated before moving to Hestercombe House. A business plan is being developed to help attract funding to this venture.

## **10. Equalities**

- 10.1 We are working with partners across Somerset to ensure that we deliver our Equalities commitments to the same standard and work towards the new Equalities Framework for Local Government.
- 10.2 In order to achieve this, we have been reviewing our services through carrying out Impact Assessments. These will be used to inform a review of our Corporate Equality Scheme. This will also be impacted by the introduction of the Single Equalities Bill when it is enacted.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

# Council Meeting –17 February 2009

## Report of Councillor Steve Brooks - Communications

### 1. Public Relations

- 1.1 Over recent months, the focus has been on spreading the message on what help is available to residents in Taunton Deane to help them cope with the challenges of the economic downturn.
- 1.2 We are working closely with teams in Economic Development, Revenues and Benefits and Housing to highlight initiatives. The launch and on-going programme of business advice clinics in Taunton Deane were publicised in the media and in Business Link and Taunton Chamber of Commerce publications.
- 1.3 At the end of January, we organised a successful workshop to launch our "Money Matters" initiative. The aim of this initiative is to improve networking between local service providers, for example the Credit Union, Taunton Deane services and the Citizen's Advice Bureau to support local people through the economic downturn. The focus is around preventing people from getting into debt, making sure people claim the benefits they are entitled to and claim any grants available to reduce their fuel bills.
- 1.4 A number of local service providers attended the workshop and we will be developing the work over the next few weeks. One specific piece of work will be around producing two signposting leaflets, one aimed at local families and the other at older people.
- 1.5 Deane Dispatch in January 2009 featured help available from the Council in terms of Council Tax and Housing Benefits and highlighted other sources of help – websites and telephone numbers for useful organisations.
- 1.6 February's edition featured the launch of the Council's Money Matters initiative and ten free things to do in Taunton Deane. Copies of Deane Dispatch are now going out to leisure centres, the TIC and community centres as well as the parish councils.
- 1.7 The Council attracted extensive coverage of a fly-tipping case on the Quantock Hills. The case was covered in court so that a contemporaneous report was available for the media together with pictures. We gained good regional and local coverage and excellent publicity in the trade press.
- 1.8 The budget briefing with the media was held in late January 2009 with the media invited to The Deane House. A press release on the budget "headlines" was available to those who were unable to attend.

- 1.9 We continue to work closely with partners – Somerset Fuel Poverty Partnership and the Police most recently - and with other Somerset authorities via the Pioneer Communications Group.
- 1.10 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 excellent progress on the migration of information from our existing Taunton Deane website into the correct format for the new website. We are grateful for the support we have received from services across the Council, in particular the hard work the numerous Web authors have put in to deliver to a very ambitious timetable.
- 2.2 We are now entering the next phase, and our focus now is on quality checking the website content the authors have rewritten and testing the new system.
- 2.3 I would particularly like to thank John-Mark Strange and James Logan for all their hard work in ensuring Taunton Deane meets all key deadlines.
- 2.4 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 received the raw results from the place survey, these results have now been submitted to the Audit Commission to be verified and weighted. We were delighted with our 47% response rate (3000 questionnaires were sent out). We undertook the survey as part of a consortium across Somerset and as a consortium our response rate is in the top quartile nationally.
- 3.2 A number of the results from the place Survey will be used to set the baseline for several Local Area Agreement indicators. Therefore, we are working on a process to share the results. The process will start with workshops for residents and Senior Managers across Somerset to allow us to further explore and understand some of the results to inform the final report. We are currently preparing a timetable for sharing the results with Members.

Councillor Steve Brooks

# **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation**

### **1. Local Development Scheme (LDS)**

- 1.1 The LDS is agreed annually with the Government Office for the South West (GOSW) and is the basis on which housing and planning delivery grant is assessed for plan making
- 1.2 The potential implications of the Core Council Review on the LDS milestones were discussed with Development Portfolio Holders on 15 January 2009. It was agreed that the public consultation on the Core Strategy and small site allocations DPDs be programmed for autumn 2009.

### **2. Regional funding allocation for Transport (RFA 2)**

- 2.1 RFA2 is for the period 2014 to 2019 and RFA 3 2019 plus. Across the region the transport budget is heavily oversubscribed and 23 highway authority schemes are listed. The following three are in Somerset:-
  - Taunton urban growth infrastructure NE Taunton (Creech Castle) £21.8 million total cost (£18.10 RFA)
  - Yeovil eastern corridor package £6.8 million total cost (£3.06 RFA)
  - A38 corridor package Bridgwater to Taunton £55 million total cost (£24 million RFA)
- 2.2 Under a separate connectivity project heading, £100 million is earmarked for the A303/A358 second strategic route but £70 million of this is post 2019. It must be noted that these are NOT final figures because GOSW will not accept more than 20% over programming.

### **3. Building Control**

- 3.1 We are looking to extend partnership working through sharing more staff to help both services in Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor achieve efficiencies and counter the recession. We hope to share the management of the administrative support teams on the same way that the overall management of the services is shared.
- 3.2 We will be drawing the combined resources of the shared services to bid for major contracts like the Musgrove Park surgical expansion and the Building School for the Future Programme in Sedgemoor. We will

be forming a joint project team with West Somerset to bid for work in connection with the projected Hinkley Point expansion.

- 3.3 I am delighted to confirm the Acolaid System continues to perform well and is helping to enable this department to exceed its targets in regard to turnaround times.

**4. Monkton Heathfield**

- 4.1 We are now being told that we may expect the decision from the Secretary of State possibly in March 2009. On the assumption that this is indeed the case it will have taken some eighteen months for this decision to have been reached.

**5. Residents Parking**

- 5.1 The paper revising the arrangements for Residents Parking will now hopefully be approved and implemented to commence sometime early in the new financial year.

**6. Southwest One**

- 6.1 Work is well under way to get the Council ready for implementing SAP, the new electronic system for HR, Payroll, Finance and Procurement. The system, which will be implemented early in 2009, will coincide with implementing the Council's new CRM system.
- 6.2 The plans to combine the customer contact centres for the two councils are now complete. The work has been carried out on the top floor of The Deane House which has enabled the two teams to be located together.
- 6.3 Overall Southwest One has had a terrific first year and all the partners look forward to its continuing growth and success in the future.

Councillor Simon Coles

# **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development and the Arts**

### **Part 1**

#### **1. Into Somerset**

- 1.1 We are still struggling with getting the governance of this organisation set up in a meaningful manner. I'll report on this verbally on 17 February 2009.
- 1.2 In the meantime I have asked the officers to prepare an alternative plan for promoting Taunton Deane for inward investment purposes. This will embrace identifying our role along the M5 corridor as envisaged in the RSS and the source of our Growth Point Funding as well as considering the role of Project Taunton in a wider and deeper delivery role than at present.
- 1.3 I hope that we will be able to collaborate closely with our colleagues in Sedgemoor should this come about. We are also exploring a halfway scheme whereby we enter into a Service Level Agreement but do not take a place on the board.

#### **2. The Brewhouse**

- 2.1 Again I will have to update members on 17 February 2009. They have had a poor Christmas programme and their deficit for December was some £40,000 below budget. Crisis talks are taking place.

#### **3. The Economic Downturn**

- 3.1 I am participating in the informal Economic Downturn Group set up by the County Council Chief Executive and meets monthly with other stakeholders such as the Police, Job Centre Managers and other Local Authorities.
- 3.2 The increase in numbers on unemployment is some 78% up on 12 months ago throughout the County and in Taunton Deane some 75%. The average length of time that a person is on the dole has risen to 13 weeks (not sure from what) but there is still relatively healthy "churn" despite the lower number of vacancies. David Dundas is working closely with Business Link to provide once a week clinics on a one to one basis to help small firms survive.

- 3.3 Ruth James organised a successful seminar “Money Matters” at the Albemarle Centre on 28 January 2009 which led to a greater awareness of the problem of individuals and the areas where support can be provided.

#### **4. Project Taunton**

- 4.1 Negotiations are nearing completion with our preferred developer for the Firepool site. A special Executive has been called for 26 February 2009 hopefully to conclude the deal. There is greater recognition of the work of Project Taunton as a delivery organ by outside bodies such as the South West Regional Development Agency and the Government Office for the South West. Castle Green is progressing well, too.
- 4.2 Its success is proven by the Growth Point Funding for 2009/2010. We will be bringing a paper to the special Executive mentioned above on 26 February to propose the allocation of the £301,000 of revenue and £3,338,000 of capital expenditure in the forthcoming year. It will mean that we can undertake some infrastructure work which might have otherwise come to a halt because of the economic downturn.

### **Part 2**

#### **5. Employment and Skills**

- 5.1 The final draft of an Economic Assessment for Taunton Deane has been completed and is being reviewed. The general conclusion is that Taunton Deane’s economic structure is weak with an imbalance between high value and low value business activity and that the balance between private and public sector is unfavourable.
- 5.2 This shows that Taunton Deane has to act proactively to build a more competitive knowledge based economy in order to increase wage levels and business outputs.
- 5.3 The assessment commends the revised Corporate Strategy, but also identifies a need to consolidate a Vision for Taunton Deane with public sector partners, private sector and third sector organisations. This envisioning process will be the next stage in reviewing the Economic Development Strategies and it is planned to complete this exercise by the end of March 2009, which will result in a draft Economic Development Strategy for approval by Members in April 2009.
- 5.4 The Learning and Skills Council, through the Taunton Deane Employment and Skills Group, has offered to support additional research into workforce skills and training requirements in order to reduce deprivation and lift wage levels across Taunton Deane and Somerset County Council has offered to support research to underpin a revised Economic Development Strategy.

- 5.5 A local business survey of land and property issues has been undertaken with over 600 responses from businesses. The survey has been undertaken to better understand business needs and to inform the future allocation of employment land through the Employment Land Task and Finish Group. The data is currently being loaded onto a database for analysis.

## **6. Networks and Events**

- 6.1 In partnership with Business Link, a 'Credit Crisis' event was held for businesses in Taunton Deane. Business Link is following up this event with a series of seminars for business owners and an information page for businesses will be included with the Council Tax booklet when it is distributed.

## **7. Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC)**

- 7.1 The three groups continue to develop delivery plans for 2009/2010, which will be sent to the South West Regional Development Agency for approval within the next few weeks.

## **8. Wellington**

- 8.1 The Rural Development Officer is exploring how objectives within the Vision for Wellington can be incorporated into the Blackdown LARC Delivery Plan.

## **9. Somerset Tourism Partnership**

- 9.1 It has been agreed with partners that the Somerset Tourism Partnership will not be joined with Into Somerset and Taunton Deane is leading on formalising the governance arrangements of the Partnership for 2009/2010.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley



# **Council Meeting – 17 February 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure**

Herewith I present my Portfolio Report:-

### **1. Community Leisure**

- 1.1 The Christmas edition of The Deano was sent to every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane. The Easter edition is currently in hand.
- 1.2 Carols Around The Bandstand was organised again this year by the Friends of Vivary Park, with some financial assistance from the Council. The event was successful.
- 1.3 Capital Grant Aid - Lydeard St Lawrence Village Hall and Bishops Lydeard Football Club have both received capital grant aid assistance and successfully completed their projects. West Monkton Village Hall has applied for capital grant aid. A decision on which is due to be made at the next meeting of the Joint County and Village Halls Committee in March 2009.
- 1.4 Coming Events in Vivary Park - A concert by Jools Holland has been booked to take place in Vivary Park in July 2009 and the Chinese State Circus is coming to visit the park in September 2009.

### **2. Play**

- 2.1 Green Flag Award – French Weir Park
  - 2.1.1 A draft Management Plan for the Park has been completed with input from the Friends and all staff involved in caring for the park. This is the basis of an application for Green Flag status for the park which will be judged early this summer.
  - 2.1.2 The Lottery grant awarded to the Friends will be funding new signage around the park to explain its history and the wildlife to be found there which will help with the assessment of the park.
  - 2.1.3 The new play space which will be completed this spring will also help the chances of gaining the Award.
  - 2.1.4 The Green Flag Award is important to the community as it acknowledges their input to managing the park and it gives the Council confidence that its parks are being managed to a good standard.
- 2.2 Grant - The Friends of Vivary Park have won a Big Lottery grant of £22,000 for the Sensory Garden there. It is hoped that some more work will now start on

this area where the boating pond used to be and create a very enjoyable, area for all the community. May I congratulate all concerned here in my report for the dedication and hard work put in and still being put in to achieve this wonderful project which can only enhance the magnificent Vivary Park.

- 2.3 Sport - The Government has now informed us that they will provide another £10,000 for the provision of Free Swimming for the under 16's and O.A.P.s that should commence later this year. This means that our commitment can be reduced to £40,000 from £45,000 as we share the £10,000 with Tone Leisure - £5,000 each. These proposals, if approved, will create a fantastic scheme due to commence later this year.

### **3. Tone Leisure Limited Activities**

#### **3.1 Health Development**

- 3.1.1 MEND - Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it! - 5-7s - Tone Leisure has secured the opportunity to deliver one of just five pilot sites in England of the MEND 5-7s Programme. MEND 5-7s is a treatment programme for children aged between 5 and 7 years old who are overweight or obese. The 10 week programme of weekly sessions will be held at Staplegrove Primary School. Places are free. Recruitment of families is currently taking place.
- 3.1.2 Over 50s Exercise Class, Milverton - New exercise class in Milverton for over 50s set up through Active Somerset and Age Concern Somerset. To date three classes have run, averaging 20 attendances per class! Class really making a difference to the older generation in the community.

#### **4. Play Development**

- 4.1 Wild About Play - Tone Leisure held a very successful Wild About Play session at Higher Holway Play Area on 22nd December. Local children came along and took part in the session, which included sports, environmental crafts and forest skills. Further Wild About Play sessions are planned as follows:

18 February - Allington Close Open Space - 10.30 am-12.30 pm

8 April - Victoria Park, Taunton - 10.30 am-12.30 pm

8 April - King George V Playing Field - 2.00-4.00 pm

15 April - Roly Poly Green, Alexandra Road, Wellington - 10.30 am-12.30 pm

15 April - West Buckland Playing Field - 2.00-4.00 pm

26 May - Norton Fitzwarren Playing Field - 2.00-4.00 pm

## **5. Facility News**

- 5.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre - Wellsprings sprang into the New Year with renewed vigor with their GOGx Launch evening. The launch spectacular kicked off on Tuesday, 27 January 2009 from 5-9 pm. Master Trainer Dave Cross was invited down to the centre to put the public through their paces in a master class in Body Combat, with the help of two of Wellsprings instructors: Bev Farley and Jodi Cameron.
- 5.2 This set the scene for a night of high energy and fun, with additional classes in Body Pump led by Donna Williams and Body Vive led by Lou Fyne, with the night ending with Body Balance taught by Donna Walsh. The night was a roaring success with over 200 people attending the launch. Every member was given the opportunity to enter a draw to win a Mini Cooper through Irvines for the weekend, amongst other fantastic prizes.
- 5.3 Wellsprings continue to receive 700 visits per week on the classes programme.
- 5.4 On Tuesday, 3 February 2009, Wellsprings held a Junior Activities Open Evening to promote its junior courses programme. Activities running included soccer skills, street jazz, trampolining and judo as well as a multi-activities session including games and a bouncy castle.
- 5.5 As an extra to this Wellsprings are also planning a pre-school and dance open day on Thursday, 19 February 2009. This will give children the opportunity to take part in free taster sessions in ballet, tap dancing and street jazz and under 4s the chance to experience our popular pre-school programme and trial our new music based courses 'Jolly Babies', 'Music with Mummy' and 'Three Four Time'.
- 5.6 Four Big Christmas parties were a huge success in December, with over 500 visits per night.
- 5.7 A Big members' social is planned for Tuesday, 17 March 2009. The centre staff are looking to rally up as many members as possible to watch Russell Kane who has recently been on Channel 4's Big Brother's Little Brother. He will be appearing at Wellsprings on his latest tour "Gaping Flaw"; doors open at 7 pm show starting at 8 pm.
6. Taunton Pool - Taunton Pool has seen a good start to 2009 with exercise classes and fun sessions at full capacity. Positive feedback from customers has been really good regarding their swimming experience and staff are working on improving standards even further.
  - 6.1 Recruitment for Swimathon 2009 was good and the event was being very much looked forward to, but it had to be cancelled due to the inclement weather.
  - 6.2 New CCTV is being installed in February with internal and external cameras being fitted in four different areas.

- 6.3 Swimfit started in October. Eleven swimmers have been or are still going through it and we have received a lot of positive testimonials. Our aim for 2009 is to drive it even more.
7. Blackbrook Pavilion - Blackbrook Pavilion has had an extremely busy January, obtaining 166 new member sales against a target of 160. This has been achieved with the aid of successful awareness campaigns at the end of last year. One of these campaigns included a very favourable full-page report in the Somerset County Gazette of a news reporter's experiences of the new facilities as a result of being regularly personally trained by an instructor.
- 7.1 Customers are enjoying using the new facilities. Many positive comments have been received. In November the Blackbrook gym was experiencing a 40% increase on utilisation per week. There have been occasions in peak times when the gym has been full to capacity. Despite the gym having over 74 people in it, the design layout enables clients to enjoy and effectively workout.
- 7.2 The new Gravity training machines and Powerplates have been very well received offering variety and spice to members' workouts.
- 7.3 A new GOGx programme of 31 classes per week was introduced at the beginning of January 2009. The programme has a wide range of activities for a broad range of interests. It covers high intensity step, circuits and bodypump, with dance options such as Body Jam, Pilates and Yoga for the mind body enthusiast, Fitball, Line Dancing and Movers and Shakers for the over 50s. This broad programme is anticipated to increase appeal and provide opportunities for the residents of Taunton Deane to be 'More Active, More Often'.
- 7.4 The target for the GOGx programme is 700 participants per week. At the beginning of December the figures were 450. With the new formats and added classes, Instructors are reporting high attendances and we believe we are close to our target.
- 7.5 As we go into February 2009, the general economic climate gives rise for caution. At Blackbrook we have world class facilities, a strong and capable team and, with hard work and endeavour we have the ability to exploit opportunities to achieve our goals.
8. Tennis Centre - Lucie Shuker, number one ranked British Wheelchair Tennis player and member of Taunton Tennis Club, went to the Australian Open in Melbourne in January, but was unlucky to be drawn against the World Number One who she lost to 6-1, 6-3.
- 8.1 The club endeavours to train players not only to become great tennis players but also to move into the coaching profession. Many of the current coaching team started as juniors in the club programme. The club was therefore delighted that Dan Sizer, a former junior player at the club and the South West Tennis Academy, joined the coaching team in a permanent capacity in November.

- 8.2 Two of the club's brightest prospects, Olivia and Sophie Hamilton, aged 7, achieved the highest Mini Tennis rating, red 1, in December 2008, joining only ten other players in the country to achieve this level. The twins, who live in Wincanton, travel to the club three times a week to train.
9. Wellington Sports Centre - 'B-Fit' Project - The final application has now been submitted to the Big Lottery Fund (Young People's Fund) for a project to create a dedicated young people's fitness and activity zone at Wellington Sports Centre. The £202,000 three year project, if successful, would be used to provide a variety of appealing and interactive fitness equipment and 'chill out' zone - all chosen by local young people.
- 9.1 Dedicated instructors would deliver a number of activity sessions each week, including; gym sessions, group cycling, aerobics, and relaxation classes. Training programmes would also be on offer for young people, where they could achieve qualifications such as Fitness Instructor and Sports Coach.

## **10. Other Youth Activity Schemes**

- 10.1 Following the success of previous and current grant-funded activity schemes, both within the Sports Centre and out in the Wellington Community (delivered by Sports Centre staff), Wellington Sports Centre is continuing to work in partnership with the Youth Service and, with the help of Councillor Andrew Govier, it is expected that two new schemes will commence this Spring. One will offer structured activities during the day for school-leavers who are neither employed nor in full-time education. The other will offer a programme of community activities based in parks and outdoor spaces for young people in Wellington.
- 10.2 A new 'Swimskool' scheme - In March 2009, Wellington Sports Centre will be the first of Tone Leisure's swimming pool facilities to implement the revised National Plan for Swimming Teaching (Amateur Swimming Association). The scheme will offer more variety and fun for children learning to swim at all levels and will further strengthen and support the development of swimming in Wellington.
- 10.3 Even though we have had the Christmas break, as you can see, a very full programme from activities in the parks to what is happening with Tone Leisure. A very pleasing period to report on since our last Full Council.

Councillor Richard Lees.