

Part II Reports from the Executive

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005 REPORT OF COUNCILLOR JOHN WILLIAMS – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

A merry Christmas and successful New Year to all our Officers and Members and I thank everybody for their commitment and hard work during yet another successful year.

The immediate major issue confronting us is establishing the budget for 2006/07 which is made difficult at present by the lack of information from central Government regarding the amount of Revenue Support Grant they are likely to award. By the time of Full Council this information will be available and at least the uncertainty will be over. From rumours circulating it heralds a difficult time ahead because only a nominal increase is being forecast. I hope this is proved wrong for the sake of our community.

Notwithstanding this we have made good progress in reducing our budget deficit of £0.7m as reported to the Review Board recently down to £50k using best guesses as to what the Revenue Support Grant will be. This has been achieved so far by increasing income and reducing costs without any use of reserves, a position we have previously managed to achieve that no recurring costs are funded from reserves and a situation we will maintain.

Our greatest challenge is the delivery of more effective services at less cost. The arguments surrounding Council Tax are legendary but suffice to say because of justifiable public outcry we must keep any increases as small as humanly possible, whilst accommodating all the extra directives from Central Government which are not fully funded. For instance, it is decreed by Government that we will provide free bus passes for all senior citizens from April 2006, this is estimated to increase our present costs from £330,000 by another £320,000 to the huge amount of £650,000 – of the £320,000 extra cost, our officers best guess is only half of this will be funded by Government (although directing us to do it) leaving local taxpayers to pick up the bill for £160,000. This problem extends much wider because of inadequate Revenue Support Grant allowances meaning we must find efficiency savings to mitigate the extra burden on the local taxpayer. The headline costs/services not fully funded are re-cycling of waste, new licensing costs, increased costs of staff salaries and services we buy. Pensions and the huge costs associated with homelessness being particularly exacerbated by Government changes as to who we must house when they present themselves as homeless.

2006 should see the building blocks in place for commencement of the regeneration programme for Taunton in earnest. Since August 2005 a dedicated team has been in place fully supported and financed by TDBC, SCC and SWRDA. They are working through the logistics of facilitating the development of this huge project in an orderly fashion. County Council have designed additional roads necessary for implementation of the redevelopment and we are hopeful that funding will be available through Local Transport Plan 2 now under consideration by GOSW. The Environment Agency have been modelling flood prevention schemes the results of which should be available in 2006. Early indications are positive that relatively economical measures can be

carried out to prevent flooding. The all important car parking strategy is presently being worked on and will be available early 2006, this is vital to the future prosperity of the town and we must get it right. Under the new car parking schemes it is intended to use advance signing to notify motorists of available spaces and pay on exit charging systems, both will be a major improvement on the existing.

Final decisions will be made regarding relocation of the Livestock Market which will free up the single most important site in the regeneration programme with circa 2,000 homes, 600,000 sq ft of office/business space, multi-storey car park and new hotel. Also, we must not forget the wonderful opportunity this will bring to enhance the riverside with attractive walkways, riverside bars and cafes. I must clearly and unequivocally state that there is the will and the commitment from this Council to facilitate a successful relocation of the livestock market to J26 Chelston, we have in place the mechanism to assist with the cost of redevelopment and our officers are presently working with TMA as to the likely amount we will be able to invest.

Somerset County Cricket Club are rapidly progressing plans to redevelop their ground to accommodate one day international matches. The latest plans show a scaled back version of what was proposed originally to completely remodel the ground including new stands. I understand the more recently built stands will now be retained making the whole project much more viable. We will, of course, be working closely with the Cricket Club to assist where possible, for instance, some of the Deane Coal Orchard car park will be required, we are fully aware of the Club being a jewel in Taunton's crown, therefore, will do all possible to assist their redevelopment.

Tangier area is also becoming a prime candidate for development, a company called Second Site have recently agreed the final Section 106 terms to allow construction of a major residential development. This is a prime site overlooking the river and is a significant move forward. In addition, the County Council are seeking permission to develop a new prestigious civic building to house Somerset Archives and a learning centre, this would be a major boost to the development of a cultural quarter for the area.

There is considerable interest in the development of the High Street/Crescent Car Park area which, if constructed, provides an extremely central bus station as a drop off point for the prime shopping areas. Besides multi-storey car parking this new development will provide in excess of 300,000 sq ft of new retail area and some residential development.

Besides the central station it is crucial that an interchange station for buses is provided at the railway station if we are to encourage greater rail use.

All of the foregoing clearly indicates why the Vision for Taunton planning over the last 3 years has been vitally important – without a masterplan in place we, the Planning Authority, would not be able to assess the merits of the individual disparate projects as to how they fit into the overall picture when brought forward. This hopefully avoiding the piecemeal, sometimes unacceptable, development of Taunton that has occurred.

It goes without saying that quality of the built environment must be paramount in all of our future development plans. This must include quality public realm buildings and spaces with excellent cultural and leisure facilities. Economic development will be worthless in the long term if we leave behind it, a barren cultural wasteland.

I will touch on the Regional Spatial Strategy which will dictate our housing numbers to 2026, this could have huge implications for Taunton as we are identified as a major growth area. As such,

we could be asked to accommodate increases from our present 400 to 500 PA up to possibly 900 PA.

This brings with it huge community and infrastructure problems which I have no confidence that the Government will properly address. Without adequate investment in new roads and community facilities any extra housing growth should be limited. Regrettably, these decisions are now outside of our control and in the hands of the Regional Assembly who have been nominated by Government to make decisions that we, as planning authority, will have to implement. I am delighted that the Silk Mills Bridge and Park and Ride scheme are at last operational this will ultimately bring huge benefit for Taunton Deane and all who travel on that side of town. We will not see the full benefits of this until all construction works have been completed and the lights properly sequenced then the traffic flow will improve dramatically I am sure.

Developers, Summerfield, have been working closely with TMA to design a new roundabout on the A38 at Chelston to facilitate access to their own site of 55 acres for employment land and provide the necessary access to the livestock market site opposite. A planning application for development of this employment land is expected imminently which will be excellent news for Wellington. Summerfield are very anxious to bring this site forward because they have recently completed development of phase 3 at Chelston and there is still an unmet demand for further employment space. Good news for Taunton Deane that we are able to attract and sustain employment opportunities.

You will note that my colleague Cllr Lewin-Harris has referred to the Review and Scrutiny process and the recognised need for improvement. This is now definitely being addressed with the appointment of a Policy and Performance Manager, Simon Lewis who is to be congratulated on his promotion and we look forward to Alistair Higton joining us in the New Year as Scrutiny Officer in order to provide the support and assistance to make scrutiny and review work. These posts have been provided within our existing staff budgets and demonstrate our administrations commitment to making scrutiny a worthwhile process for the benefit of the community to ensure we deliver the most effective services.

Finally, good news for Taunton, for those of you that did not attend the turning on of the Christmas lights the 20 November it was a huge success and I must congratulate the Town Centre Manager, Lucy Ball, and her team for organising such a fantastic day. I cannot recall such large crowds and wonderful atmosphere any time previously. I say day because it was not just the turning on of the lights, it was a complete fun day event with market stalls and events dotted around the traffic free centre culminating in a fantastic firework display. Well done to all again, for the hard work that went into making it such a success.

We must not forget the real ice rink that at the time of writing this report is being constructed. By the meeting it will be fully operational and I am sure will be giving great enjoyment to many. I certainly hope that it will set Taunton apart as a place to visit and enjoy, thus being a magnet for visitors from across the region. We must not forget, it also provides a wonderful facility for our own community. I could not help notice press reports that some traders did not benefit from the crowds visiting Taunton for the turning on of the lights which is to be regretted, but hopefully as the ice rink is in Goodlands Gardens they will gain considerable benefit from this attraction creating extra footfall.

Cllr John Williams
Leader Taunton Deane Borough Council

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REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GWYNETH LEIGHTON COMMUNICATIONS

Due to the restructure of Policy and Performance the work carried out by the '*Information*' and '*Consultation*' team has been aligned with and complements the work of the Communications team as a whole and consequently now falls within the remit of the Communications Portfolio.

Information

Work is currently being carried out to both update the existing Wellington and area profile and to create new profiles for the North Taunton and Taunton East community planning areas. The purpose of these profiles is to provide a base line of information using the most up-to-date data and trends available for these communities. These profiles will provide vital evidence of the economic, social and environmental well being of the areas. The information will then be used to prepare a community strategy for each of the areas and thus begin the process of establishing a long term vision and a supporting action plan. The plan then belongs to local residents and organisations of the areas, reflecting their priorities and hopes.

Consultation

Planning for the 2006-2007 priorities and budget consultation exercise will start in the spring of 2006.

Local Government Reputation Project

Like Somerset County Council, the Council has recently signed up to the LGA 'Local Government Reputation Programme'. Using research undertaken by MORI and drawing on the expertise of approximately 400 local authority communications practitioners, the LGA working with the IDeA have identified five core 'communication actions that, if done well by the council, will have a significant impact on its reputation and standing. The research tells us that one of the most important drivers of public satisfaction with local authorities is perceived quality of services overall and perceived value for money and to this end we are committed to delivering the 5 core activities of this programme - these are:

- effective media management
- provide an a-z guide of council services
- publish a regular council magazine/newspaper
- branding - effective and consistent linkage of council brand to community services
- good internal communications

Weekly Bulletin

Working well, with a few minor transitional problems but we are aspiring to producing a really useful weekly update for Members.

Campaigns

Several successful campaigns have been rolled out over recent weeks including the Handyman Scheme and the results show that communications has really helped to bring in enquiries so much so that two handy vans are required for a period to deal with the extra workload. Work has included helping with communications to parishes, press releases to the local media and road shows. Our press office continues to support Waste Services and effectively handled a number of difficult media enquiries at the start of the roll out. The recent feature article on the second phase of our 'Sort It' recycling scheme in the Somerset County Gazette was excellent and clearly demonstrates that the public want to participate. In the New Year you can expect a concerted effort to promote the introduction of the Fixed Penalty Notices in respect of litter and before anyone asks we have never had any intention of using Megaphone man despite what you may have read in the local press!!

The Vision Guide has been well received and is used by the Vision Delivery Team. The PR team are working well (TDBC, SCC, EA, RDA), which has resulted in good coverage in several national trade publications. Consultation with the public has confirmed the Vision is and should remain one of our top priorities. However the research also identified that we need to do more work to promote a better public understanding of the Vision and this is now being worked on in conjunction with the local press.

Media Training

Media training has now taken place with CMT and the Executive.

Deane Dispatch

Winter edition is now out and we have received many compliments on the improvement in editorial style over the past 12 months.

Last, but not least I would like to thank both staff and members for their continued dedication and hard work during the past year. This is much appreciated. I wish all of you a happy Christmas and good fortune in the New Year.

Gwyneth Leighton
Executive Councillor for Communications

December 2005

COUNCIL MEETING 13 December 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BISHOP PLANNING POLICY AND TRANSPORTATION

Schools' half term was no holiday for Taunton Deane's Building Control Service, who once again took over the Castle Sports and School complex to stage their seventeenth annual Conference and Exhibition.

Tuesday 25th October was set-up day, as the Sports Hall was transformed into an exhibition arena hosting 40 trade stands and an all-day coffee and refreshments bar, while the installation of temporary staging, discreet lighting, sound and projection systems and plush seating transformed the school hall into an excellent conference theatre.

Deane Parks Service provided the planting displays, and Deane DLO the men and materials to make the transformation complete.

Conference day, 26th October, saw over 200 delegates assembled in the hall to hear the opening address from the Mayor, Councillor Richard Lees. Then it was into a packed programme involving speakers from the Office of The Deputy Prime Minister, Plymouth University and various other practices and organisations. Principal theme of this year's Conference was the forthcoming changes to the Building Regulations aimed at reducing the carbon emissions which buildings and building use contribute to the environment. An excellent buffet lunch and exhibition viewing provided a break before the delegates re-assembled for the afternoon session.

I have been a keen supporter of the Building Control Conference over a number of years, and I congratulate, Brian Yates and the Building Control staff, for making this an outstanding event in the conference calendar which is supported and recognised nationally both by the delegates and exhibitors, and puts Taunton really on the map.

Delegates went home happy at four o'clock after another hugely successful event, while the Building Control team just had time for a quick cup of tea before setting-to and clearing the whole show away in time for the Sports Hall to resume business at seven in the evening.

Eight months in preparation, one grand performance and gone in a flash – that's show business for you!

Planning training

Since my last report, three more training sessions have been held for Parish Councils and an excellent training session for Taunton Deane members was held with Judith Jackson and John Hardy making a presentation on Planning Enforcement followed by Di Hartnell, with a presentation on the many aspects of her work dealing with conservation issues.

At the last meeting with Parish Councils, the members present were all in favour of attending a meeting at the Deane House, at which all councils will be invited to see a presentation on Planning Enforcement, similar to that given to our Members. I will

arrange for everyone to be given adequate notice of the date when we propose to hold the training session.

Planning applications and decisions

A section 106 has been agreed and planning permission granted for the outline application, submitted by the Agents acting for Second Site Property Holdings, for residential development. new site accesses, car parking and associated works on Former Gas Storage site at Castle Street, Taunton. The appeal, submitted for failure to determine an application within the appropriate time, has now been withdrawn.

An outline application has been submitted by Redrow Homes, Persimmon Homes Ltd and Westbury Homes Ltd (The Monkton Heathfield Consortium) for 900 dwellings, an employment site of up to 13 hectares for B1a, B1c and B8 uses, a Local Centre site of 2.72 hectares with a minimum of 600 sq metres of retail floor space, a Primary school site of 2 hectares, Green Spaces, including leaps and neaps of 12.96 hectares and the A38 Relief Road.

Regional Transport Strategy

The RTS is being progressed and contains the following sections :-

Progress and relationship of the RTS to other regional documents;

Themes of the RTS;

Prioritisation of investment;

Likely impacts of policies on Somerset; and

Summary and conclusions

The RTS is not a distinct document in its own right but is part of the Regional Spatial Strategy which is expected to be submitted to Central Government by 31st March 2006.

Public Transport Forum

At a recent meeting I was pleased to hear that the bus shelters in Taunton Deane are maintained to a better standard than in some other areas within the County.

Cliff Bishop

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS.D. BRADLEY – LEISURE, ARTS AND CULTURE

COMMUNITY ARTS AND ARTS DEVELOPMENT

Cultural Quarter

The report “The Cultural Quarter; A Catalyst for cultural regeneration and renewal in Taunton and Somerset” was launched at the Brewhouse Theatre on 17th November. It was born out of a workshop held by Terence O’Rourke which led to the setting up of a working party of stakeholders. These include the County Museum, The Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, the Brewhouse Theatre, the Tacchi-Morris Centre, the Town Centre Company, Richard Huiish, Somerset Art Gallery Trust, Taunton Civic Society, the Chamber of Commerce SCAT, the Taunton Association of Performing Arts, the County and Taunton Deane. Together they have shared information on future plans and reached a consensus on what is needed to develop a cultural quarter. The report is one of substance and considerable value and owes an immense debt to the chairman Max Hebditch (ex London Museum). I would publicly like to express not only my own thanks but those of Taunton Deane for the very considerable time and expertise that he has given to us. The report is also of value and importance in our approach to outside funding bodies.

The Consortium has identified the following components to build the cultural infrastructure:

- A new centre for the performing and visual arts – an expansion of the Brewhouse
- A redeveloped County Museum and “Centre of Excellence”
- Development of a regional art gallery, possibly at the Brewhouse or the Museum
- Redevelopment of Castle Green for markets, performances and public activities
- High quality design of architecture and public space
- Support for the Creative Industries

Taunton Deane Borough Council is now looking for accommodation for a Creative Enterprise Resource Centre in Taunton for which funding has been obtained from the rural Renaissance Fund. We are also now starting to draft a public art and design policy

The Consortium itself is now revising its terms of reference in order to contribute to the Taunton Vision delivery team on matters cultural.

The Brewhouse

Robert Miles, the new director of The Brewhouse Theatre, attended the Health and Leisure Panel to introduce himself. He is working closely with the local amateur groups to build a stronger relationship between the two. He comes from the Theatre Royal Stratford East, a ground breaking London producing theatre which has been instrumental in bringing change into a run down part of the East End. He is particularly interested in working with young people and in outreach. He has a real vision of how Taunton can become a premier arts venue for Somerset. Geographically there is a huge constituency and the potential to draw in locals and tourist from a large area

Ann Frank Exhibition

The international touring exhibition “Ann Frank and you” will be coming to Taunton in March 2006. This Council is supporting the exhibition with a £1500 grant from community planning as well as programming arts events around the exhibition.

PARKS

Victoria Park

Work is planned to start on a new children’s play area and a multi-use games area for young people in Victoria Park in the New Year. For safety and management reasons these are being centrally located. They will be followed with a community project to create a community garden and wildlife-friendly garden on the sites of the old play areas in the Spring.

Play Areas

Refurbishment and safety improvements will be carried out at various childrens’ play areas throughout the borough over the coming months.

North Taunton

The Blackthorn Gardens MUGA and children's play area have been refurbished and improved with work just about complete. The new youth shelter at Lyngford Park will also be installed before Christmas.

French Weir Park

A master plan for the development of French Weir Park has been drawn up based on recent consultations and an exhibition held in the park to seek the public’s opinions on the proposals. A meeting of people interested in becoming more involved in the further development of the proposals is being held in January.

SPORTS

Vivary Chalet

The chalet walls and roof are now completed and works to ‘finish’ the building will continue through December with the project estimated to be completed by Christmas 2005. The chalet will house a café for the park, new public toilets and a reception area for the golf and mini golf facilities.

The current golf kiosk will then be converted into a changing facility for pay and play golfers – it is anticipated that this will be completed in January 2006.

Taunton Tennis Centre

The project to convert 2 external courts at Blackbrook into an indoor facility is being tendered in early December with a tender return date of January 2006. TDBC, Tone Leisure and the Lawn Tennis Association are funding the project.

The building will be a ‘framed fabric’ structure, which has advantages over traditional build of speed and cost.

Barclays Space For Sports

An application has been made to Barclays Space For Sports for £50,000 to convert an under utilized tennis court on the Taunton Green site into a Multi Use Games Area.

The application could also attract up to £20,000 revenue/development funding to enable coaching courses to take place at the new facility.

It is anticipated that the result of our application will be heard early in 2006.

Facility Investment

The investment programme for improving and maintaining the sports facilities is shared by the Council and Tone Leisure. Recent and planned projects include:

- Refurbishment and upgrade of upper hall at Wellington Sports Centre to include air conditioning ceiling, lighting and flooring.

- Refurbishment and upgrade of lockers and changing rooms at Blackbrook Pavilion.
- Installation of high quality golf practice area at Vivary Golf Course.
- Refreshment of front of house area at Station Road Pool.
- Upgraded flooring and drape system at Wellsprings Leisure Centre.

Tone Leisure Limited Events

Two successful entertainment events have been held at Wellsprings recently - Jethro and Killer Queen, the latter attracting a crowd of around 850.

Forthcoming Events include:

- Junior triathlon run by the Pony Club at Wellington Sports Centre on 2nd January.
- “The Big Party” nights at Wellsprings are proving to be very popular, with four of the six evenings already fully sold out. Each party accommodates up to 450 guests.
- An evening of 70s pop bands (December - Slade, Mud and tribute band T-Rextasy) at Wellsprings on 21st.
- Chaplin’s Pantos production of Cinderella at Wellsprings on 3rd January
- Aquathlon (swim followed by run) 19th February at Wellington Sports Centre.

NET WORKING

I attended a workshop on the Local Area Agreement at the Exchange and joined the workshop on the Economic block to argue the case for the creative industries.

I travelled by train and on foot to Dartington Hall to a presentation by English Heritage on their Third Strategic Plan. What is contained in their “Our Heritage, Our Future, Your Say” appears to me to tie in well with our evolving “Waterscapes” bid.

This is an application to the Big Lottery Fund on the theme of the Waterways of Somerset (deadline 6th January 2006). It is a collaborative approach involving County, Districts and the Voluntary sector and will bring together flood prevention on the levels, the Tone in Taunton, the canals, improved cycling, walking and river based recreational opportunities, industrial archaeology, training and educational facilities and the renovation and interpretation of a number of historic features of national importance.

English Heritage also flagged up their concern over the demands made upon their resources by the numerous village churches in the region. I would therefore ask whether perhaps we as community leaders should not be seeking to promote greater community use and enjoyment of these precious historic buildings through our current strategies and grants.

I have also been approached by a Real Tennis enthusiast seeking fellow enthusiasts with a view to locating a court in Taunton Deane. May I ask such enthusiasts to get in touch with Stephen Hughes or myself.

Finally may I thank our officers for the immense hard work they have put in on so many fronts towards creating that level of momentum to move us all forward into this very different world of the 21st Century.

Cllr Dilly Bradley

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR CAVILL **ECONOMIC, ASSET MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM**

Asset Management

As part of the continuing CPA process, in the summer of this year the Audit Commission focussed on aspects of the Council's performance over the previous year and our planned course of action for the future. Since its inception in 2001, we have produced an asset management plan, AMP, each year. The AMP contains the relevant information on our assets and how they are performing regarding energy consumption, profitability, their condition, and what is being built, modified, sold, acquired, or demolished. Although since 2003, we have not been required to produce an AMP, we have continued as it was considered a beneficial process and produced a meaningful document. This Autumn, the 2005 AMP was submitted, together with additional information, to CPA inspectors. (The AMP is on the Council's intranet). It is understood that having interviewed officers and members, the CPA inspectors were satisfied that the council's assets were being satisfactorily maintained and that adequate plans for the future were in place.

Expressions of interest have been requested from developers for the development at Blackdown Business Park. Tender documents will be sent in the next two weeks to interested parties who satisfy TDBC criteria.

Economic Development

The primary focus of the Business Support Team over recent weeks has been the development of a transparent and modernised Business Support Grant, that both client companies and our partner Business Link can understand. This has involved developing a section of the Ec Dev web-site, which now carries details of the scheme.

There has been a good response to the first round of this scheme, which has resulted in five local small businesses (or new start companies) each receiving £2000 towards the set-up costs of their enterprise. In particular these exemplar companies employ 15 people, and their future business plans indicate that a further 12 new jobs will be created as a result of the support received.

All applicants to this scheme attend a series of business development workshops, run by Business Link, are introduced and encouraged to improve their own level of skills through courses run by either Somerset Skills Alliance or SCAT. The scheme has proved to be of benefit to all businesses attending, whether one of the award winners or not.

Tourism

Both the Taunton and Wellington TICs have received Bronze Award from South West Tourism, as a result of their 2005 Mystery Shopper service. This service provides a detailed feedback to the TICs, there are different types of enquiry, which include written, telephone, out of hours phone service, e-mail and a personal visit. It is a credit to our TICs, that the report from SW Tourism noted that the Taunton TIC, '...gives excellent support to local craftspeople and promoting their quality products as well as selling an excellent range of small gifts, maps, books and postcards/cards.

Excellent selection of free visitor information with excellent light, bright and well organised office.'

Rural Economy

Our ADO has organised a second series of marketing courses designed specifically for farmers which was delivered in partnership with Business Link. In the face of growing adverse conditions and increasing levels of regulation, sheer economic necessity is forcing many farming businesses to consider new ventures. These developing enterprises, by definition, require new skills concerned with promotion, advertising and customer support. To help farmers understand these essential skills for a new marketplace, a series of 'Marketing for Profit' workshops have been commissioned. To ensure we are delivering what the delegate wants, we commission feedback from each delegate before the course ends. I am pleased to say that, for both programmes delivered to date the response has been very positive: high marks for relevance and quality of the programme. In line with DEFRA and Government policy to encourage cooperation and group working, we are helping delegates to form a marketing discussion group so they can continue to work together share ideas and gain benefit from each other. So far these workshops have assisted businesses employing in excess of 70 people, and all businesses are actively pursuing their proposals.

A further range of courses is being developed by the partners that will give farming businesses the skills to assess the potential of diversification projects. This is likely to take place in early 2006.

Ice Rink

By the time you have this report, the ice rink will have been constructed and I hope you will all have had an opportunity to practice your skating. Although we have not been successful in attracting the initial sponsorship that we had hoped for, 6 banners around the rink have now been sold. The promotion campaign has been well received and we have had local, regional, and national promotion for Taunton. The event is advertised on the back of buses in Yeovil, Exeter, Minehead and Weston. Ticket sales, individual and block bookings, are going exceptionally well. I am sure that the ice rink with its publicity is, and will be, a considerable boon to the community of Taunton Deane and around and increase footfall to the shops of Taunton.

Councillor Norman Cavill

COUNCIL MEETING – 13 December 2005.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MARK EDWARDS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES.

1.0 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

1.1 Licensing Unit

The new licensing arrangements have now “gone live” following the second appointed day on 24th November. Following decisions made by the Council’s Licensing Sub Committee five appeals were lodged with the Magistrates Court. All of these appeals have now either been heard in Court with the Council’s decision upheld or have since been withdrawn.

Taunton Deane Borough Council has been appointed as one of only ten local authorities in England and Wales to work with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as a Scrutiny Council over the next six months to monitor and evaluate the licensing reforms. Officers from the group of councils that also includes Birmingham, Blackpool, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Havering, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham, will be working with the DCMS, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office to establish an in-depth partnership between local delivery and central policy makers.

1.2 Health and Safety Team

National Ladders Campaign 14 - 25 November 2005.

Last year 13 people died from falls while working on a ladder and over 1,200 people suffered major injuries. In support of the Health & Safety Executive’s (HSE) ‘National Ladders Campaign’, the Health and Safety Team distributed information leaflets to help raise awareness of the risks associated with ladder use and giving advice on how to use them safely. Visits were also made by Environmental Health Officers to local premises to provide practical advice and guidance in order to help prevent future incidents in Taunton Deane.

1.3 Food Safety Team

A Formal Caution has been accepted by the proprietors of a town centre restaurant as an alternative to prosecution. The offence was contamination of a meal with a piece of wire from a sieve used in food preparation.

Two Contractors have now been appointed to deliver our *Safer Food Better Business* (SFBB) programme. Both have attended a two-day Coaching Seminar and will be applying for full accreditation as SFBB Tutors within the next few weeks, after further practical training.

1.4 Environmental Protection Team

Water Sampling

With the phased abolition of the Somerset County Council’s precept allowance for water sampling, the Team has developed a strategy for ensuring that we continue to provide a service to owners of “single premises” Private Water Supplies. There is no statutory duty to provide a sampling service for these residents and we cannot continue our current free programme with the reduced funding. Affected residents are

now being offered a sampling programme for which they will have to pay but for which the costs have been kept as low as possible.

Depending upon the level of analysis they select, from a wide range, the costs will be from £10 to £140 per visit. The customer will also choose the sampling frequency. Of the 374 questionnaires sent out explaining the new scheme 358 (96%) have been returned, with 46 of these expressing an active interest in the Project. The questionnaire also proved very useful in updating the Team's Private Water Supply database.

Land Contamination.

Team members were involved in a contamination incident resulting from a domestic heating oil spill in Capland. Though the storage tank was nearly new it had fractured, allowing some 500 litres of oil to pollute two gardens and threaten nearby surface waters. The Environment Agency was notified and is monitoring water courses. Team members are continuing to negotiate with the owner's insurance companies to ensure that the affected land is cleaned up to a satisfactory standard.

Air Quality.

Team members gave an evening presentation to Ruishton Parish Council concerning air quality issues. One of the Council's two Air Quality Action Areas is in Ruishton and the presentation centred on the Action Plan that has been developed to deal with marginally elevated levels of Nitrogen Dioxide, arising from vehicle exhaust emissions.

2.0 WASTE SERVICES

2.1 Toilet Cleansing

Tancred Street toilets have now been sold and ceased operation on 17th November.

One of the attendants at Castle Green ladies toilets is on long term sick leave, we have been fortunate and found a replacement who has been employed on a casual basis.

2.2 Street Cleansing

The Autumn leaf fall is stretching resources but the support of the "Swingo" precinct sweeper is proving invaluable with its ability to sweep footways.

2.3 Abandoned Vehicles

With the continued cooperation of the Police and their Community Support officers the number of vehicles removed in the period April to September was 54 compared with 83 for the same period last year. Apart from this cooperation and the proactive approach the reduction in numbers could be caused by the increased value of scrap metal.

3.0 TAUNTON DEANE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM

Crematorium Organ

Work has almost been completed on repairing and renovating the crematorium organ. The renovation has provided a far better depth of sound and improved usage of the system. To demonstrate this improvement the crematorium organist is hoping to hold a recital in the New Year.

Taunton Deane Cemetery & Crematorium Car Park Lighting

Following a "risk assessment" the necessity for car park lighting was identified. Demonstrations of various systems available are currently arranged. It is hoped that an environmentally friendly system such as solar powered lighting can be used. The lighting will be financed from income generated by the crematorium.

Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions

Legislation requiring 50% of cremations in this country to be abated for mercury by 2012 has been issued. The Health & Leisure Review Panel has approved a recommendation to increase the cremation fee and save for the extension necessary to the crematorium building, and purchase the filtration equipment required. The revenue generated from the increase in the cremation fee will be placed into a ring-fenced fund.

Wellington Cemetery Extension

For several years now both the estates and planning sections of Taunton Deane have been looking for suitable land at Wellington to use as future burial ground. As yet no land has been identified, although enquiries continued to be made.

Taunton Deane Cemetery Extension

The Council owns land at the crematorium, which will be used for future burial. This land requires developing for the service. An entrance road, paths, drainage, planting etc have to be in place before its use can commence. It is anticipated that work to prepare this land will be undertaken over the next few years.

Funeral Directors Room

A small room has been provided for use by funeral directors at the crematorium. This provides a comfortable shelter for their staff between services.

[Mark Edwards](#)

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

This report will focus on two areas within the Housing Portfolio. The first is to provide the usual update on Housing Stock Options and the second will be to update members on the position regarding homelessness in Taunton Deane.

Housing Stock Transfer Update

Last three months

There has been a great deal of work undertaken since October, with the Project Team communicating to Tenants, Staff, Councillors and our Partners and generally driving the consultation process forward.

Since the last Full Council update, there has been:

- i) A mop up briefing to all Housing and Building DLO Staff
- ii) Briefings to Non Housing Staff
- iii) Door Knocking and Drop-In-Sessions across the Borough
- iv) Analysis of returned Priority Survey
- v) Discussions at various Council Meetings on key areas such as Savills Stock Condition Survey and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Financial Update
- vi) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum and Tenants' Panel and Tenants' Forum
- vii) The Shadow Board has met three times covering areas such as:
 - October: Introduction to governance
 - November: Duties and responsibilities, TUPE
 - December: Housing finance, rents and service charges

Presentation by Housing Corporation and the Community Housing Task Force at the quarterly Members Briefing

Key Messages:

Tenants Priority Survey:

Nearly 50% of the tenant population returned the priority survey indicating a high level of engagement by tenants. The results of the survey are being analysed and details will be presented in the new calendar year.

Early indications suggest that tenants concerns are mainly in the following areas:

Improved kitchens and bathrooms
Improved access and amenities for people who are disabled
Faster repair times
Improved security around their homes
A proactive approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Door Knocking and Drop In Sessions across the Borough:

The Project Team undertook 10 days of localised door knocking and drop-in-sessions. They met with and consulted tenants on the proposal of transferring the housing stock to a not-for-profit, locally based and totally independent Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

During this period staff spoke to 20% of the tenant population with a further 20% of the tenant population being left calling cards.

Door knocking - Geographical areas covered:

Broomfield House, Taunton Bulford, Wellington Darby Way, Bishop Lydeard Dorchester Road, Taunton Dowell Close, Taunton Greenlands, Taunton	Hope Corner Lane, Taunton Lodge Close, Wellington Middleway, Taunton Moorland Place, Taunton Newton Road, Taunton Normandy Drive, Taunton	Parmin Close, Taunton Roland Close, Taunton Taunfield Close, Taunton Treborough Close, Taunton Wellesley Street, Taunton
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Financial Position:

The work undertaken by Savills on the completed stock condition survey, combined with inputting these findings into the Housing Financial Budgetary Models by staff and PricewaterhouseCoopers, has resulted in a more stark position. Over the next five years alone, there is an annual £2.1 million shortfall on resources against predicted expenditure in achieving the Decent Homes Standard and Statutory Obligations, which, as a benchmark, is considerably less than what the Council currently provides to tenants.

Next three months

- i) Further Tenants and Staff Newsletters will be sent
- ii) Further Council meetings where there will be an introduction to the “Offer Document” and more information on the findings on the Priority Survey
- iii) Meetings of the Officer Steering Group, Communication Group, Staff Forum and Tenants’ Panel and Tenants’ Forum
- iv) Two further Shadow Board Meetings (covering Business planning, Tenants draft offer, culture of RSL’s, Skills audit feedback).
- v) Undertaking Tenants’ Days to talk to tenants to understand more about the areas they have asked for improvements in, from the returned Priority Survey
- vi) Further Door Knocking
- vii) A Partners Day

Homelessness

We continue to experience high levels of homelessness and in recent weeks have had an increase from households with children, single households and couples without children. Traditionally the biggest cause of homelessness has been the ending of assured short hold tenancies (private sector landlords) but recently we have seen an increase in the number of all household types being evicted by friends and family, we are monitoring this closely to ascertain whether this is seasonal or a long term trend.

The 6 week target for families in B&B remains challenging but generally we are meeting this target in the majority of cases.

Work on homeless prevention continues but is largely confined to assisting households in moving in to the private sector through the provision of deposits and rent in advance. We had hoped to develop a “Finders Fee” scheme with the other four Somerset Districts but unfortunately failed in our bid for funding from the ODPM (a finders fee scheme is where local authorities offer landlords an incentive to take families on two year instead of standard 6 month lets) . We continue to do home visits wherever possible and are looking to develop further preventative measures such as our own finders fee scheme and mediation etc. Such initiatives will be developed as staff gain more experience and workloads allow.

Cllr Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR TERRY HALL - RESOURCES

1 Boundary Review

The Boundary Committee has published its draft recommendations into the future electoral arrangements for Taunton Deane. The Council has until 6th March to respond to the draft.

The Boundary Committee has accepted the Council's proposal to increase the number of Councillors by adding one more each at West Monkton and Norton Fitzwarren.

Under the Committee's proposals three seat wards will be created at Bishops Lydeard, and another by the combination of Creech, North Curry, and Stoke St Gregory. Two seat wards will be created by the combination of Ruishton and Neroche and also Milverton and Bradford on Tone.

To achieve better levels of electoral equality boundary adjustments are proposed at a number of other wards.

2 Customer Service

Since the middle of November the telephone speed of answer by Customer Service has markedly improved. This has resulted from a decline in the number of calls arising from the 'Sort It' rollout and by increasing the number of reception staff.

On average the speed of answer is now consistently under 30 seconds and the abandonment rate well under 10%. We plan to maintain this satisfactory situation.

3 Improving Services In Somerset (ISIS)

As members will know Avon and Somerset Police have reluctantly had to withdraw from this project because of proposed amalgamations of Forces in the South West Region.

Meanwhile progress is continuing at pace towards obtaining a preferred private sector bidder to join SCC and TDBC in this exciting venture. It is planned to publish the European Union tender notice (OJEU) at the end of December 2005 and in the Local Government Chronicle early in January 2006. A bidders information pack will be completed by the end of the year and a bidders open day will be held on 16th January 2006.

Interested companies will be short-listed by the end of March with the objective of award of contract by December 2006.

4 Financial Services Unit

The Financial Services Unit have been continuing their work on the 2006/07 budget process and have been updating both the Review Board and Executive on progress to date. Alongside the detailed number crunching there is also a lot of work, which supports the budget process for example officers have been presenting reports on the

expected level of fees and charges for 2006/07 and also calculating the expected Council tax base for next year. We have also recently received the initial estimate of the amount of housing subsidy, which the authority will have to bear in 2006/07. All of these things help to pull together our overall expected financial picture for next year.

The unit are also supporting many other corporate projects such as the following, Vision for Taunton, Waste Contract Integration, ISIS and the Housing options work."

5 Members Services

Following concern expressed at the last Council meeting regarding the microphone system, arrangements were made to get the original installers back to have a look at it. It has now been serviced and adjusted to provide a better quality of sound. The induction loop system was also checked and an order has been placed for 3 lapel microphones for use during presentations.

The Overview and Scrutiny review continues and as requested by the Review Board further consultation is being undertaken with the political groups. Appropriate officers have so far attended one group meeting and as a result much useful and positive feedback was obtained.

Incredible as it may seem the next Borough Council elections are only 18 months away. With this in mind preparatory work has already started on action to attract candidates and prepare an induction process for any new members.

6 Internal Audit

Internal Audit staff working as part of the South West Audit Partnership continue to be involved in a wide range of initiatives across the Council including: -

- Undertaking a wide range of financial and non-financial audits
- Rolling out Risk Management at service level with a number of workshops being facilitated by members of the Internal Audit Section.
- Ongoing provision of Data Protection and Freedom of Information advice.
- Playing a vital assurance role in some of the major projects that the Council is working on including ISIS, replacement Revenues / Benefits and Housing Systems.

On 1st October West Somerset and Mendip District Council formally joined the partnership providing further opportunities for us to develop our skills and learn from others. The Internal Audit team is currently operating with a full-time vacancy but has been strengthened by the return from secondment of the part-time member of staff who is now employed full-time within the Audit Partnership as a Computer Auditor / Audit Assistant.

7 Benefits Unit

On 15 November 2005, the Benefits Service submitted their self-assessment against the DWP's new Performance Standards. This was based on our performance in the

first half of 2005/2006 in delivering against 19 Performance Measures and 65 “Enablers”. Under the new scoring methodology, the Benefits Service is rated as “good” although improvements in October in the area of Customer Focus have now seen us move into the “Excellent” category.

We are currently recruiting new staff for a Benefit Advice Team that will allow us to focus more on the needs of our customers. Through internal re-organisation, we now have a permanent Investigation Team Leader, Helen Vile. North Somerset Council will continue to provide professional support until 31 March 2006 when Helen will complete her training. Her move to Investigations will bring much needed stability to the team.

Finally, we have increased the number of staff "home working" to nearly 25% of FTE's in the unit. So far, the benefits of this initiative have been significant through:

- Increased productivity;
- Improved quality;
- Reduced absence as the result of sickness
- Improved morale

Over the next year, we will be evaluating the success and the pitfalls of home working as we consider rolling out this initiative to more staff.

8 Revenues

- Payment kiosks – the payment machines are now operational at both the Taunton & Wellington cash offices. Staffs at both offices are explaining to customers how to use the machines. Currently the machines are running in conjunction with face-to-face cashiering. However, the face-to-face cashiering service is scheduled to end at both sites from Friday 20 January 2006.
- Revenues & Benefits IT System Replacement Project – contracts have been finalised with IBS and work has started on the implementation of the new system. Initially this will involve our converting over the information held on our current systems. This is a major task and will be undertaken by a project team comprised of staff from the Revenues, Benefits & IT units.
- Council Tax & Business Rates Collection – the statistics at the end of October 2005 indicate that we are on target with both debts.
- Year-End for Council Tax & Business Rates – Revenues, Benefits & IT staff has met to timetable and plan the new-year billing exercise. This exercise will take place at the beginning of March 2006 and will involve the production and issue of some 50,000 Business Rate and Council Tax bills. The Council Tax booklet, which accompanies all bills, is being produced in conjunction with the other 4 districts and the County. This will help to minimise production costs.

- Small Business Rate Relief – application forms are shortly to be issued to all ‘small businesses’ inviting them to apply, or re-apply, for Small Business Relief for the coming financial year. Successful applicants can receive up to a 50% reduction in their rate bill. We anticipate issuing applications to roughly a third of the business properties.

Terry Hall

COUNCIL MEETING 13 DECEMBER 2005

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS JOANNA LEWIN-HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA)

The first draft Local Area Agreement has now been through the Scrutiny process at Taunton Deane and was submitted to Government Office by the County Council at the end of November. Here are a few headline aims and targets that have particular relevance to this council. I would, however, stress that these are just some examples and in no way show the full extent of the LAA. Further information is available from Brendan Cleere, who is the lead officer for the Council on the LAA Multi-Agency Steering Group. A final draft LAA will come to the Review Board in January.

Children and Young People

Aim: Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation
Target/Indicators: Take up of Sporting opportunities by 5 – 16 year olds
Take up of cultural and sporting opportunities among over 16's

National standards to include:

Access to two hours per week of sporting activity

Access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups or classes

Older People:

Aim: To increase older people's inclusion and participation through primary prevention.

Target/Indicator: The number of older people helped to live at home

Aim: Increased use of 'mainstream' services by older people.

Target/Indicator: The number of older people who enrol on learning and leisure (inc arts / cultural) courses and activities.

Aim: Improved use of preventive technology.

Target/Indicator: Increased number of users of community alarm services and related provision

Safer Communities

Aim: To reduce crime and reassure the public reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour

Target/Indicator: Large businesses who regularly do drinks promotions encouraged to pay for door staff training and other initiatives to deal with drink related problems in a given area.

Licensed premises encouraged to switch to toughened or plastic glasses where they have not already done so, where it can be shown that toughened or plastic glasses would lead to reduction in glass related injuries.

The Three Strikes initiative (based in Taunton) expanded across Somerset
Expand diversionary activities, such as the Taunton Deane based VIBE Project, to engage young people living in areas of deprivation and isolated rural areas.

Stronger Communities

Aim: A more thriving and vibrant Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) in Somerset, which is in a stronger position to represent and support our communities

Target/Indicators: Increasing the proportion of key public services delivered by the VCS
Increasing the number of "self-sufficient" VCS organisations (e.g. less reliance on grant funding)
Increasing the number of "social enterprises"

Aim:	To empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and the delivery of services
Target/Indicators:	Increasing the number of volunteers Increasing the diversity of volunteers (including those at risk of social exclusion) Improving the quality of training of volunteers (e.g. accreditation) Broader and better use of village halls
Aim:	Maximising opportunities to meet the affordable housing needs of communities in Somerset
Target/Indicator	Number of new affordable housing units as a % of identified Housing Need The ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings

Economic Development

Aims:	Increase investment levels and business competitiveness in Somerset Increase growth and sustainability of small businesses in Somerset More sustainable Somerset rural communities
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POLICY AND PERFORMANCE UNIT

Following a restructure in this unit, interviews have taken place for three vacant posts. I hope that a new Scrutiny and Performance Manager, a new Strategy and Partnerships Manager and a new Scrutiny Officer will take up their posts in the New Year and will strengthen the team. It is important to emphasise that these new posts are all funded from within existing budgets.

SCRUTINY

CPA flagged it up, and the recent work by Stephen Taylor of the Leadership Centre also flagged it up – scrutiny is not working very well at Taunton Deane. Officers from the Members Services Unit are working on proposals to make scrutiny more effective and rewarding, and they are currently discussing these proposals with the different political groups. While not wanting to pre-empt the outcome of this, I think it is fair to say that “continue as before” is not an option.

RELOCATABLE CCTV CAMERA

A letter has recently been sent to all Parish Councils and Local Action Teams, the North Taunton Partnership and the Taunton East Development Trust asking if they would like to apply to use the system. Monkton and Creech Local Action Team have requested that the camera to be located at Blackbrook Park Avenue where there has been an ongoing problem with anti-social behaviour. The police strongly support this request and a suitable site has been identified. Therefore the decision has been made to re-site the camera to Blackbrook Park Avenue as soon as possible.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Taunton Deane and the LSP have jointly appointed consultants (Bakers and 2md) to help with consultation on the Local Development Framework and Community Strategy Review. The consultants are currently preparing a strategy to consult under represented groups on the review of the Community Strategy, the Town Centre Area Action Plan, and the area based plans for Taunton East and North. The consultation will take place between January and March 2006.

LOCAL ACTION TEAMS

£10,000 is available in the LSP budget to support Local Action Teams (LAT's). £2000 of this is being used to support a mobile Youth Shelter project and the remaining £8000 is available to support other LAT projects. LAT's have recently had a letter advising them of this.

Joanna Lewin-Harris