

PART II REPORTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

COUNCIL MEETING - 11 DECEMBER 2007

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

Since my last report many things have happened and a lot of issues have positively progressed.

One of these is the Team Somerset Agenda following the unitary decision. The 5 District Councils and the County Council pledged to work closer together towards a programme of closer co-operative working to deliver joint efficiency savings.

Now of course we in Somerset are way ahead of the game with our Waste Partnership and our ISIS Initiative. After an unnecessary delay, ISIS has launched and become Southwest One and will, I hope, become the success we all hope for. Just this week the remainder of the staff seconded to work for Southwest One started their new roles. 650 staff in Somerset from the County, IBM and Taunton Deane working together on this project. IBM will also open a new office in Taunton. I am really excited at the prospects of the efficiency savings Southwest One can bring for the Taunton Deane taxpayer.

The Waste Partnership goes from strength to strength and we look forward to trials in the New Year of doorstep cardboard and plastic recycling in Taunton Deane. Something we can all celebrate. The trials will follow several different collection systems. The nature and location of the different trials will be advised later.

THE BUDGET

The Executive will report to Overview and Scrutiny proposals on Thursday to totally close the budget gap. This has not been an easy process but much work has done by the Executive and Directors to get to this position. I am confident that these proposals are sustainable and robust and that is the view also of Directors. To totally close the budget gap which stood at £1.1 million before Christmas is, I think, an achievement. The pressure put on this authority by the unfair funding of the concessionary bus fares scheme. Government should pick up the bill for all the cost of the tickets used and not expect local councils to find huge amounts of money which is crippling many Councils. That is also the view of the South West Local Government Association as well and they have written to Government on these lines. I will stress though that this is a wonderful scheme and I totally support it. It was a great decision by the Government to introduce this but we now need them to fund it properly.

NORTH CURRY

This week sees the Public Inquiry at North Curry Village Hall regarding the gypsy incursion. It is very frustrating for all to see this problem rumble on and on. However, this administration totally supports the residents of North Curry and will continue to pursue this matter with the utmost diligence. I have held a meeting with the County Portfolio Holder for Resources to see if there can be found alternative gypsy provision in the Borough. This is crucial to this whole problem.

COTFORD ST LUKE

It is understandable that residents of Cotford St Luke were so concerned at an unauthorised planning incursion recently onto a farmer's field. This Council moved like lightening to ensure that a Stop Notice was issued on this site and that the relevant legal and Enforcement Officers were dispatched to the site that weekend. I would like to thank our staff who worked so hard that weekend to ensure everything that could be done. I also thank Tony Beavan who phoned me and kept me informed of all developments as they progressed that weekend. I attended a public meeting last Wednesday to talk to residents to discuss their concerns.

THE MARKET

This month marks the end of an era for the market in Taunton with the last sales on site at Priory Bridge Road. This is a sad day for many people but will also open up other opportunities for that site. Project Taunton will ensure we get the best return of this land after the market vacation.

THE BREWHOUSE

Just to say I have attended two really good shows at the Brewhouse recently and it was a reminder of what a good night out the place is and how important the theatre is to our long term future for Taunton. We will continue to support them through the difficult times the Brewhouse has had and will. Give them all the encouragement they need.

FINALLY

I would like to wish all of the staff and members a very Happy Christmas and New Year and thank everyone for all the support I have had as Leader since my appointment in May.

Councillor Ross Henley

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Report of Councillor Steve Brooks - Communications

Public Relations

The latest edition of Deane Dispatch has now been produced and distributed to local residents. I would like to thank Debbie Rundle for all the hard work she put into producing this publication.

We continue to maximise public relations opportunities across the Council. Over recent weeks, we have been promoting issues as varied as tackling gulls in Taunton town centre to the introduction of the new, cashless parking payment system. Between April and the end of October we issued a total of 94 press releases and the Council received coverage in 793 newspaper articles. Over the same period we dealt with an average of 9 media enquiries a week. The majority of the enquiries continue to be in the areas of Environmental Services and Planning Policy and Transportation. We keep a copy of all newspaper clippings which is available on request.

A media briefing involving the Council, Summerfield Homes and the National Trust was held on the affordable housing proposals for a site off Cheddon Road, near Ladymead School. The briefing attracted the County Gazette and the Western Morning News while the Western Daily Press photographer attended at Fyne Court and at the Deane House. The story was carried prominently by the Western Daily Press and Western Morning News, the two major regional newspapers, and both stories were positive. Further coverage is expected when the consultations are held on 17 January at Ladymead School.

Over the coming weeks, one of our priorities will be the promotion of the work to be undertaken by the various Task at Finish Reviews. We want to encourage local people to get involved in some of these reviews, so as part of the pilot project we will be using public relations to promote the changes.

We also continue to work closely with partners, including Project Taunton and Somerset Waste Partnership enabling effective partnership public relations for each of the Projects.

Website

At the moment our focus is on keeping the website up-to-date. Fiona Baker is currently on maternity leave and we are in the process of identifying someone to provide temporary cover until she returns.

Consultation and Information

We are working on a Data Segmentation project. This project follows on from the work TDBC has done with the Local Government Association on "Measuring Customer Satisfaction" earlier this year.

The LGA project recommended that local authorities should work to understand differences in the way communities in their areas feel about the area and experience the Council's services.

We are currently looking into which groups of TDBC residents are least satisfied with the Council. This involves segmenting the data from the Best Value User General survey by:

- ward
- age
- gender
- ethnic group
- disability

The first stage is to develop an interactive way of showing the differences in satisfaction with the Council and our services in the different ward. This will also support the work of the Area Working Partnerships.

The LGA project also developed a Data Protocol. A data protocol is a standard way of keeping data. In the case of this project the data is about people who use local services. The data is recorded in a standard way prescribed by the protocol so that they can be stored and compared with other data. In this way, information from several different sources, such as other surveys and information about the local area, can be brought together and analysed. This enables us to build up a clear picture of people in a local area and their preferences, opinions, and experience of services. We are working on implementing this Data Protocol here at TDBC.

Other Communications

We continue to support the communications connected with the ongoing changes within the Council as our staff second over to Southwest One. Communications will continue to be a key priority during this transition phase.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a very happy Christmas and we look forward to working together in the New Year.

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Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

Park&Ride East Taunton

Somerset County Council have submitted a planning application for a Park&Ride site at Cambria Farm and this scheme is now out to consultation with the Public. Should this application be approved it is envisaged that work would commence at around Easter 2008 and be completed around the end of January 2009.

Ringo cashless parking comes to Taunton Deane

I am pleased to announce that following discussions held with the manufacturer we have decided to install the Ringo payment by phone system in most of our car parks it is hoped that these will be installed and operational by Christmas. This system allows motorists to pay for or extend their stay in any of our car parks that have a Ringo sign on the notice board by the simple placing of a phone call and paying by card, thus removing the need for racing back to the car park for a specific time to avoid a potential overstay. Needless to say our Parking Attendants will have all the required equipment to be able to ascertain if any particular vehicle has had a valid ticket purchased for it.

Development Management Staffing

We are still recruiting for two Area Planning Manager posts. Advertisements have been placed and when the responses have been evaluated suitable candidates will be interviewed and hopefully appointments made. In the meantime we continue with our current arrangement of using two part time staff to ease the workload.

Monkton Heathfield Major Planning Application

The consortium leading this application had its application turned down by the planning committee at the planning meeting held on the 22nd November 2007. This matter will now go to the planning inspectorate for determination, a date for which is expected any day now, but it is envisaged that this will be around Easter 2008

Taunton Cider Factory Norton Demolition work of the factory buildings and site clearing on this important site continue apace. The first phase of ground works have been started and it is hoped that the building work will now speed up and the 370 houses will be completed without any further delay along with employment and community facilities all of which are to be welcomed in Norton Fitzwarren.

It just remains for me to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous 2008

Councillor Simon Coles

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Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development, Tourism & Property

We have decided to divide the report into 2 Parts. The first part highlights the involvement of the Portfolio Holder and the second part concentrates on the work of the Economic Development Unit carrying out the corporate priorities of the Council. The two parts coalesce, of course, both striving to fulfill the needs and ambitions of the council.

PART 1

a) Property

This part of the portfolio has been for far too long the “Cinderella” of the Council. As we become more and more involved in attaining desirable economic, social and environmental goals, it will be necessary for the Council to devise a strategy which looks at property as assets which can work for the Council at all levels. The position is becoming even more vital with the establishment of South West One.

For us to obtain both our political requirements and funding future needs, we need to move towards a much more commercial approach to property ownership. Accordingly I have asked the Chief Executive to reinstate the importance of the Asset Management Plan and give it a much higher priority than it has had hitherto. I am also asking colleagues to ensure that the possible disposal of all properties (with the possible exception of those in the Housing Revenue Account) is immediately referred to the department and we can professionally have it looked at. We should be considering, where appropriate, acquiring property for the long term future.

b) Project Taunton

Apart from the understandable delay until next March/April of the choice of the preferred developer for us on the Firepool site, this has been a month of intense activity for the team.

Somerst County Cricket Club will be starting their (slightly) delayed work on the eastern end of the Coal Orchard car park now that our sale to them has been completed. We need a debate on the name we give to the public area which will emerge at the end of the scheme. I don't think Somerset Square is an appropriate one for what is so obviously something less than a triangle!

The work on the cultural quarter will require a commitment from Taunton Deane if the County is to get its Heritage Lottery Bid accepted for the museum, to find the

cash to develop Castle Green and Goodland Gardens in a way to bring the area into keeping with the ambitions. This means a real dilemma for the Council as Castle Green is a considerable revenue provider to the car parking revenue and the capital cost will also be large. Our experience in funding the land behind the Brewhouse (Somerset Square) is indicative of this.

Many of us visited the Princesshay shopping development in Exeter earlier this month. This illustrated for us the challenge that is before us to realise the vision for our primary shopping area both east and west of our High Street. It was put before us by Peter Clayton of Savills at the presentation given on 30 October. I am confident that Project Taunton will rise to this challenge.

The car parking report from Parsons Brinkerhoff is in draft form and has been presented to the Project Taunton Advisory Board. Much more work has to be done. It is fair to say that meeting the required shopping goals for the long term will see deficits in the number of car parking spaces for shopping especially between 2011 and 2014 whilst the redevelopment of the main shopping area is undertaken.

c) The In2Somerset (Inward Investment Company)

It has successfully recruited Honour Chapman as its Founding Chairperson, and is currently in the process of recruiting the staff team. It is hoped that the organisation will be up and running in February 2008 but there has been a delay in the appointment of a Chief Executive. I hope to be able to report to the Council the latest position after the next meeting of the Board on 6 December.

d) Somerset/Taunton Chamber of Commerce

Steve Kendall gave a presentation of the work of the department to a business breakfast of the chamber(s) on 28 November at the Wellsprings Centre. I supported him at this function. The relationship is good and needs careful nurturing if we are to enable businesses to succeed. There is little doubt that the establishment of the Taunton Town Centre Company has allowed the Chamber to unshackle itself from its former obsession with the town centre and retailing in particular. It now serves a much wider business diaspora and is more broadly representative of the local business scene. It also works well with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and augurs well for the economic wellbeing of the County.

PART 2

a) Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI)

Members will be aware that for the past two years this Council has received from Central Government significant grant funds to develop further business support and development projects. Initially announced as a three-year Programme,

Government has decided to close the Scheme early, and use the 'final year' to consult and re-define the Grant in readiness for its re-introduction in April 2009.

This decision has major implications for much of the work of the Economic development Unit, as projects such as Wellington Food Town, Community-based economic development, and a wide range of small-scale business initiatives have been supported by, or initiated by this Council using LABGI funds. In the current financial year some £330,000 was available through the grant, and an urgent review of avoidable commitments is currently underway in order to enable established three year funding agreements to be honoured.

b) The Council's Economic Development Team has focused on a number of key activities over recent weeks::

1) Tourism

- a) Work has started on the production of a new "welcome to Wellington leaflet" that will raise the profile of the Town on the back of the Wellington Food Town initiative, with the support of a number of businesses from the Town and surrounding area. The leaflet will be available in TIC's throughout Somerset, with a number available for distribution in shops and Farm shops in the Town and surrounding area.

- b) Work continues to develop the Destination Management products, and the development of a single Somerset Visitors guide for the 2008/09 Year. In addition a new DVD promoting Somerset has been produced and will be distributed through the national TIC network.

2) Business Support

- a) Members will be aware, and share my disappointment that the Waterlinks Project Bid for Lottery Funding has not been selected to proceed to the televised finals stage of the competition. Economic Development Staff have been working closely to develop two of the project proposals for Taunton (The WonderTree project and the Business Incubation Centre). Individual project reviews are underway to assess the potential to continue to deliver these projects without the Lottery funding.

- b) The Young Enterprise Primary Programme moves into its second year as a result of agreement at the Executive to continue to support the second year of the Programme. 24 Schools are expected to join the scheme this academic year. The first year of operation proved difficult for Young Enterprise to attract sufficient

'mentors' for the school groups, and an early request for Members of this Council to come forward as mentors has been issued.

- c) The Economic Development Unit has part funded and been instrumental in the organisation of the Somerset Careers fair, providing careers advice and access to a range of service providers for 13-19 year olds throughout the County, and held in Taunton during October this year. More than 60 exhibitors attended, and in excess of 1,000 people visited the event.
- d) A further round of Business Development Grant applications has been appraised in September, with 12 interested business owners attending business development training sessions delivered by Business Link, of which 6 business proposals proceeded to a formal application. 6 Grants of £2,000 have been offered to these companies.

3) Rural Economic Development

- a) The EDU continues to support the development of the Wellington Food Town and Market and Coastal Town Initiative Steering Groups.

Market & Coastal Towns

A 'Visioning Event' is to be held in Wellington on 20 November, where over 100 representatives of local groups and organisations will be invited to give their views on the projects and activities that will significantly improve the experience of living in Wellington. The MCTI project intends to appraise proposals and to develop a range of key projects, which it is hoped that SWERDA will finance studies to determine costs, issues and deliverability for each. This process is expected to be largely complete in Summer 2009.

Agriculture Sector Support

The Council has organized a number of courses for Farmers this winter. On our 'IT for Farmers' programme eleven weekly half-day sessions are due to run between Mid-November and Mid-February for 24 delegates. As in previous years demand is strong and suggests that farmers are finding it valuable in streamlining and modernizing their businesses.

The Rural Team continues to work with the monthly Sheep Farmers Group, where a number of national experts have visited to talk on practical issues around veterinary and husbandry matters.

Although the recent movement restrictions following Foot and Mouth and Blue Tongue have impacted on our ability to visit and

discuss business issues with Farmers, it is clear that a high level of anxiety exists over the impacts of both diseases on the business viability of many farms in the Borough. We are continuing to monitor the situation.

Members of the Rural Team continue to work with local groups developing significant local projects, such as the Ten Parishes Centre Group and separate Children's Centre Group in Wiveliscombe.

4. General Work of the Unit

- a) The Unit is supporting the work of a number of Council Task and Finish groups, and it is hoped that the work of the initial round of Group work will be completed and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel during the final quarter of this year.
- b) At the end of November 2007 we were advised that a joint bid to Government with Taunton East Development Trust for a proposal to develop a model to examine and support the transfer of council-owned assets to the voluntary sector had been successful. This project, which will not involve any direct transfer of assets during its lifetime, and involve no funding from the authority other staff time, will commence in January 2008.

**JEFFERSON HORSLEY
30 NOVEMBER 2007**

Council Meeting 11 December 2007

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Leisure, Arts and Culture

I herewith present my third report to Full Council as follows:-

The Deano

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

Creative Business Exchange

I was delighted to attend, for part of the time, the Creative Business Exchange held on Thursday 15 November at the Somerset College Centre for Enterprise. It was highly successful. This was Somerset's first creative business exchange to bring together artists, designers, performers and others to showcase their creative work and services. At the end of the evening many of the people attending wished me to thank Caroline Corfe the officer responsible for most of the arrangements, so I would like to do that here in my report - "Thank you Caroline".

Play at Higher Holway

Research for our new Play Strategy this year discovered that in the Holway and Blackbrook ward there is a combination of factors making it one of the most deprived wards in terms of play provision. This gives the project underway to develop play provision on the Higher Holway Open Space extra importance.

Currently tenders are being invited for a comprehensive project to involve children and young people in the design of the play provision and to construct the agreed design in time for the summer of 2008. Tenders will be received in early January followed by interviews for the shortlisted tenders with a start date for the project shortly afterwards.

Allotments in Taunton Deane

Work on the Strategy for allotments is nearing completion. The demand for plots is growing nationally and locally and there is a recognition of the wide ranging value that allotments can deliver - meeting people especially those from different backgrounds, learning new skills and passing them on, outdoor exercise to help combat obesity and other health problems, a low cost way to have a healthier diet, a reduction in food-miles and food packaging, reuse of materials, a refuge for wildlife. There are also other benefits not yet delivered by our allotments to be explored such as provision for people with disabilities and encouraging schools to use plots as an outdoor classroom.

The Draft Strategy will be going to the Scrutiny and Performance Panel in February for consideration.

Vivary Sensory Garden

The Park Rangers for the town centre parks are working with pupils from Ladymead School to design a sensory garden for the park. This will provide interest and enjoyment through colour, texture, scent, sound and will be accessible to all. As someone who knows just how beneficial such a provision can be for the appropriate people it seeks to support and the wider community, I can only say how much I feel this provision is needed within our major park in Taunton.

French Weir Park

North Town Primary School pupils will be planting crocus and daffodil bulbs in the park with the Park Rangers on Thursday 6th December at 3.30pm. This will provide spring colour in the park for everyone to enjoy. A superb initiative involving pupils from a primary school

Vivary Tennis Courts

Work is nearing completion on the Tennis Courts in Vivary Park. The surface and fencing has been replaced and it is anticipated that painting of the surface will take place this month. The work is being funded from the Vivary Park Trading Account and through developer contributions.

Football Foundation Applications

It is with tremendous pleasure that I can announce that the Council has been successful in securing £532,656 towards the construction of new sports pavilions on Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields. The Football Foundation has awarded the grant with the necessary balance coming from Planning Gain contributions. It must be added here that Steve Hughes the officer concerned has put in a fantastic amount of work to help secure this funding and I feel here we should record the Council's appreciation for that hard work. The contract has been won by Bluestone and it is anticipated that the buildings will be completed in time for the 2008/09 football season.

It needs to be added here too, the Taunton & District Saturday League has won the Charter Standard Umbro Challenge as the league having the most clubs to have gained the Charter Standard Award. This has a monetary prize for the League and is a result of the close working relationship that has enabled the Council to have gained Football Foundation support and the League to win this award.

TONE LEISURE (TAUNTON DEANE) LIMITED ACTIVITIES

Facility News

- **Blackbrook Pavilion and Taunton Tennis Centre**

The third School Sports Festival took place at Blackbrook Pavilion and Taunton Tennis Centre in September. The festival, run in partnership with the Tone Schools Partnership, attracted over 1,000 year 5 children and 1,200 year 7 children to the facilities. Groups had a choice of 11 sports including golf, basketball and tag rugby, through to dance mats. The activities were led by 200 young sports leaders from local secondary schools, colleges and staff from the Tone Schools Partnership and Tone Leisure. All the children received an activity and club link brochure, giving details of how they can take up any of the activities they have tried.

Work is under way to resurface outdoor tennis courts at Taunton Tennis Centre.

- **Station Road Swimming Pool**

Station Road Swimming Pool has received the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management's (ISRM) National Pool Safety Award (NPSA). The award ensures the delivery of a safe, reliable service to customers. The NPSA is a voluntary scheme, open to all swimming pools in the UK. Station Road Pool is one of 31 pools in the UK to achieve the award and will use it as an internal assessment and improvement plan. The award scheme provides a robust examination by industry experts of the degree of compliance to a wide range of industry good practice requirements.

Forthcoming Events

Forthcoming events include:

- The ever popular BIG Christmas Parties, which are running for six nights this year and will cater for approximately 2,500 customers. This year's experience includes a six-course dinner, chocolate fountain, live entertainment and disco.
- BBC stars of Strictly Come Dancing, Matthew and Nicole Cutler, bring Strictly Dance to Wellsprings on 8th March 2008. The evening will feature a five-dance entertainment section, followed by an audience participation dance, with professional dancers on hand throughout the evening.

Programme Initiatives

As ever Tone Leisure has been looking at new ways to get more people into activity over the last few months. Programme initiatives include:

- Socca-tots, a football coaching programme, tailored to give toddlers the skills and co-ordination needed to play football. The programme was launched at Wellsprings, with an average of 12 children now taking part each week.
- Body Vive™, a low impact, 55 minute class integrating aerobic exercise for heart fitness, resistance training for strength and mobility for flexibility, has been successfully launched at Wellington Sports Centre and Wellsprings Leisure Centre. The course, currently run twice a week, is being expanded to cope with demand.

Sports and Health Development

- **Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Aquathlon** - The Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Aquathlon, organised by Tone Leisure and Somerset RC Tri club, is being held on Sunday, 24th February 2008 at the Wellington Sports Centre and has widened its appeal for 2008 by encouraging team entries and launching its first ever 'Corporate Challenge'. Teams, either all female, all male, or mixed, share the challenge as one competitor completes the swim and the other the run. We hope this will make the event even more accessible to those who want to take part but who are not so confident in one of the disciplines. Businesses that enter a team in each of the three categories can also enter the 'Corporate Challenge'. This new challenge provides an opportunity for local businesses to get involved and compete against each other to see who will take home the inaugural Foot Anstey Corporate Challenge Trophy.

The Aquathlon involves two disciplines, swimming and running, in a continuous race against the clock. The race caters for varying levels of fitness with two distance options of short (500m swim/5k run) and long (1,000m swim/10k run). To make it completely fair, those who enter the traditional individual race doing both disciplines will compete in their age categories, which range from Youths 14-15 years to Vintage Vet at 60+. The entry forms are now available in all Tone Leisure Centres and on the event website www.tauntondeanetri.co.uk.

In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best as we enter the festive season.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting 11 December 2007

Report of Councillor Mel Mullins – Environmental Services

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Food Safety.

Scores on the Doors

The Food Team are making good progress with 'Scores on the Doors'. Officers have already issued around 100 ratings for the Somerset Food Hygiene Star Rating scheme and have been providing businesses with information leaflets and a window sticker at the end of each routine food hygiene inspection. So far 12 premises have achieved the top 5 star rating, which means they comply fully with food hygiene requirements. The response from businesses has so far been overwhelmingly positive, with only one negative comment received.

Prosecution

In October, Dean Singer, Proprietor of the Royal Oak, Hilcommon pleaded guilty to food hygiene offences and was ordered to pay a total of £7100 in fines and costs.

Sampling Results

The food sampling programme is on target and so far this year surveys of raw eggs, fresh herbs, edible seeds, dishcloths, pies, salads from kebab shops, sandwich bars and self service salad bars have been carried out. All the results were satisfactory except for some of the fresh herbs, which were later re sampled and found to be satisfactory. A press release on sampling was issued.

1.2 Environmental Protection Team

New Public Sewer

Since the construction and completion of the public sewer project in Blagdon Hill the degree of pollution to the environment has dramatically reduced, as many residents opted to connect into the sewer. However, a few residents have decided not to connect in, and the Environmental Protection Team will continue to deal with pollution problems relating to old, defective septic tank systems as they arise.

Pest Control

The Council's Press Officer spent an enjoyable day with Pest Control recently, which will result in an article about the service being submitted to the local press. She saw the officers deal with rodent and insect infestation treatments and heard a few "interesting case" stories along the way.

Dog Warden Service

The Environmental Protection Team has hosted an exercise, in which our Dog Warden Service was benchmarked against 32 other participating Authorities. The results show that our Services compare favourably in terms of extent, diversity and value. We are now actively working with other Somerset Authorities to find the best way to implement new duties that will be imposed upon all Councils in April of next year to deal with stray dogs outside of office hours, a transfer of responsibility from the Police.

Gull Control

An article on the conclusion of the 2007 Gull control programme was released to the Press. The programme has again been very successful, with a total of 167 eggs being removed from 81 nests. We remain well on course for preventing the predicted increase in gull colony numbers, of 30%, year on year.

Pollution Control

New Regulations will replace the existing Pollution Prevention Control (PPC) programme in April 2008. The new system, affecting all potentially polluting industries and processes, will streamline and combine the Waste Management Licence and PPC Permit, creating a common approach to applications, maintenance, surrender and enforcement.

Sewer Incident

The Environmental Protection Team received a call from Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service on 15 November at 12.50 re: noxious smells possibly arising from the drains in East Street. As a precaution the area was evacuated from Woolworths to the end of East Street. The Fire Service did not request the attendance of Environmental Health. The two substances identified as causing the smells were Styrene and Hydrogen sulphide, the source of which was from nearby Wessex Water works. Wessex Water teams carried out forced ventilation to atmosphere using fans and the incident was brought under control at 18.55 same day. Shop owners were advised to ventilate their premises the following morning if residual smells were detected.

1.3 Health and Safety

Christmas Stocking Checks

The Health and Safety team will be checking up on the Christmas stocking to make sure the festive season is not spoiled by accidents. They will be visiting retail businesses in the run-up to Christmas, checking on stock rooms and public areas looking at storage and handling procedures and making sure that walkways are clear to prevent trip accidents. The team will offer practical advice to businesses on how to operate safely in the busy pre-Christmas season and ensure that agency staff, and young workers in particular, are given health and safety advice and supervised, where necessary, so they can work safely.

Workplace Health and Safety Strategic Planning Event.

Along with two members of staff from Environmental Health, I recently attended the above event in Bristol organized by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The event was to consider more opportunities to extend local authority and HSE partnership working that has been so effective in the last two years, that utilises a range of joint interventions to promote health and safety compliance in businesses to meet national occupational accident and ill health reduction targets. The event also considered how health and safety inspectors could link up better with other regulators to target issues and organisations of joint concern and how regulators can engage with and contribute to the current Local Area Agreement process.

Councillor Mel Mullins

Council Meeting 11 December 2007

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey – Housing Services

Deane Helpline

I reported last time that a new contract had been negotiated with Tunstall to upgrade the system at the Control Centre from PCN4 to the new generation PCN5, which will provide the capacity to monitor new tele-care contracts coming on to the market. This contract was negotiated at virtually nil cost to Deane Helpline, but would have otherwise cost the Council approximately £61,000.

I am extremely pleased to report that as a direct result of this decision, Deane Helpline has been successful (out of 18 Control Centres) in winning new business in Devon. Devon County Council, in partnership with Tunstall, have around £700,000 of rolled over Preventative Technology Grant to spend on Telecare equipment over the next 18 months. The range of Telecare equipment will include smoke detectors, fall detectors, gas detectors, bed/chair occupancy sensors etc.

Deane Helpline will provide all the monitoring for the first six months during the pilot phase, and is likely to be well placed to become the long term supplier. Business from this contract is forecast to generate approximately £4,000 in additional revenue for Deane Helpline in 2007/08, building gradually to a potential £30,000 in 2008/09. It is particularly important for the business to gain early experience and reputation in this expanding area of new business, which is why this news is particularly welcome.

Towards a Positive Housing Future

Members will each have received a copy of the report by Steve Partridge of the Housing Quality Network entitled, *Towards a Positive Housing Future*. This is a report by a leading national housing finance expert who has looked specifically at the financial position of Taunton Deane Borough Council, and recommends ways in which we may be able to exploit the very significant changes in housing policy which are occurring at national level. Members who attended his briefing sessions on 29th October 2007 will, I'm sure, agree that the sessions were informative and stimulating, and most importantly gave us some of the ingredients of an exciting vision for the future. The Chief Housing Officer will be progressing this vision in a report to members in the new year.

New Lettings

I have recently taken the opportunity to shadow the Rent Voids Recovery Team, which deals with the management of vacant properties and the re-letting of properties to incoming tenants. I was keen to see vacant properties being prepared for re-let with my own eyes. Despite the significant cut to the Re-let Budget, made as a contribution to the 1.85 million pounds per annum savings being re-invested to achieve the Decent Homes standard, the standard of re-let properties is generally reasonable. I intend to shadow other teams in the Housing Service during the new year in order to gain further experience of the service customers are actually receiving.

National and Local News: RSL “Merger Mania”

There has been a lot of discussion in the housing press recently about the increasing numbers of Housing Associations which are merging and creating group structures. On the plus side, merging Housing Associations will argue that they are attempting to reach a size of optimum and regional efficiency, whilst other commentators say that huge landlords are being created which are out of touch with their communities. Locally, the LSVT South Somerset Homes is in talks with Arcadia Housing Group (main operating company Knightstone Housing Association) and consulting tenants with a view to possibly coming together in the new year.

National News: The Calcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery

The Calcutt Review, which was referred to in the Housing Green Paper, reported on 22nd November. Its purpose was to examine how new homes supply is affected by the housebuilding industry. The following points from the report may be of interest to members:

- The housebuilding industry is considered to be in shape to deliver the homes we need for future generations, and capable of delivering 240,000 homes per annum
- There are individual cases where housebuilders hold land for longer than they need, but the current evidence does not support the suggestion that this practice is widespread
- Preferred housebuilding partners should be invited to engage with the Local Strategic Partnership

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey
Housing Executive Member

Council Meeting 11 December 2007

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Work on the Member Charter is continuing and the Council's Action Plan has now been submitted for approval. Members will have received details of a draft skills framework and I would encourage everyone to respond if they have any views or comments.

Officers have been working in partnership with 40 Commando Royal Marines in planning an event to mark their return from active service in Afghanistan next year. Following a request from the Marines, they will be exercising their Freedom and parading through the town to an open air Thanksgiving Service. Further details will be notified to members just as soon as they become available.

David Greig, the Council's Parish Liaison Officer has been continuing his regular visits to meetings of parish councils. He has been taking the opportunity to deliver ethics and probity training at each meeting which has proved an excellent way of giving this important subject as much coverage as possible within the parish councils.

New legislation has created a new framework for local authority Standards Committees to take on greater responsibility for upholding ethical standards locally. Our Standards Committee are currently working on procedures and protocols for delivering this new method of local regulation.

PERSONNEL

JOB EVALUATION

The formal appeals process is now underway with almost all informal appeals now having been heard. Formal appeals are considered by a panel of trained employees with a JE expert. Once all of panels have been completed and the results are known individuals will be notified of their individual result. This will be early in 2008.

ABSENCE

New measures to try and cut absence are currently being trialled in 4 areas of the Council. This involves people phoning a Director on their first day of absence. Steady progress is also being made generally to reduce the average days lost due to sickness. The Absence Working group and the Healthy Workplace group have been merged into one working group and their first re-launched meeting was successful.

A re-launch of the 'Wellbeing' package is planned for April 2008

Introduction South West One - From 1 December the HR team will be part of South West one and induction events will be taking place during the week commencing 3 December.

Policy Development - A number of HR policies are being reviewed in the light of new requirements and keeping pace with developments and the needs of the Council.

Partnership Working - Professional HR support to areas of the Council looking at more partnership working with other Authorities is taking place. The main emphasis

has been in the contractual and legal position for employees transferring to or working with other organisations.

CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Work on the Southwest One project still continues and meetings with IBM on service delivery and transformation projects for Customer contact, plus work streams for Customer Contact, Corporate Administration and WP, Design and Print and Facilities have been on-going with relevant key project leads within IBM. Majority of the time for the Corporate Support Services Manager has been taken up with these tasks and with ensuring that the services can deliver the day job as well.

Customer Services:

From 1st October – 28th November 26,242 calls were managed through the contact centre with 59% being dealt with entirely within Customer Services. A total of 5,028 people have been helped at Main Reception and 1,108 at Planning Reception. 4,806 people visited Wellington Community Office.

Customer Services started to pilot the new sickness absence monitoring arrangements on 1st October, however from an operational point of view there has not been a great change in the absence rates.

Design and Print:

Work continues with assisting services on their professional design and print requirements. Throughput of work is slightly down on this time last year but it is expected to even out by year end. Design and Print have managed to get the litho printer back up and running for a minimal amount of work (i.e. letterheads) and this will assist to keep costs down.

Corporate Administration/Facilities/WP:

Corporate Administration continue to work with services on providing cost effective solutions for large mail requirements and have been working with services to see how they can assist with new initiatives in the coming year.

Facilities continue to work with agency staff covering the morning opening and evening closing of Deane House.

All posts covered by temporary staff are under discussion with IBM to agree how these will be filled in the future.

ICT SERVICE

The majority of ICT service work is connected with Southwest One. The ICT service went through service take on, and effectively went live on 1st November, and in the lead up to and since that date ICT have been working closely with new colleagues from Somerset County Council and with IBM to start making the many changes that will be maturing over the coming weeks and months

The main issues/event from an operational perspective is the HMRC records loss incident. Whilst TDBC have robust controls in place for our data storage and management processes, we cannot be complacent over this. The ICT Manager Simon Kirkham has been working with Chris Gunn (of South West Audit) on a review of all existing processes where data is exchanged with other organisations. As part of that, work is being undertaken with all Service Managers about what we currently do, once we have completed the review I will report back to Full Council

REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE UNIT

As Members will be aware, there have been two information reports issued recently on the Revenues & Benefits Service's performance. The first is a quarterly update on our progress against collection targets. This shows that while we may be slightly behind our targets for "in-year" collection for Council Tax and Business Rates at the end of September 2007, we hope to achieve the desired out-turn by 31 March 2008. It is pleasing to see how well Taunton Deane is performing in comparison with neighbouring Somerset Authorities in this area.

The second information report focuses on performance in Housing & Council Tax Benefit administration. Given the understandably poor results in Best Value Performance Indicators last year, following the migration of data from the Revenues & Benefits in-house system to new software, the service has demonstrated remarkable improvement showing that at the end of the second quarter, performance was the top quartile in many areas.

One of the more notable cases appearing before the Court this month for Benefit Fraud involved a woman who failed to declare savings of over £53k. Because of her false declarations, we overpaid Housing and Council Tax Benefit of £11k. The Judge in the case decided to defer sentencing for her offence until December 2007 to ensure the cheques she gave us to repay the overpaid benefit are against cleared funds.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

In recent weeks the finance service has been concentrating on the detailed work behind the budget, this has included meeting with budget holders and managers and firming up the assumptions behind the Medium Term Financial Plan. Financial Services have also been providing support to Managers in the preparation of savings plans which will be necessary to close the anticipated budget gap for 2008/09. Recruitment of a new Housing Accountant is underway and Financial Services have also been working with IBM/SouthWest One in anticipation of service take on by SouthWest One on 1 December. Financial Services have also recently been working with external auditors, the Audit Commission, following up the recommendations that they have made on their Final Accounts and Use of Resources judgements for 2006/07. It is pleasing to note that the Council continues to score 3 out of 4 for Use of Resources - especially when there has been so much going on recently with the start of SouthWest One.

Legal Services

Legal Services have been heavily involved with a number of issues, the forthcoming planning enquiry into the planning applications for the "gypsy" site at Oxen Lane North Curry. Legal Services have also been involved in the report that went to the Planning Committee concerning the development proposals for Monkton Heathfield and it is likely that there will be a significant public enquiry into the non-determination of the planning application early in the spring next year. There has been on-going involvement with elements of the projects under the Project Taunton banner together with various social housing developments. The Land Charges unit is undergoing a review and the results of which will be reported in the near future.

Scrutiny and Performance Management

Scrutiny

The Scrutiny Pilot under the new working arrangements is continuing. Councillors started on four new Task and Finish Reviews in November – Renewable Energy; Delivery of larger housing schemes; Housing and anti-social behaviour; and Rural Stagnation. There are more in the pipeline to commence shortly.

Performance / CPA

The Annual Report 2006/07 has been published which details TDBC achievements over the past year and our plans for the next year. This is a statutory publication and includes all of our performance indicators and targets, a statement on our contracts and details how we plan to address our weaknesses.

The half year update of performance against our Corporate Strategy objectives, performance indicators and budget position will be taken to the Strategy and Performance Panel on the 18th December for Scrutiny.

The Audit Commission have sent us their draft 'Use of Resources Judgement' report for 2006/07. This report still awaits moderation, however early indications of performance are good with the Council being awarded the same scores as last year (all scores out of 4) – Financial Reporting 3; Financial Management 3; Financial Standing 3; Internal Control 2; Value for Money 3.

The Audit Commission have also sent us their draft 'Data Quality' report. Again the conclusions are mostly positive and our "management arrangements for data quality continue to meet minimum requirements".

For both of these reports, we will respond to the Audit Commission on their findings and will discuss recommendations with the portfolio holder and send the final published reports to the Executive for information.

The Annual 'Direction of Travel' assessment by the Audit Commission starts now! Their first meeting is with the Executive and they will finish on Monday 10th December. They will come to an opinion on whether we are improving as an organisation and delivering the right outcomes for our community.

Michelle Hale, the Corporate Performance Officer, continues to be seconded to ISiS until the end of December.

Corporate Strategy

The Draft Corporate Strategy is 90% complete and has been through Overview and Scrutiny. The Final version will be taken to the Executive in January for approval.

Procurement

The new SW1 Strategic Procurement Function is being developed and Procurement is being fast-tracked to try and identify some early savings. Procurement is being broken down into eight 'categories' (e.g. 'Construction') across the Councils, and project groups will look at each category in detail to identify savings opportunities. Structures are being put in place to be able to agree and authorise savings and to then remove them from budgets.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting 11 December 2007

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp - Community Leadership.

Much of the activity within the Community Leadership Portfolio relies upon partnership working, and there has been a great deal of progress within these partnerships as follows:

In October '07 we embarked on our South West One Partnership with IBM and the County Council (and possibly Avon and Somerset Police soon too). At the same time Leaders and Chief Executives of the five District Council and the County Council have been meeting as Team Somerset to formulate ways of sharing expertise and services across the County. There is a feeling of co-operation and a desire to produce the very best services for the people of Somerset through joint working.

Meanwhile Taunton Deane Borough Council continues to work closely with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which includes the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, to improve the quality of life for the people of Taunton Deane. The LSP published its Sustainable Community Strategy earlier this year. The Strategy sets out the LSP's 21 priorities and, to ensure that projects take place to help deliver against these priorities, the LSP is inviting applications for funding. The LSP has approximately £73,000 to allocate to projects that fulfill its criteria.

Progress is being made on the new Local Area Agreement (LAA). The LAA is a multi-agency action plan that seeks to address the priorities from the Districts, and County Council's Sustainable Community Strategies. A new LAA will commence June 2008 and so a lot of consultation and information gathering has been happening over recent months. The 'longlist' of issues which will form the basis of the new LAA was presented to the LSP, and other interested parties, last week to test whether all the issues that matter within Taunton Deane have been included.

There was a very successful Local Action Teams/Neighbourhood Watch Network Event at Wellsprings Leisure Centre on Saturday 1 December. A large number of people attended. It was heartening to see the two groups developing a better understanding of the others role, and as a consequence seek ways to co-operate and work together. Along with the Local Action Teams we continue to work with the Police Constable Support Officers, the County Youth Workers and others to actively support young people and encourage them to be a cohesive force in the community. We are particularly pleased that there will be two PCSO's dedicated to monitoring licensed premises and off-license outlets, looking out for people selling to under age children and young people.

The Community Restorative Justice Panel for the Wellington area continues to develop. We will be interviewing for the Panel Coordinator in December. Once this key member of staff is in place the recruitment of volunteers can

take place and, all being well, the scheme should be up and running in the spring.

For further information about any of the issues in this report please contact me.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp