

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. Core Council Review

- 1.1 The Core Council Review has five phases. We delivered Phase One during the early part of last year. We have now signed off at Full Council in November 2009 Phases Two and Four.
- 1.2 As a result of these two phases, nineteen staff will be leaving the authority. Other members of staff will be taking up new strategic posts and we are in a process of recruitment for several other posts as well.
- 1.3 Since starting the Core Council Review we have saved a total of £792,000 in staffing costs and if you include the earlier review of Legal and Democratic Services that total is around £1 million in ongoing annual savings.
- 1.4 This process has not been easy and we must not underestimate the challenge this has caused to the business of this Council.

2. The Budget

- 2.1 I am proposing at this meeting that we set a Council Tax rate below the rate of inflation for the third year running. We are also able to propose the complete doorstep roll out of plastic and cardboard recycling and the continuation for a second year of the very popular Free Swimming Scheme.
- 2.2 We are also able to propose extra help for the Brewhouse Theatre and financial backing for our Council aim to become a 'Carbon Neutral Council'. On top of this we are proposing new backing for youth in Taunton Deane and our deprived areas.

3. Project Taunton

- 3.1 A visible sign of progress for Project Taunton is clear for all to see if you walk a very short distance from here to Priory Bridge Road. The demolition of buildings has begun at the old Market site.
- 3.2 We are also about to take our Taunton Advisory Board to a new level by it developing into a new Growth Board with a wide representation of private and public sector members.

4. Lyngford By-Election

- 4.1 I would like to formally welcome Ben Swaine who was elected in the recent Council By-Election for this Ward.

5. Britain in Bloom

- 5.1 We are pledging continued support for our two Britain in Bloom Committees. However there is a particular need for extra help for our Wellington group.
- 5.2 They have done a great job over many years and now need extra members to support their work. They are going to concentrate on the Gardens Competition this year.

6. Deane DLO

- 6.1 Phase Three of the Core Council Review is the review of Deane DLO and as we all know we have been considering the report by Turner and Townsend.
- 6.2 This process means that difficult choices are going to have to be made. We have taken this through Scrutiny and the Executive and this Council tonight will decide how to take this process to the next stage.

7. Meetings

- 7.1 Since the last Council meeting I have held meetings with Senior Officers of Avon and Somerset Police to discuss Police issues and our Southwest One partnership and also with the President of Taunton Chamber of Commerce to discuss the economic situation in our area.
- 7.2 Sadly we are no further forward with the Pioneer Somerset agenda. It is time for all District Councils to forge a new working relationship to deliver the necessary shared working agenda and I will be suggesting this at our next meeting of the Somerset Leaders.

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

1. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

- 1.1 The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership will discuss the merits of a county wide merger at its March meeting, with partners asked to support this whilst ensuring that a delivery structure remains in place below it to ensure that local delivery is supported and enabled. This is likely to mean greater use of Task and Finish groups and more working across areas, in line with the ethos of the Core Council Review.

2. The Paintball Project

- 2.1 The Paintball Project which ran successfully until 2008 is to be revamped and run by Somerset Leisure on behalf of partners at Hestercombe House, Cheddon Fitzpaine, on lands owned by the Trust. It is intended that this will be run through referrals into the scheme and continue to be at a low cost when compared to commercial ventures.
- 2.2 This scheme is likely to be up and running again from May this year and will provide a more rounded experience for young people who will also get to learn team building skills and climbing whilst on site, amongst other things.

3. CCTV cameras

- 3.1 CCTV cameras in Taunton Town Centre recorded over 5000 incidents in 2009, resulting in more than 450 arrests. The local media have picked up on these figures, highlighting them in a front page Somerset County Gazette story. The Halcon cameras have also proved their worth and figures are currently being collated into their use since their inception during the summer of 2009.

4. A Neighbourhood Pathfinder Bid

- 4.1 A Neighbourhood Pathfinder Bid has been submitted to the Home Office, relating to the Halcon area. This bid is based around the concept of community contracts and delivery by agencies of certain minimum standards in return for greater community involvement.
- 4.2 The results of this bid are likely to be known during March 2010, but we are able to gain multi-agency support for this concept which was highlighted by the Ward Councillor (Councillor Tim Slattery).

5. Wellington Community Justice Panel (CJP) 2008 - 2010

- 5.1 Since the Community Justice Panel in Wellington began in 2008 there have been a total of 39 cases. The first of these was received on 6 June 2008 and the last recorded case before this report was written was received on the 3 December 2009.
- 5.2 The majority of these cases were referred to the Panel by Avon and Somerset Police Constabulary (34), with a further three from Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing, one jointly from Taunton Deane Borough Council Housing and Knightstone Housing, and finally, one was referred across from the Chard Community Justice Panel.
- 5.3 The referrals to the CJP were for a variety of offences. Seventeen were for criminal damage, one of which included theft. Eight were for assault and a further three for common assault, one of which was part of a larger neighbourhood dispute. Five were referred for theft, four for neighbourhood disputes, two for public order, and lastly there was one case of insulting and abusive behaviour.
- 5.4 Of the 39 cases, there were 25 cases with the offender over 18 years of age, and 12 cases with the victim under 18 years of age.
- 5.5 The cases came from different areas. Whilst the majority (28) came from the Wellington area, two came from Taunton, three from Milverton, and a further five from Wiveliscombe. There was also one case referred across from the Chard CJP as stated above.
- 5.6 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) were signed in all but eight cases, which were returned to the referring agency. Seven of these never made it to the Panel, and one made it to the Panel but was then passed back to the referring agency. Five of the eight were returned back to the Police and three returned to Taunton Deane Housing. These cases were returned to the referring agency because they were not considered appropriate to be taken to the Panel or because individuals involved refused to take part and sign any ABC. Of the ABCs that were signed, five were breached, a total of 28 cases have been successfully completed, and two are still open and in progress.

6. Taunton Restorative Justice Panel

- 6.1 The Community Justice Project in Taunton has a new coordinator, who started work at the beginning of the year. He will work out of Taunton Fire Station, with a team of volunteers, taking cases that are less serious in nature.
- 6.2 The aim is to repair harms caused and to provide a level of understanding as to why a crime was committed as opposed to a more formal criminal justice route. This follows on the successful Wellington Restorative Justice Panel. It is expected that the project will start taking cases in March 2010.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

7. Infrastructure Planning

- 7.1 Work has started and will go on for several months this work ties in closely with master-planning (Local Development Framework) of the urban extensions. Urban Initiatives (consultants) have been appointed to lead this.
- 7.2 The growth will be plan-led and so we need to set out community/partner priorities at an early stage and keep in mind that we are considering the next 20-25 years. The three principal areas to be considered will be delivery priorities, funding, and transport and environment detailed planning related matters.

8. Deprivation

- 8.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council will lead on a Deprivation Strategy and work closely with the LSP.
- 8.2 At a recent joint meeting, Brendan Cleere gave an overview of the work and achievements of the East Taunton Multi-Agency Group followed by an update by Joy Wishlade on the North Taunton Multi-Agency Group. Both advised there were positive outcomes from the groups and the contact between agencies had been beneficial, in particular mapping out the work each was doing.
- 8.3 A discussion took place about merging the groups, but the conclusion was that the communities were distinct and warranted separate groups. There was a need to avoid duplication and ensure lessons and resources were shared, such as a directory of providers. A key purpose will be to ensure good communication and provide guidance based on sound evidence. A review should take place in six months to ensure we are focusing on the areas that are priorities.
- 8.4 The role of a sub-group was discussed and an earlier arrangement that Andrew Hinchcliff OF Somerset County Council should be the LSP representative was confirmed.

9. Climate Change

- 9.1 Tackling climate change will be a key priority for Taunton Deane Borough Council and this will involve the production of an Energy Descent Plan. However if it is owned solely by one organisation there is the risk of it gathering dust!
- 9.2 To have value it needs to come from the community and will need to be driven forward by someone. The proposal is that this role be taken on by the LSP. Of course we will need to make a decision soon about the future of The Deane House.

9.3 One recent positive result here at The Deane House will be the purchase of a Powerperfector through Southwest One which will save 10% on our electricity bill.

9.4 **The big saving will be the carbon saving.**

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Alan Paul - Communications

- 1.1 Since the last report, the Deane Dispatch for January and February have been published. The January edition featured the consultation process on the Local Development Framework, in order to engage the public in contributing to what will be a very important document about the future of Taunton Deane for a very long time to come.
- 1.2 The February edition saw some useful information from the Revenues and Benefits section.
- 1.3 Publicising and encouraging the uptake of benefits was one of the issues discussed at the recent Local Government Communications seminar on Recession, Recovery and Value for Money, attended by the Media and Public Relations Officer. The event is free to members of the group.
- 1.4 The seminar provided some extremely useful information and advice from Local Government Communications Officers from across the country. It was interesting to hear that Essex County Council has a communications budget of £2.3 million!
- 1.5 Speakers included Chris Leslie, Director of the New Local Government Network and a representative from the Department for Communities and Local Government. He alerted the audience to the Government website which provides information to local government – www.infor4local.gov.uk.
- 1.6 Penny Lawson, Head of Internal Communications at British Airways, provided a fascinating insight into how difficult issues are tackled within a high profile corporate environment.
- 1.7 A useful workshop from a district council perspective was provided by Wychavon District Council on how they engage with people on budget cutting decisions. They use a system called Simalto. This provides independent, face-to-face interviews with a cross section of local people. The results are analysed and added to more broad-brush consultations carried out by the communications department.
- 1.8 Wychavon has secured RIEP (Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership) funding for the exercise which is carried out roughly every two years. The results showed that people wanted money spent on services benefiting the local environment such as street sweeping while arts funding came lower down the list of priorities.

- 1.9 Blackburn and Darwen Council explained how the use of social networking media provides a cost-effective way of reaching their community which, interestingly, has the highest proportion of young people in the country.
- 1.10 It was a valuable chance to exchange ideas and to make very useful contacts.
- 1.11 On a more local scale, the Pioneer Communications Network is being changed to a Somerset Public Service Communications Group which will include representatives from the Police, Fire Service and NHS as well as the District and County Council. The first meeting took place on 12 February 2010 at Sedgemoor District Council.
- 1.12 The change in membership of the group reflects the increasing emphasis on partnership working and should prove valuable.
- 1.13 Press releases since the New Year have included the topics of flood defences, new play and leisure schemes for east Taunton, praise for the DLO in dealing with bad weather, Food Inspections, the DLO Review, CCTV successes in Taunton and Wellington, the Local Development Framework, healthy eating for children in catering establishments, new cycle paths, the use of an empty shop as a focus for 'Our Place : Your Place : Taunton', the success of the Wellington and Wiveliscombe Restorative Justice Project, and the planting of varieties of apple trees in the Children's Wood, as well as several reactive press releases to combat various examples of misinformation about the Council.

Councillor Alan Paul

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Pedestrianisation of Taunton Town Centre

- 1.1 The consultation period for comment to Somerset County Council on this scheme will end on 18 February 2010.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane has already commented that whilst acknowledging the financial constraints all Local Authorities are under, we are concerned that the experimental implementation is of a very temporary nature and involves less of the town centre than originally envisaged. Furthermore, we hope that upon the completion of the Northern Inner Distributor Road the further pedestrianisation will go ahead.
- 1.3 In all other pedestrianisation schemes around the country there was some reluctance from town centre traders, however after implementation the marked benefits of higher footfall and increased spending have been both welcomed and acknowledged by all concerned.

2. Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Site Allocations

- 2.1 The statutory public consultation under Regulation 25 on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Site Allocations continues as planned during February 2010 and includes the request to land owners and developers to suggest suitable sites for consideration in the future.
- 2.2 Naturally, it goes without saying that any site put forward will not automatically be accepted as suitable and all the normal acceptance criteria will have to be met.

3. Southwest One

- 3.1 Members will recall that in my December 2009 report I indicated that an announcement as to the replacement for Richard Jones as Chief Executive of Southwest One was imminent.
- 3.2 I am delighted to report that Fiona Capstick was duly appointed at the December Main Board Meeting of Southwest One. Fiona brings with her a wealth of experience and an unbounded enthusiasm that will help us achieve our aims.

3.3 As Members are already aware the SAP CRM system went live as planned on the 30 November 2009, following a successful period of testing and training. Customer Advisors are becoming increasingly familiar with the new system, which is now being used in the The Deane House contact centre and reception area as well as at the Wellington Community Office.

3.4 The Customer Satisfaction Survey in relation to Taunton Deane calls into the Contact Centre continues to report excellent results. Overall 93.8% of callers are satisfied with the service they receive from the Contact Centre with 85.6% of callers rating the service good or very good.

4. Houses in Multiple Occupation to be brought under planning control

4.1 Following a consultation the Department for Communities and Local Government has decided to amend the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order to introduce a specific definition of a house in multiple occupation (HMO). This will mean that, in future, a material change of use to a new class for HMO's (C4) will require planning permission.

4.2 At the same time the General Permitted Development Order will also be amended to mean that planning permission will not be needed to revert back to a single dwelling from an HMO. The Government has sensibly indicated that they are not introducing a new definition of an HMO, but are basing it on the definition already in the Housing Act.

4.3 The Government's Chief Planner suggests that "this measure will enable Local Planning Authorities to identify new HMO's with more certainty and target specific areas where there is a need to restore community balance". It is intended that secondary legislation will be brought forward in time for this to come into force on 6 April 2010.

5. Planning Application Fees Frozen

5.1 The Government has previously indicated that planning application services should be self funding and, as a result, have in recent years increased fees significantly in order to move to this position. However it is generally accepted that a further increase of ten percent is still required.

5.2 Notwithstanding this, Ministers have decided that in order to aid economic recovery and support investment, fees should remain at the current rate. This therefore means that the Council Tax payer will continue to fund the gap between income received and the cost of providing the service.

5.3 In addition the introduction of fees for planning appeals is not being introduced as was previously proposed.

6. Planning Team Changes

6.1 Whilst Tim Burton retains overall responsibility for the Planning service, from 1 April 2010 Bryn Kitching takes up the role of Development Management Lead and will be responsible for managing day to day Development matters.

6.2 In the assessment of major proposals he will be supported by Karen Marlow, Julie Moore, Anthony Pick, Matthew Bale and Gareth Clifford. Matthew will also be responsible for overseeing more minor proposals in the West of the Borough, whilst Gareth will take on a similar role for the East area. Karen Purchase, Darren Addicott and Francis Wadsley (who is currently on Maternity leave) will primarily concentrate on applications other than those in the major category.

6.3 The Support Officers, who should be the first port of call for all general enquiries, remain unchanged with Philomena Hogg in the West area and Sarah Melhuish in the East.

6.4 A further change is that Di Hartnell and Nigel Pratt will now act as case officers rather than Consultees, in relation to works on listed buildings.

And finally.....

It would be remiss of me to make no mention of the departure of John Hamer who has served the Wellington and West areas so very well for many years. I am sure that Members will join me in wishing John every success and happiness for the future.

Councillor Simon Coles

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Report of Councillor Francesca Smith - Economic Development and the Arts

As you are all aware the Core Council Review is well underway and the Economic Development Team have been part of the current review. Many of the staff are not remaining within the authority and will be leaving before the next Full Council meeting.

I would therefore like to take the opportunity now to thank the staff for the very professional way they are completing their remaining work and also for the way they are maintaining their enthusiasm. It is very much appreciated as they try to leave the Council with an Economic Development Unit and an Economic Development Strategy that will be able to be continued by the new staff that take up the currently advertised posts. I would like to wish them well for the future.

There will obviously be a time when we will not have a full complement of staff until new positions are filled but I am reassured this will be managed by the Corporate Management Team.

1. Economic Development Strategy

- 1.1 The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) is now completed as a final draft for submission to Community Scrutiny Panel on 2 March 2010 and Executive Meeting on 31 March 2010.
- 1.2 The process began in January 2009 with a statistical analysis of the Taunton Deane economy, in partnership with Professor Mark Hepworth of Geoeconomics and the Economics Department Statistical Team at Birkbeck College led by Dr Martin Frost, published in February 2009 as the Local Economic Assessment for Taunton Deane.
- 1.3 This evidence was used to identify and agree the challenges and opportunities facing Taunton Deane with businesses, statutory and local delivery organisations and strategic partners such as the Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), Government Office South West (GOSW), and Somerset County Council (SCC).
- 1.4 In developing a Vision for what the economy should look like in the future there was a clear message from stakeholders that focus should be given to exploiting the growth potential of Taunton in order to benefit Taunton

Deane residents and the wider Somerset population. The Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Economy paper was published in April 2009.

- 1.5 Following further participation from representatives of business, public service, education and community sectors during the latter part of 2009, the draft EDS explains measures that need to be pursued to strengthen the local economy and create more and higher-value jobs and business opportunities to achieve the economic Vision.

2. Rural Retail Support

- 2.1 Taunton Deane has been a key partner in the project that was commissioned by Somerset's Post Office Network Review Group. This group was formed in response to the fact that many shops lost their Post Office counter due to the Network Change Programme in 2008 and large numbers of rural shops closed as a result.
- 2.2 The purpose was to support independent retailers who lost their Post Office counter to continue to run a shop and independent retailers who run a shop alongside a Post Office counter in a rural area with limited access to services.
- 2.3 The Economic Development Unit at Taunton Deane have funded a study into five shops / Post Offices in Taunton Deane, two of which are Community owned/run. The survey work was conducted between September 2009 and January 2010 by consultants from the Rural Shops Alliance.
- 2.4 The customer base of many rural retail shops has been declining over recent years due to increased customer mobility, changing shopping habits, competition from supermarkets and changing lifestyles but the research indicates that rural shops act as a social base in which customers can meet and they can be important sources of information for many residents. They are of high value to the communities they serve.
- 2.5 Three of the aims of the Rural Retail Support study were to:-
 - to provide rural retailers with specialist practical advice and guidance to help them improve the viability and sustainability of their business;
 - to identify additional opportunities for retailers to expand and diversify; and
 - to produce a written report for Somerset's Post Office Review Group to provide them with a detailed understanding of issues facing rural retailers in Somerset and what they could do to support them effectively in the future.

- 2.6 The Final report will be published during February 2010 and hopefully will be useful for other teams such as Planning, Business Rates and Environmental Health when setting future policy.

3. Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC)

- 3.1 This innovative rural development programme runs until 2013 and is one of the few sources of funding available to businesses, community groups, social enterprises and parish/town Councils in the Taunton Deane area. Taunton Deane is fortunate to have three different LARC areas covering a large percentage of the District:-

(a) The Western Somerset LARC includes the 10 Parishes area and 7 neighbouring Taunton Deane parishes. This group has a fund of £2,250,000 for investment in rural communities across the area. The overall vision is to work towards a low carbon economy and Councillor Peter Watson (Bishops Lydeard) has been appointed to the Executive of this group.

(b) Levels and Moors LARC includes the Taunton Deane parishes of Ruishton, Thornfalcon, Creech St Michael, Stoke St Gregory, North Curry, Durston and Burrowbridge. The total grant available for this area is £1,800,000 and the overall vision is to work towards promoting sustainable development in the Levels and Moors to strengthen the economy, vibrancy and environmental quality for all residents, businesses and visitors. Councillor Dave Durdan (Creech St Michael) has been appointed to the Executive of this group.

(c) The Blackdowns and East Devon LARC known as "Making it Local" includes Wellington and its hinterland and has £2,400,000 funds available. "Making it Local" has three strategic objectives, around which projects will be funded:-

- Raise business performance and local employment;
- Communities and Connections; and
- Make the most of local resources.

- 3.2 All three LARC areas are currently seeking new projects and it would be helpful if Members could promote the scheme within relevant wards.

4. Arts

- 4.1 Following the adoption of 'The Public Life of Public Space: Taunton Deane's Public Art Code' in October 2009, the Public Art and Design Panel have commissioned a public arts advisor, Diana Hatton, and artists,

Sue Palmer and Natalie Parsley to make recommendations to enhance ways of finding and improving the public space along the routes in Taunton town centre.

- 4.2 The 'Routes, Rail, River: Connectivity and Legibility' (RRR) study is particularly exploring the paths and use of space for leisure and sustainable travel along the River Tone and its links from the railway station to the town centre. It is also looking at the visual and functional impact of the Third Way bridge, pedestrianisation of North Street, Castle Green and other developments on ease of movement.
- 4.3 The RRR team will be consulting with other partners, stakeholders and the general public over February 2010 using creative ideas and questions to seek out imaginative and practical solutions to improving people's experience of moving around town and using the river corridor. Watch out for their draft recommendations at the Living Places project in the High Street in the ex Peter Briggs store.
- 4.4 A final symposium on 25 March 2010 will review their recommendations for public art commissioning plans to enhance the routes and encourage people to linger and enjoy Taunton's public space.
- 4.5 Halcon Youth Club have succeeded in securing a voluntary grant from Taunton Deane to continue Street Jam, a street arts project started last summer in East Taunton with Fuse Performance.
- 4.6 Over 180 young people took part, a number of whom (approximately 10 %) are known to be 'NEET's (Not in Education, Employment or Training). A core group of the young people wish to continue creative and circus skills development, and Fuse have secured some short term funds to continue their work with them in Halcon and Priorswood, while further fundraising is underway to expand the project to its full potential.

5. Tourism

- 5.1 Over 100,000 of the new Somerset 2010 Brochure have been distributed nationwide to visitors and Tourist Information Centres. The new design of brochure aims to sell the experience of visiting Somerset and includes advertisements and features on many Taunton Deane Tourism Businesses, supported by the web site www.visitsomerset.co.uk
- 5.2 The Somerset Tourism Partnership has provided grant funding to allow tourism businesses to have 1:1 Green business audits. The audits allow business owners to see how 'green' they are and suggests ideas on how to operate in a more sustainable manner. The aim of the audit is to then

encourage businesses to take part in the Green Tourism Business Accreditation Scheme.

- 5.3 The Somerset Tourism Partnership is undergoing a major review by the Somerset Economic Regeneration Directors Group. The partnership is likely to purely focus on the strategic marketing of Somerset as a tourism destination from 1 April 2010 onwards.
- 5.4 The Taunton Tourist Information, Ticket and Travel Centre (TIC) within Taunton Library have had another hectic and successful couple of months. As mentioned in the last update the location of the Card for Good Causes Charity Christmas Shop inside the TIC proved to be very popular bringing in a noticeable number of new customers and more importantly income to the centre. It is hoped that this will return to the office in early October 2010.
- 5.5 The Ticket Centre within the TIC are looking forward to another busy year with concerts and performances by Somerset Chamber Choir, Cossington Concerts, Taunton Choral Society, Taunton Sinfonietta and Taunton Thespians all currently on sale.
- 5.6 The Taunton Travel Centre have now teamed up with the Isles Of Scilly to sell holiday packages and travel to the island, and closer to home they have been promoting local coach providers Bakers Dolphin and Berry's Coaches new holiday and day tour brochures for 2010.
- 5.7 Deputy TIC Manager Kathy Epps has just celebrated 25 years of working in the centre and her hard efforts over the years are much appreciated and valued.
- 5.8 Following the Core Council Review of the TIC, the TIC Manager has been working with the Growth and Development Manager on the future direction of the office. Any changes to the service will be notified to Members in due course.

6. Project Taunton

Firepool

- 6.1 Demolition of the buildings on the livestock market site has commenced and should be finished by the end of March 2010. The "Auctioneers Building" is being refurbished and retained in the medium term as a marketing centre.

- 6.2 Uncertainty about the amount of Growth Points funding available for next year is making the relative prioritisation of works and purchases much more complicated than would otherwise have been the case.

Cultural Quarter

Cricket Club

- 6.3 The Pegasus development and new stand is now complete. It is understood that terms have been reached to let the two commercial units under the flats and fronting on to Somerset Square.
- 6.4 The construction of the SCCC Club Hub is complete and work to convert the pavilion to a 600 seat conference facility has started with completion during May 2010. This is an exciting development with the opportunity to develop a regional conference centre that will enhance the economy of Taunton Town Centre.

Somerset Square

- 6.5 Landscaping of the wider area to the front of the Pegasus apartments and the Brewhouse is complete - the area adopted by Taunton Deane and formally opened to the public in December 2009.
- 6.6 There is however an issue with health and safety where the seating/steps lead down to the riverside path on the apartments side of the area. Whilst a solution is being sought, barriers have been placed along the length of the seating/steps.

Castle Green and Goodland Gardens

- 6.7 The original planning application was submitted in May 2009 and now includes the demolition of two of the Castle Hotel garages, the wall surrounding the car park and its replacement with a lower and more appropriate wall and the resurfacing of the car park, paid for by the Castle Hotel.
- 6.8 A new planning application covering all the issues that have arisen from discussion and consultation has now had a successful run through the Council's Planning Committee. The application is now being considered by English Heritage.
- 6.9 This has proved to be an extremely difficult and complicated project because of the number of different owners affected, the different interests which they represent and the sheer number of design, transport,

ecological, environmental and archaeological issues requiring to be resolved.

- 6.10 If Growth Point funding for 2010/2011 is confirmed then the team remain confident that the project will be delivered successfully and provide a fantastic public space for Taunton and one which will play a fundamental role in the future success of Taunton.

Tangier

- 6.11 The Third Way Road and bridge is ready to start on site at any time but Department for Transport funding has not yet been received. There is no indication of when the funds will be released.

Retail

- 6.12 The owners of The Old Market Centre have completed the £3,500,000 refurbishment and are continuing to work positively with us on plans for a new retail scheme.

Longrun Meadows

- 6.13 Planning consent with conditions has been granted for landscaping of the 65 acres of land which includes the flood prevention scheme. Local landscape architects, Swan Paul, are managing the landscaping which will begin when weather permits in Spring 2010.

Funding

- 6.14 Taunton Deane, like other Growth Points(GP), have been notified of a 43% cut in previously allocated Growth Points capital allocation for 2010/2011 although our revenue allocation appears to be unchanged. It is not anticipated that funding will be available for draw-down until at least after the General Election.
- 6.15 It has been agreed that some GP funding will be used to fund a short length of the Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) through the Firepool Lock site, in order that the affordable housing scheme can come forward.
- 6.16 Knightstone Housing Association have detailed planning permission to construct 108 units of affordable housing on this site funded by the Homes and Community Agency (HCA), but this scheme will only happen if this section of the NIDR can be constructed.
- 6.17 Without this piece of road the HCA funding would be lost from Taunton. It is planned that the Knightstone development will start in April 2010 and

completed by March 2012.

Community

- 6.18 Project Taunton Young Champions attended the civic ceremony to open Somerset Square and spent the rest of the day working with people involved in the cultural quarter and the pedestrianisation projects towards reports included in the imminent Young Taunton newsletter.
- 6.19 A new low-cost residents' newsletter has been distributed to homes and businesses immediately adjoining the Firepool site. In part this is in response to residents questions about parking in Canal Road whilst the demolition is underway. It is intended that location specific newsletters will be distributed as developments come forward.

Our Place, Your Place, Taunton

- 6.20 The 'empty shop' project funded by Living Places/ Transformation funding in the former Peter Briggs Shoe Shop in the High Street, Taunton is opening on Monday, 8 February 2010.
- 6.21 Museum of Somerset volunteers supported by a paid supervisor will provide staffing for activities, on the theme of *Taunton: past, present and future*, both in the venue and at outreach venues.
- 6.22 The Project Taunton themed week is week beginning 8 March 2010 when lunch time talks and regeneration walks feature throughout. There is a lot of media and press interest in this pilot project and on 25 February 2010 BBC's History of the World team are visiting to profile Newton's Dynamo.

Public Relations (PR) and Marketing

- 6.23 Project Taunton's website V2 went live in January 2010. The site has a more dynamic interface, secure sections for project team access and more accessible downloads for general visitors. The latest electronic newsletter was issued to coincide with the website's launch.
- 6.24 Recent media activity includes a Property Week's interview with Ian Franklin, the success of the flood defences at Longrun and Longrun Meadows planning consent. The PR team will be working with the new Taunton Business Forum as well as the Promoting Taunton Group to ensure resources are coordinated and focused on agreed aims.

7. High Street

- 7.1 An amended scheme to improve the High Street in Taunton has been

agreed at a reduced cost and the funding has been found by the Town Centre Company (£7,500 from the Taunton Unparished Area fund and also £7,500 from private sector contributions).

- 7.2 Deane DLO have worked on the amended scheme and have come up with the final costs to remove/pollard trees and mend and replace damaged paving. At the time of writing my report the schedule of works is still to be received, so by the time of the Full Council meeting they may well be underway.

Councillor Mrs Fran Smith

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

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.
- 1.3A season of summer bandstand concerts has been arranged for Vivary Park, Taunton and The Moscow State Circus will be paying a visit in September 2010.

2. Play

2.1 Wheels Park

- 2.1.1 Work has begun on site on the replacement of the old skate ramps at Hamilton Gault Park, Taunton with a new concrete bowl facility. Young people have worked closely with the constructor, Wheelscape, to fine-tune the design and ensure it both safe and exciting for a range of users.
- 2.1.2 The funding for this has come partly from Section 106 Agreements but principally from the grants applied for by the Community Skatepark Group which total £120,000 from three funding bodies.
- 2.1.3 It is anticipated that the facility will be completed early in the spring.

2.2 Play Spaces

- 2.2.1 Three of this year's Playbuilder funded projects are now under construction: Lyngford Park and Hamilton Gault Park, Taunton and Oake recreation ground.
- 2.2.2 At Lyngford Park there will be a new play space for 8-13 year olds and the kindergarten area is to be refurbished. Both will be complete for the Community Day on 7 April 2010. Work with local young people is also underway to improve the BMX facility at the park in time for the summer holidays.

2.2.3 At Oake we have worked with the Village Hall Committee and local parents to create a challenging landscape play area for local children and the community. We are now waiting the outcome of a funding bid to the Lottery to build phase 2. It is intended that this play space will be a show case to Parish Councils of the value of using a professional designer to create play facilities that don't rely too heavily on formal play equipment.

2.3 Strategic Documents

2.3.1 Four important strategies are out to consultation that will ensure that the Council continues to manage its leisure assets to maximise community benefit and that it secures adequate new facilities for the future.

2.3.2 Strategies for Green Spaces, Playing Pitches, Allotments and Built Sports Facilities will complete the suite of leisure strategies with Play and Community Halls strategies already adopted. The public consultation on the strategies will end on the 17 March 2010 following which they will be presented to the Council for adoption and integrated into the Local Development Framework.

2.4 Longrun Meadows and the River Tone Corridor

2.4.1 The first stage application to Natural England for a Lottery grant to deliver a project improving access to natural spaces along the river for the people of Taunton Deane with a special focus on the communities of North Taunton and Halcon was successful and we have been invited to submit a second stage application by the 4 May 2010 deadline. This is difficult but officers are striving to achieve it. The outcome will be known in August.

3. Parks

Vivary Park Sensory Garden

3.1 The construction of the Sensory Garden has continued over the winter months. The pond and paths are waiting to have the final finishing surfaces applied. Turf has been laid and the planting of the aromatic plants began this month. The garden will be finished this spring and it is hoped to have the official opening during mid May 2010.

Green Flag Parks.

3.2 The annual Green Flag applications to the "Keep Britain Tidy Group" have been made for Vivary Park, Wellington Park, Victoria Park and French Weir. A first application has also been made for a Green Pennant Award for Swains Lane Nature Reserve in Wellington. This is an award open to community groups to recognise the hard work of the

volunteer groups. Judges will be visiting the parks and the nature reserve in May and the results known in June 2010.

Higher Holway Open Space, Taunton

- 3.3 A new BMX track has been installed by Deane DLO and this has proved to be very popular with the local youth. The existing basketball hoop has been moved near to the new children's play area and new tarmac has been laid around the basketball hoop.

Hamilton Road Allotments

- 3.4 Works have been carried out to the allotment site gravel track to improve the access to the allotment extension that took place last year.

Winter Gritting and Salting

- 3.5 The Parks staff, working extremely hard, have been gritting and salting the car parks, crematorium, open spaces and helping Somerset Highways in the town centre during January 2010. They have also been salting and gritting at Musgrove Park Hospital and other hospitals throughout the county through their annual grounds maintenance contract they have with the Somerset Hospital Trust. I am sure the Council would like to put on record just how much we appreciate this tremendously important and difficult work the staff have put in for our community.

4. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Facility News

4.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre

Health and Fitness

- 4.1.1. Innovations and new concepts being implemented include bi-monthly gym challenges, incorporating weight/power lifting competitions. These events will culminate in a Wellsprings Strong Man near the end of the year (approximately November 2010).

Activities and Events

- 4.1.2 Brazilian Soccer School has now started, with over 10 children attending the first course, and already they have impressed the Instructor with their ball skills.
- 4.1.3 The ABBA Thank You For The Music evening on Saturday, 30 January 2010 was sold out (600 tickets).

4.2 Station Road Pool

- 4.2.1 Free Swimming slowed a little during December 2009, which is normally the quietest month in pools. Despite this, nearly 1,500 over 60s made use of the offer and approaching 1,000 under 16s swam.
- 4.2.2 Free Swimming Lessons for over 11s and over 60s are still being enjoyed by nearly 20 non-swimmers per week.

4.3 St. James Street Baths

New Adult Lessons

- 4.3.1 The Free Swimming Lessons initiative launched in the summer 2009 at St. James Street Swimming Baths, in partnership with the ASA, has now led to a demand for adult group lessons during the day.
- 4.3.2 St. James Street is happy to announce a new series of adult group lessons, for people who are looking to improve their confidence and stroke abilities, on Fridays at 11 am.

Swimming Parties

- 4.3.3 St. James Street are now able to offer more pool times for children's swimming parties following a rise in demand since September 2009.

New Schools and Hirers Swim at St. James Street

- 4.3.4 Following a structured timetable review St. James Street have been able to offer several new schools and hirers pool space. Periton Mead Independent School and Spaxton School started in September 2009. Two new hirers (St. Margaret's Hospice and Stratford Lodge) now have permanent slots.

5. Blackbrook Pavilion

Feel Good Factory

- 5.1.1 On 4 January 2010 the new Feel Good Factory was opened - an all ladies facility for those who prefer a more gentle approach to exercise.
- 5.1.2 The Feel Good Factory uses Shapemaster's Power-tone and Easy-tone machines, which combine resistance and cardiovascular exercise. The unique system involves a power assisted exercise circuit that takes just 30 minutes, working the body smart rather than hard.
- 5.1.3 It is suitable for almost anybody and everybody, regardless of their age and physical condition. New member sales were slow at the start due to the inclement weather, but have now taken off dramatically. There

are 27 members, with staff being fully booked with trials and demonstrations.

Teen Gym

5.1.4 September 2009 saw the launch of the Teen Fitness programme. Teenagers are now able to train in the main gym alongside the adults.

5.1.5 The number of participants continues to grow, with the teenagers seeing some fantastic results. This concept has enabled busy parents, with limited available time, to exercise at the same time as their children without having to worry about childcare arrangements. The programme has also been well received by single parent families.

February Giant Camps

5.1.6 An action packed programme for the February holiday camps is planned, which it is hoped will bring in more children than ever before. Taster sessions are being introduced for activities that people may not normally participate in, such as archery and fencing. An added bonus is the Police Dog Handling Team popping in with their dogs to show the children the skills of dog and handler working together.

6. Taunton Tennis Centre

6.1.1 The Senior County Cup took place at the Tennis Centre at the end of November over three days, with men's county teams from Gloucestershire, Avon, Wiltshire and Northamptonshire competing.

January 2010 was a month of tournaments at the Centre, with nine out of the ten weekend days taken up with tournaments.

7. Wellington Sports Centre

Z 3 Young Persons' Activity Zone

7.1.1 Equipment has arrived and the team have their January timetable of activities for all to see. The team saw the first week as a huge success, with 94 visits from 10-16 year olds who braved the cold weather to try out this new facility. Several Deane Councillors came along to see this venture in action and I am sure they will agree with me what a superb facility for younger members of our community this is.

Children's Camps

7.1.2 Children's Camps have been growing from strength to strength, with a fantastic total of 65 visits over the Christmas period.

GO g x Class Programme

7.1.3 The GO g x Class Programme in January has seen the launch of Belly Dancing and the UK Exclusive Belly Drills Programme exclusive to Wellington Sports Centre. Also new to the programme are Street Dance and Pilates.

Free Swimming

7.1.4 Free Swimming continues to attract a strong take up at Wellington, although December was a little quieter than previous months, with approaching 1,000 over 60s taking part and over 600 young people.

8. Vivary Golf Course

8.1.1 As I am sure you will expect, the course was closed for 12 days during December 2009 and, up until the 22 January 2010. 13 days in the month had been affected by the adverse weather conditions.

Again, overall the areas of my portfolio I am sure you will agree, lots of things going on for all age groups and it is a pleasure to be able to bring these issues to Councillors' notice.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Tim Slattery – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Protection Team

Pest Control

- 1.1 The Council has operated a very highly regarded in-house Pest Control Service for many years with a great deal of customer satisfaction. As part of the Council's Core Council Review the Pest Control Service came under scrutiny to determine if a similar service could be offered to customers at a more economical rate.
- 1.2 The Council has considered and approved a range of recommendations that will result in the procurement of a contractor to operate the Pest Control Service as from April 2010. Invitations to tender for the service have been advertised and applications will be sent to all those interested parties for consideration.
- 1.3 One Pest Control Officer has now taken redundancy and the other will continue to operate the in-house service until a contractor is recruited at which time this officer will be taken on by the new contractor.

Buddhfield Festival 2010

- 1.4 The organisers are proposing to hold the festival in Taunton Deane in the same place as last year on 14 – 18 July 2010. The event will be very similar to last year with a capacity of 3000 people, dancing, music, workshops and with a no alcohol policy.
- 1.5 A formal Licence application will be submitted to the Licensing Authority within the next few weeks. In previous years the festival has been successful and there have been very few reported problems associated with the event.

New Private Water Supply Regulations 2009

- 1.6 The new Private Water Supply Regulations 2009 came into force on 1 January 2010. These apply to all private water supplies intended for human consumption, and will cover supplies used for domestic purposes, commercial premises and food production. The aim is to ensure that the standard of private drinking water is the same as the public water supplies.
- 1.6 The Environmental Protection Team currently monitors 305 private supplies, supplying water to over 600 premises, mainly small domestic users. The new regulations outline the monitoring frequency and analysis required (depending

on the type and size of the supply) and require the Local Authority to carry out a detailed risk assessment of all supplies. The Council is able to pass on the costs of the sampling and assessment to the person responsible for the supply.

- 1.7 The new regime could lead to an increase in the sampling required for some supplies, and the costs to the supply owners will also increase due to the additional risk assessments. Officers are liaising with laboratories to obtain prices for water analysis and are estimating the costs that will be involved in the sampling and assessment of supplies. This work is being carried out in liaison with other Somerset Authorities to ensure a consistent approach across the county. Supply owners will then be contacted with details of the new regime and charges involved. It is proposed to start the sampling and assessment in April 2010.
- 1.8 There is also a requirement to monitor private distribution systems, where the water supplied by a water company is further distributed by a person other than the water company (for example, hospitals, caravan parks, shopping centres).
- 1.9 Although costs can be recovered, the additional work will increase the amount of time officers will have to spend dealing with water supplies which will impact on the Team's workload.

2. Food and Health and Safety Team

Healthy Menus Project

- 2.1 Funded by the Food Standards Agency grant awarded to South Somerset District Council on behalf of Somerset, a free Seminar is going to be held on 4 March 2010 for independent caterers that supply food to children (for example, nurseries and pubs with children's menus).
- 2.2 There will be an option for free one to one training for businesses on healthy menus and also for one business to receive a free nutritional analysis (recommended retail price £1000). The Seminar, run by a qualified nutritionist, is for a maximum of 10 businesses. Invitations have been sent out and booking forms are already being received. A press release will also be issued.

Christmas retail project

- 2.3 A total of 41 premises in Taunton and at Hankridge Farm were visited before Christmas to check on storage of stock and the use of compactors/balers in the run up to Christmas. The Team worked in partnership with the Fire Service and a joint press release was issued before Christmas.

Food Standards Agency Audit

- 2.4 Auditors from the Food Standards Agency are due to audit Taunton Deane's Food Safety team in March 2010.

Scores on the Doors

- 2.5 Taunton Deane has been successful in securing funding from the Food Standards Agency to help migrate to the National Scores on the Doors Scheme. This will replace the current Food Scores scheme currently in operation across Somerset.

Staffing

- 2.6 The loss of a post within the team following the Core Council Review has meant an increase in the workload of the team. There will be the further loss of a staff member at the end of March

3. Waste Management

- 3.1 The next big phase of Sort It Plus will commence in April and the roll out programme will be complete by the end of September 2010. I think most residents already know that Sort It Plus adds plastic bottles and cardboard to the range of things already collected at kerbside.
- 3.2 Recycling benefits the environment in two very major ways. Firstly, it avoids the need to landfill the material. In landfill, the organic material including food, garden waste, wood, paper and card breaks down slowly releasing methane gas.
- 3.3 Landfill also has huge impact on the landscape, the Walpole site near Highbridge (one of two major sites in the County) **has the same land area as 64 football pitches**. Because of its total impact, the cost of landfill is rising through taxation in order to encourage better solutions.
- 3.4 If Taunton Deane residents recycle more, the amount that has to be landfilled goes down. Somerset County Council (being responsible for disposal) pays a "recycling credit" to Taunton Deane for every tonne recycled. While recycling still costs money overall, this credit helps to make the system affordable and best overall value for the Council Tax payer. The County Council has upped the level of credit for new materials collected through Sort It Plus.
- 3.5 The second, and perhaps even more important, benefit to the environment is that making new products from recycled materials takes much less energy than making them from raw materials. Aluminium is the most abundant metal on the planet but it takes just 1/20th of the amount of power to make aluminium drink cans out of recycled cans than aluminium ore.
- 3.6 Less energy equals lower carbon emissions. Even taking into account the environmental impact of collecting and transporting the materials, the benefits of recycling are clear and significant for glass, paper and all the other things we collect.

Councillor Tim Slattery

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

1. Farewell to Chief Housing Officer – John Williams FCIH

- 1.1 After 23 years of service, John Williams is to leave as Chief Housing Officer at Taunton Deane Borough Council. John is to move on at the end February 2010.
- 1.2 As Chief Housing Officer, John has ably steered the Housing Service through periods of significant change using the thoughtfulness and commonsense he is known for.
- 1.3 John's insight, dedication and experience have made a real difference to the local Housing Services and neighbourhoods of Taunton Deane.
- 1.4 We all wish John every happiness in his next adventure!

2. Appointment of new Housing Services Lead

- 2.1 I would like to congratulate Stephen Boland who has recently been appointed as the new Housing Services Lead. Stephen is an experienced and able Housing professional whom I know shares my commitment to tenant empowerment in order to deliver the best possible service to the tenants of Taunton Deane.

3. Tenant Services Management Board

- 3.1 The creation of the new Tenant Services Management Board is gathering pace. The Board is charged with the responsibility for ensuring the best possible standards of homes and neighbourhoods for all tenants. It will assess the Housing Service and say where and how it can be improved.
- 3.2 A group of tenants came together in November 2009 to shape how the Board will operate. The key areas looked at included:-
 - How the Board will work – frequency of meetings;
 - Who should be on the Board – what skills and qualities are needed; and
 - Choosing the Board – nomination and election process.

Recommendations included:-

- The Board should usually meet once a month;
- No formal qualifications needed to be a Board member – it is more important to demonstrate commitment and enthusiasm; and
- Tenant representatives should be elected by a postal ballot of tenants.

3.3 All tenants will be sent an Information Pack in February 2010. This will contain more information on the Board including how to become a Board member and inviting all tenants to “Taster Sessions” to be held at the end of February.

4. Home Improvement Agency Contract

4.1 The county-wide Home Improvement Agency contract has been won by Ridgeway Care and Repair following a competitive bidding process. Ridgeway have experience in providing HIA services in other areas of the country and the Somerset contract will start from the beginning of June 2010. Taunton Deane staff are able to TUPE transfer to the new provider.

5. Housing Subsidy Reform: “The Offer”

5.1 We are told to expect an offer from the Department for Communities and Local Government shortly which promises to allow us to escape the complex and punitive Housing Subsidy system, but only at the price of accepting responsibility for a slice of the national Housing Revenue Account (HRA) debt of approximately £18 billion.

5.2 Members will recall that we have been preparing for reform for several years, including the establishment of a HRA Subsidy Task and Finish group which considered this issue at some length. The Community Scrutiny Committee considered the formal response to the Government’s consultation on the proposals and Members may wish to look back at that report to refresh their memories on this complex issue.

5.3 This is a big decision which could affect tenants for decades to come and we will make sure that we provide opportunities for them to have their say and influence our response.

6. Shrinking Homes

6.1 It is good to hear that Sir Bob Kerslake, Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency, has woken up to the fact that many new homes are small and poky. “It’s no secret,” says Sir Bob, “that the UK has held the dubious honour of building the smallest average rooms and new homes in Europe.”

6.2 In particular, developers have built large numbers of small one and two bed flats, designed to maximise density and therefore profit but currently not easy to sell.

6.3 Full marks to Sir Bob for publicising this issue. I only have to compare the generous space standards of Council Housing in Taunton built in the 1970's by this Council, with what developers are building today, to see that what Sir Bob says is true – density and numbers need to be relaxed to avoid building the slums of the future.

7. Developments at Parmin Close, Ruskin Close and Victoria Gate

7.1 Second stage consultation with tenants and residents has taken place with further consultation planned as part of the Council's ongoing engagement process.

7.2 Phase 1 of the Ruskin Close scheme has obtained planning consent for the development of the existing farmhouse and play area.

8. Emerging Corporate Priority – Affordable Housing

8.1 The Corporate Strategy is being updated. One of the new emerging Corporate Priorities for 2010 – 2013 is affordable housing.

8.2 In developing this new corporate priority on affordable housing our underlying aim is to:-

- Ensure people have sufficient choices of housing;
- Meet the varied needs of people wanting to live here;
- Improve housing conditions throughout Taunton Deane; and
- Create homes and communities people are proud of.

8.3 Everyone should have access to a decent home at a price they can afford to live in, which is why our objective is simply **Making Homes More Affordable.**

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 16 February 2010

Report of Councillor Nicola Wilson – Corporate Resources

1. Southwest One Customer Contact Highlights

- 1.1 Southwest One (SWOne) Customer Contact successfully went live with SAP CRM on 30 November 2009 following extensive work over the weekend before to ensure the system was robust and fit for purpose. A number of issues have been reported since go-live which is to be expected as a system becomes used by CSAs (Customer Service Advisors). These issues and development areas identified are investigated and resolved/taken forward as necessary.
- 1.2 The team are experiencing an increase in call handling time which is understandable as CSAs are not familiar with the system with additional work being delivered for the authority. The CSAs who were recruited to assist with testing and training requirements have been kept on to assist with this additional call time.
- 1.3 Work continues to cross train the Customer Contact teams based at The Deane House and a sharing of the Taunton Deane (TDBC) and Somerset County Council (SCC) resources is taking place in an ad hoc manner at present. Work is continuing, in conjunction with ICT to determine a full solution which will include the ability to deliver from anywhere within the Contact Centre arena regardless of whether the CSA is working on a TDBC or SCC based network.
- 1.4 Service delivery continues to be excellent although the severe weather in January 2010 (reported as the worst for 30 years) tested our abilities to deliver and work is being undertaken to understand how we can avoid this situation in the future. However, it should be noted that these performance figures are still better than were achieved for Taunton Deane pre-SWOne.

Statistical Information:

MONTH	Nov	Dec	Jan
CALLS OFFERED	13421	12074	15053
ABANDONED % [Target less than 5%]	2.6	3.6	6.6
G.O.S.% [Target 80%]	91.25	86.70	78.22
% ANSWERED AT 1ST P.O.C.	94.6	99.6	99.6

- 1.5 A total of 5,583 enquiries have been dealt with at The Deane House main and planning receptions in addition to over 7,000 requests for signposting and visitors for meetings and 1,598 people visited Wellington Community Office. We have dealt with 347 letter and email enquiries during this time.

- 1.6 Now that SAP CRM is installed, the coming months will see work starting on year 2+ of our Service Development Plan, which includes looking at the feasibility of providing customers with improved delivery through initiatives such as 24 hour telephone payment facilities.

2. Update on progress with Investors on People (IIP) Action Plan

A summary of the latest position is as follows:-

Completion of Performance Review and Employee Development Scheme (PREDS) reviews

- 2.1 Managers are completing PRED reviews steadily and this is approximately 60% complete as at the middle of January 2010. A major effort to complete this as soon as possible is underway.

People Management Framework

- 2.2 All senior managers have been trained to use the Management Competency Framework and it is being used as part of PRED review round for managers. Managers who will be involved in receiving reviews within the Competency Framework have also received familiarisation training. The People Management Framework introduces a new competency framework for managers and reinforces the need to hold regular one-to-one meetings and team meetings. This framework will be instrumental in achieving our Organisational Development Strategy for the next year and progressing Thematic Working.

Team Meetings

- 2.3 A system has been set up to enable a central diary of all team meetings to be held by the Corporate Management Team (CMT). The quality and coverage of team meetings is being gradually assessed. The populating of the 'Team Meeting' diary needs to be monitored regularly to ensure all teams are registering their meetings.

IIP Working Group

- 2.4 Four meetings of this Group have been held and a number of issues have been raised by members of the Group – some positive and some which will require further action and discussion. Updates on progress have been given to the Group and views and feedback sought from Members and, through them, their colleagues. The Group continues to provide useful feedback from staff and a good sounding board for new ideas

Evaluation of Training

- 2.5 Reports from most managers have been received which shows how the training delivered in their teams has benefited those teams, services and the whole Council. The reports need to be summarised and conclusions drawn.

Learning and Development Plans

- 2.6 Plans for 2010/2011 are 90% in and requirements are being linked to budgets for final approval by CMT.

IIP Review

- 2.7 This will take place during the week commencing 22 March 2010. A representative sample of approx 50 people will be selected by the assessor and seen during this week.

Other Organisational Development and Training Activity

Management Development

- 2.8 The managers in the Corporate and Strategy Theme have been through the assessment phase of this Management Development Programme and are now completing personal development plans to share with their managers and to undertake development activities and /or courses to help them progress. Common training needs will be assessed and training delivered to meet them

Mentoring

- 2.9 This will complement the management development mentioned above and is now happening. People have been matched and Managers trained in mentoring skills

Skills Audit

- 2.10 A report has been produced by SCAT which has been discussed and training needs are being considered by SCAT and SWOne.

Theme Working

- 2.11 A report has been produced and agreed by CMT, an action plan produced and now integrated into the Organisational Development Plan – see below

Organisational Development Plan 2010/11

- 2.12 This and the Corporate Learning and Development Plan have been produced and agreed by CMT – copies of plans to follow.

Support for Core Council Review

- 2.13 A number of courses have been delivered to assist staff with the completion of application forms and interview skills which will assist them when applying for the advertised posts which are part of the Core Council Review.

3. Performance and Client Team Update

The Performance and Client Team covers three specific areas. An update for each is provided below:-

Corporate Performance Reporting and Improvement

- 3.1 In December and January workshops have been held with both CMT and Members to develop the new performance reporting 'dashboard'. These workshops have been very successful. The new template has been finalised and will be trialled with the Quarter 3 monitoring report.
- 3.2 The new service planning process and template has also now been completed. The use of the new template will be trialled within the Strategy and Corporate Theme.
- 3.3 The team is now gearing up for the 2009/2010 Comprehensive Area Assessment inspection, which is due to commence later in February 2010.

Client Function

- 3.4 The Client Function manages the contracts that cover the SWOne, Somerset Waste and Tone Leisure partnerships. The majority of the focus is on the SWOne partnership in view of its size and complexity. Monitoring of service delivery and performance indicators continues to take place on a monthly basis.
- 3.5 The Client Team has recently finalised a new structure for monitoring and reporting the performance of SWOne. This new structure will provide for the greater involvement of Core Council services, CMT and Members in monitoring service delivery. The new performance monitoring structure will be implemented over the next three months.

Managing the SWOne Transformation Projects

- 3.6 The team manages delivery, from Taunton Deane's perspective, of the various transformation projects being undertaken by SWOne.
- 3.7 SAP Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System and website – the new CRM system and website were successfully launched in late November 2009 with no significant issues being reported. The Customer Services Team have quickly become used to using the new CRM software and call answering statistics have been largely unaffected. In summary the launch of this element of the SAP system has been very successful.
- 3.8 SAP Back Office System - much progress has been made in resolving the issues resulting from the first release of the SAP system in April 2009. The backlog of payments to suppliers has been cleared and payments are now being made within the appropriate timescales. Posting of payments to accounts such as Council Tax, Business Rates and rents has been working smoothly for some time now.
- 3.9 There are however a number of outstanding issues with the system, which were largely identified as a result of the visits we made to all Core Council services in October/November of 2009. A plan has been agreed in conjunction with SWOne to resolve the outstanding issues by April of 2010. Both Taunton Deane and SWOne

have allocated specific staff to work on fixing the system. Key amongst the outstanding issues are:-

- Implementing an interface between the DLO computer systems and SAP;
- Correctly allocating all income and expenditure so that we can close our accounts correctly for 2009/2010;
- Commencing recovery action for unpaid sundry debt accounts; and
- Retraining staff in how to use elements of the system followed by a re-launch of those areas.

Procurement Project

- 3.10 To date we have delivered £315,000 in actual savings (although this amount will increase when we receive up-to-date statistics) whereas the target is £403,000. Consequently there is a shortfall at present of £88,000.
- 3.11 Progress on the procurement savings project slowed down during 2009 due to delays in recruiting key staff (both within SWOne and Taunton Deane) and due to the problems being experienced with SAP. However, the teams are now in place and the pace is picking up again. Additionally, we are working with SWOne to identify and deliver a plan for undertaking work with small and medium sized enterprises (SME's).
- 3.12 A detailed progress report on procurement will be made to Corporate Scrutiny on 18 February 2010.
- 3.13 I attended the Performance and Client Team Meeting on 2 February 2010 which I found very interesting. It was good to hear the team discussing the challenges that they face over the coming year in such a positive manner and hopefully I will be invited to attend another meeting in the future. The meeting demonstrated Investors in People at its best.

4. Revenues and Benefits Service

- 4.1 The Revenues and Benefits Service has a difficult time in balancing recovery of Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit debt against the needs of customers facing increasing financial difficulty. Obviously, meeting targets is vitally important, but the service must also show sensitivity and distinguish between "can't pay" versus "won't pay".
- 4.2 For those falling in the latter category, failing to pay in a timely manner inevitably leads to increased costs associated with the debt as well as extra administration for the authority. Members can be assured the service will actively pursue recovery through all legitimate means. Equally, people suffering genuine hardship will be dealt with sympathetically and referred to impartial debt advice agencies when this may be helpful.
- 4.3 Customer satisfaction surveys for Council Tax and Benefit administration are complete and results will be available for scrutiny from March 2010. However, the

“headline” news shows increased satisfaction in virtually every area in comparison with previous surveys. Most notable success has been in the manner in which staff interact with customers. There has been a big increase in customers contacting the team as a result of the downturn in the economy. The service has met that challenge head on by providing more face-to-face interviews and a more “personal” approach in dealing with customer enquiries.

- 4.4 The Revenues and Benefits Service hopes to capitalise on this through piloting the “Then and There” initiative. Through this pilot, experienced assessors will spend extra time with customers at the start of their claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit. We hope this approach will lead to an improvement in customer satisfaction because claims will be resolved more quickly. It should also provide efficiencies in administration through reduced follow-up work.

Councillor Mrs Nicola Wilson