

# **Council Meeting – 14 July 2009**

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

### **1. Pioneer Somerset**

1.1 We reached a crossroads recently in Pioneer Somerset. We have to up the pace of change. If we are to stand any chance of attaining any of the £20 million saving required of us as the six councils of Somerset then we need to move along at a much faster pace.

1.2 We have had some fruitful meetings in the last three months where a number of examples of joined up working have been proposed. However since the results of the Somerset County Council Elections things sadly have slowed again.

1.3 The new Conservative administration at County Hall needs to urgently clarify its position on Pioneer Somerset. Without this, progress will be very slow. An essential driver in this equation is having someone as a Project Director to drive forward the whole initiative. Without this our chance of success is greatly reduced. Our share of this cost is £13,500. The largest share of the costs is to be paid by the County Council with the rest being shared by the five districts.

1.4 So far the County and all the other four districts have signed up to this. We are the only council not yet committed to this process. It is essential that we also sign up as well. What message would it send out to our partners in the other Councils if we do not back them up? Also what message would it send out about our commitment to Pioneer Somerset and joined up working with the councils?

1.5 If we do not agree to our costs for the Project Director I can only assume one thing and that is that those who refuse to support this new initiative are failing to support Pioneer Somerset and fail to live up to the responsibilities we took upon ourselves when we presented Team Somerset as a alternative to the Unitary Bid.

### **2. Core Council Review**

2.1 The Core Council Review has moved onto the next important stage. Many Members attended the Deane DLO workshop in June and on the 22 July 2009 we select the partners we are going to work with to take through the remainder of this process.

2.2 Last year we delivered Phase One of the Core Council Review which gave us £342,000 of savings. The remaining three phases will also

help us deliver efficiency savings and a new structure but will be just as challenging as Phase One.

### **3. The Brewhouse Theatre**

- 3.1 The Executive has decided to award the Brewhouse a further £50,000 this year taking its funding from Taunton Deane to a record level which it has never received before from this Council. In fact the funding this year amounts to £202,000.
- 3.2 This follows the previous decision made by the Liberal Democrat administration which halted the phased reduced funding regime set up by the previous Conservative administration which cut funding from £180,000 per annum to £152,000 and had plans to further phase down funding to £137,000.
- 3.3 I am very pleased that we are able support the Brewhouse to a level never seen before and we look forward to supporting them through the various lines attached to the funding.

### **4. Free Swimming**

- 4.1 I recently welcomed Gerry Sutcliffe the Sports Minister to Taunton to celebrate the success of free swimming in Taunton Deane. So far nearly 2700 children and over 60s have registered for the scheme. I always knew it would be a success and I believe its one of the most popular initiatives that this Council has ever introduced.

### **5. Budget Priorities**

- 5.1 We recently had a session from our external financial advisers about the state of the economy and the recession. It was followed by an update on our own financial status by Maggie Hammond.
- 5.2 We again have difficult choices ahead of us and the Executive have done a great deal of work on this already in readiness for next years budget. We are working on refreshing our Corporate Priorities and also reviewing all of our services in light of the economic situation.

Councillor Ross Henley

## **Council Meeting – 14 July 2009**

### **Report of Councillor Francesca Smith - Economic Development and the Arts**

- (i) I have spent the past weeks since taking over the role familiarising myself with the various aspects of the Portfolio. I wish to thank Councillor Jefferson Horsley for the hard work he has put into the portfolio over the past two years and the support he has given to me in my new role. Jefferson has offered to continue to help me in the future and has also offered to represent me at meetings that I am unable to attend.
- (ii) I have had meetings with the officers who work in Economic Development and they have briefed me on their work. I have attended various meetings including the Somerset Economic Development Portfolio Holders meeting held in Bridgwater. This is a very good forum for developing the work carried out by the different District Councils and the County Council and is attended by officers, Members and other stakeholders. We received presentations by local food producers and the Affordable Housing Officer from Mendip District Council.
- (iii) I have also met the Taunton Town Centre Company, the Town Centre Manager and the Taunton Chamber of Commerce. Although the economic climate is not good they are all working hard to develop ideas for the traders to encourage people to visit and shop in the town.
- (iv) On Saturday, 20 June 2009 I went to visit the Rural School of Music at Monkton Heathfield School. They currently receive a small grant from Taunton Deane and it was good to see how some of the funding is used. The majority of the musicians are children but it is open for adults to have music lessons so I would encourage any of you wishing to learn to play a musical instrument to give them a call! Later that day I went to the Brewhouse to see the work of the Somerset College of Arts and Technology's fine art students.
- (v) I visited Langport to meet members of the Somerset Art Works organisation which is made up of several groups promoting artists and their work in Somerset. Discussions were taking place about issuing a bursary for five artists to exhibit in empty shops in each of the districts in Somerset.
- (vi) I attended the consultation presentation for the proposed new Academy in the north of Taunton to see what affect the development could have for the town. At the moment it is at a very early consultation stage.
- (vii) I also attended the joint meeting held between the portfolio holders and shadow portfolio holders for Economic Development and Planning and

Transport. This meeting is also attended by the relevant senior officers and forges good links between the two portfolios as they are often interlinked.

## **1. Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Economy**

- 1.1 Further to the report on the Local Economic Assessment on 14 April 2009, the Envisioning report has now been completed and Members will receive a presentation on the findings by Professor Mark Hepworth prior to the Full Council Meeting on 14 July 2009.

## **2. Employment and Skills**

- 2.1 The Employment and Skills Officer has been attending Management Group meetings at both West Somerset and Sedgemoor, which have helped to inform Taunton Deane plans for what was the Project Taunton Skills Group. The Project Taunton Team agree the need for a new Employment and Skills Group to extend its remit beyond Firepool to the whole of the Taunton Deane area and, as such, this group will now be organised by the Economic Development Unit.
- 2.2 The closing meeting of the existing group took place on 23 June 2009 and the new group will be constituted and set up with terms of reference and objectives agreed by beginning of September 2009.

## **3. Recession Support for Businesses and Communities**

- 3.1 Links continue to be developed with Business Link. Monthly business advice clinics continue to take place at The Deane House – these offer 90 minute one-to-one advice clinics and since the start of 2009, 24 businesses have benefited from this service. Additionally, four businesses attended an advice clinic in Wiveliscombe and regular clinics are now planned for Wellington.
- 3.2 Initial meetings have been held with North Taunton Partnership and Taunton East Development Trust to establish Job Clubs in the heart of deprived areas under the umbrella of Enterprise Gateways, originally conceived to provide a community link to assist local people benefit from employment opportunities resulting from Project Taunton and other major development works.
- 3.3 It is planned that these Job Clubs will be available to members of the community for three days per week and offer access to newspapers, computers and advice on skills development, job search, and making applications for work.
- 3.4 The Enterprise Gateway programme is being developed in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus and Somerset Skills and Learning.

- 3.5 A meeting was held with other District Partners, Somerset County Council, Job centre Plus, Learning and Skills Council and other agencies to discuss a bid for funding through the Future Jobs Fund, a recently announced Government initiative to provide work placements for young adults of working age.
- 3.6 It was identified that in Somerset overall there were fifteen 18-24 year olds claiming Job Seekers Allowance for more than 12 months, and as such it was not viable for a bid to be submitted. This is frustrating when there is growing anecdotal evidence of graduates returning home to Somerset because they cannot find work elsewhere. The Economic Development Unit will investigate the potential of establishing a GradStart Programme by another means in order to retain this talent in Taunton Deane.

#### **4. Arts and Culture**

- 4.1 Young people in North and East Taunton have a summer programme of activities to look forward to thanks to Streetjam, a project supported by Taunton Deane Borough Council and partners.
- 4.2 Streetjam, led by Fuse Performance, Elementz and Escape Parkour offers a mix of street dance, circus skills and artworks to young people at Halcon and Hamilton Youth Clubs, Vibe at Wellsprings, Energise in Vivary Park and open sessions in Hamilton Gault Park. These free activities in July alongside the Pride in Priorswood summer activities every Tuesday during the school holidays at Priorswood Resource Centre are leading to the creation of a street art company.
- 4.4 The Rock Fest, run by Richard Huish College at Wellsprings Leisure Centre on Saturday, 2 May 2009 again supported by Taunton Deane Borough Council, provided a good learning experience and exposure for the many young bands that took part.
- 4.5 Somerset County Council is currently leading workshops to develop the action points of the Somerset Cultural Strategy. They are consulting on the themes of education, heritage and conservation, sports and leisure, the arts, economic development and tourism, and welcome contributions to the debate on an ongoing basis.

#### **5. Somerset Tourism Partnership**

- 5.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council continues to coordinate the operational delivery of the Somerset Tourism Partnership (STP) business plan and work programme. The Council's Tourism Officer is the STP Coordinator.
- 5.2 A Project Initiation Document (PID) to review the work of the STP has been approved by the Economic Regeneration Directors Group for Somerset local authorities.

5.3 The PID outlines a series of pieces of work that will deliver:-

- An evaluation of the outputs and delivery of the STP since April 2006. Determine the issues relating to the development of tourism which will influence future delivery;
- Achieve a consensus by the local authorities in Somerset on shared strategic objectives for the future development of the tourism sector in Somerset;
- Outline a high level delivery plan for 2010 onwards in line with the agreed objectives; and
- Assess and agree the mode of delivery of the action plan in time for budget decision making timetable for the financial year 2010 - 2011.

5.4 Work has begun on the design and advertising sales for the 2010 Somerset Tourism Brochure. Now in its third year of publication the aim of the piece of print is to inspire and encourage the public to visit Taunton Deane and Somerset on a day out, short break or holiday.

5.5 A separate project to explore what elements and activities are required to transform Taunton into a significant visitor venue will be commenced as part of the next stage of the Envisioning process to create an Economic Development Strategy, linking closely with the work of the Arts and Culture Officer and Project Taunton team.

## **6. Taunton Tourist Information Centre (TTIC)**

6.1 The TTIC Manager has started to work with the Brewhouse management and Box Office team to investigate the feasibility of relocating the TTIC to the Theatre and, in addition to their normal duties, the team have also been involved in a number of projects including:-

- The office has welcomed the 'Explore your Somerset Routes' - Heritage Tube Map promotional display and stand for May and early June.
- Hosting an exhibition about the new Sensory Garden in Vivary Park.
- Jane Pemberton is about to host another 'Meet the Experts Day' this time with Bakers Dolphin Coaches on Thursday, 9 July 2009.
- Hosted a series of visits from West Somerset District Council staff to share good practise regarding Tourist Information Centres.
- Jill Cooper helped guide a couple from BBC's Escape to the Country programme around Taunton and the surrounding area.

## **7. Rural Development**

7.1 The Western Somerset Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) Group has been successful in securing funding for a rural development programme covering West Somerset, Exmoor, the Quantocks, 10 Parishes and neighbouring Taunton Deane parishes. The programme

will run until 2013 and will see £2.25m investment in rural communities across the area. Taunton Deane is a member of the Executive Group which is the key decision making group and participated in the launch evening at Crowcombe on 9 June 2009. The scheme is now open to applications for both Small Grants of up to £10k, and full grants of to £100K.

- 7.2 The Levels and Moors LARC area has secured funds of £1.8m for rural communities in the Levels including seven Taunton Deane parishes. The Council is a member of the Executive Group, which is the key decision making group and participated in the launch evening at Edington on 16 June 2009, including facilitating one of the working groups. This scheme is also now open for applications for project funding.
- 7.3 The Rural Development Officer is now qualified as a Project Appraiser for both LARC areas.
- 7.4 The Rural Development Officer continues to attend Steering Group meetings of the Somerset Market Towns Forum and the Somerset Rural Youth Project, and has represented TDBC at regular meetings of the county wide Rural Retail Support Group, which is currently out for tender to select a delivery agent to provide retail support for the remaining rural Post Offices in the Taunton Deane area that have expressed a desire to participate in the scheme.
- 7.5 The Agricultural Support Officer has undertaken the following work since the last report:-
  - Arranged and assisted to deliver a workshop for the Better Business Group (14 local farmers, diversifying into other business enterprises). Topic: "Making your Website Work Harder".
  - Contributed to SW Rural Skills Funding consultation.
  - Speaker to the Cothelstone Ladies Group "Farming Today, and the Prospects for Tomorrow".
  - Helped organise and participated in an Open Farm Day at Hestercombe, where 500 local school children were invited to look around a dairy farm and see how milk is produced.
  - Participated in the Audit Commission's assessment of the current work undertaken locally regarding Catchment Sensitive Farming and the Water Directive Framework regulations.
  - Arranged a workshop for the Quantock Sheep Group (25 local sheep farmers wanting to improve their profitability). Topic: "Better Control of Ectoparasites".

Councillor Fran Smith

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

### **1. Community Leisure**

- 1.1 The summer season of Vivary Park Sunday bandstand concerts have been programmed to run from 7 June and continue until 6 September 2009.
- 1.2 The summer edition of The Deano, which gives details of activities for children in the main school holidays, has been published on the Taunton Deane Borough Council web site and has been sent to all primary school aged children in Taunton Deane.
- 1.3 A family fun day is planned to take place in French Weir Park on Sunday, 16 August 2009. The event is being organised by the Friends of French Weir Park with assistance from the Leisure Development Team. This year's numerous activities will include den and raft building run by The Eden Project.
- 1.4 As I write this report I wish to bring to your attention that Jools Holland is making a welcome return to Vivary Park for a concert on 4 July 2009, at the request of his management team who expressed a preference to return to Taunton. It had been such a success in previous years that I am sure it will be this year too.
- 1.5 Also making a welcome return to Vivary Park in September after a one year absence is the European Entertainment Corporation who are this year bringing us the Chinese State Circus. Again, I am sure this will be a big success.
- 1.6 Applications for capital grant aid assistance from the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme have been received. An award has been made to Norton Fitzwarren Parish Council towards a pump track. A further application from Corfe is in process with further information awaited from the applicants. It is good to see such requests coming in and supporting Parishes.
- 1.7 Seven applications were received by the 30 June deadline for assistance from the Council's capital scheme, for voluntary village halls and community centres and sports clubs. Those applications are currently being processed.

### **2. Parks**



- 2.1 French Weir - The Friends group has paid for a new boules pitch to be constructed on the site of the former kindergarten and a new paved viewing area looking across Longrun Farm. The Park has been submitted for Green Flag status. The Green Flag judges visited the park in early June and we will know if we have been successful later this summer.
- 2.2 Vivary Park - I am pleased to say, the final plan has been agreed and work has commenced on the construction of the Sensory Garden. The ground contouring has been completed; the pond and path construction work is due to start this month. It is expected that this work will take approximately five weeks. Once this work is completed the gardeners will carry out the final shaping of the ground and plant up the garden with aromatic plants. The Ladymead School GCSE Art students have carved wood heads depicting the five senses and these have been on display in the Library. The students' other artwork will be added to the sensory garden as and when sponsorship funding is available.
- 2.3 Summer Floral Displays - The parks and other floral displays around the Taunton and Wellington have been planted with summer flowers and hanging baskets have been hung up in the town centres. The plants have all been grown at the new nursery and are a much better quality than that from the old nursery. This is because the better environmental conditions at the new nursery have produced plants with improved quality. For those Councillors that were able to visit the nursery on its open day, I hope that they had a very enjoyable visit and now are able to appreciate this fantastic facility for Taunton Deane.

### **3. Play**

- 3.1 Longrun Meadows Development
  - 3.1.1. A steering group of stakeholders has been meeting to discuss ideas for the setting out of this area of land for future public recreation. Although acquired to provide compensation for flooding issues in the town centre, the 26 hectare site has great potential for recreation subject to the creation of new bridges to link it to the town (the only access currently is at the rear of Castle School).
  - 3.1.2 An exploratory application to Sport England's Rural Communities Grant strand has been submitted which might provide money for various sports projects to be run on and around the site by various organisations including the Tone Schools Sports Partnership, the Somerset Leisure Trust, Quantock Orienteers, Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership, Castle School and Bike Somerset. The outcome of the stage 1 application will be known by early August and if approved the stage 2 application would be decided by the end of the year
- 3.2 Playbuilder

- 3.2.1 Consultation will start shortly on ideas for the redevelopment of play provision for 8-13 year olds at Hamilton Gault park and Lyngford Park. Playbuilder is money received from the government Department for Children Schools and Families via Somerset County Council and this will be the second of 3 years' of funding from this source. The playbuilder money will be matched with any other available funds such as Section 106 funds for play local to the two sites that have been received.
- 3.2.2 A total of 33 events permits have been issued so far this year. The range of activities include sponsored walks, concerts, dog show, family fun day, circus and numerous community events.

#### **4. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities**

##### **Play Development**

##### 4.1 Play Days

4.1.1 Tone Leisure have co-ordinated five play days since the beginning of April 2009. These were held at Victoria Park, Trull, Roly Poly Green Wellington, West Buckland and Norton Fitzwarren. Four of these were during the Easter break and another one during May half-term. The sessions held at Trull and Victoria Park were particularly well attended, with large numbers of children and their families attending. The children took part in a variety of activities, including fire lighting, cooking, woodland crafts, clay modelling, sports (football and cricket) and played lots of games. The Play Days have been particularly successful in encouraging children and young people to play in their local communities.

4.1.2 Seven more Play Days have been organised for children and young people throughout the summer months around the Taunton Deane area, as follows:-

12 July - Wellsprings Leisure Centre (funded by Somerset Play Forum);

5 August - Bishops Hull (am), Galmington Playing Field (pm);

12 August - Hudson Way, Staplegrove (am), Milverton Cricket Ground (pm); and

19 August - Ruishton (am), Hatch Beauchamp (pm).

4.1.3 All August sessions have been funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

##### **Young People**

##### 4.2 Energize

4.2.1 Energize held its Easter Activity Day on 16 April 2009 in Vivary Park. Over 300 young people attended the afternoon between 1 pm and 6 pm. The attractions included an inflatable bungee run provided by Bristol RFC, a Gyroscope ball, Tone Leisure's dance mats and the Police firearms, dogs and horses. Local youth organisations attended, such as the Scouts, Trailblazers and the County Youth Workers, who provided information on activities and services in the town. The park was busy all afternoon and all the young people and their families agreed it had been a fun-packed event. Energize partners include Taunton Deane Borough Council, Avon and Somerset Police, Taunton Deane Local Service Youth Team, Tone Leisure and Taunton Retailers Against Crime.

## **Sports Development**

### 4.3 'A Club For All' Workshop

4.3.1 Sixteen sports club volunteers attended 'A Club for All' Workshop on 21 April 2009, covering issues around equity and how to promote your sports club to the whole community. This 'Running Sport' workshop is one of the few workshops clubs need to attend to help their club achieve a ClubMark accreditation. Volunteers came from the following sports: cricket, tennis, golf, rugby, archery, fencing and swimming.

### 4.4 Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Triathlon

4.4.1 Despite the adverse weather conditions over 350 athletes showed their grit and determination as they battled it out in the twelfth Taunton Deane Foot Anstey Triathlon on Sunday, 17 May 2009 at Wellington Sports Centre. With heavy rain and strong winds affecting the course for most of the day, the times recorded by the athletes were still outstanding.

4.4.2 Using a new electronic race timing system for the first time, the split results for each element of the triathlon were updated and displayed instantaneously as competitors passed through each transition and crossed the finish line. The sport of triathlon is one of the UK's fastest growing sports and this increasingly popular event was sold out just five days after it was launched in January of this year.

## **5. Facility News**

### 5.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre

#### Junior Activities

5.1.1 The May half-term camps, based around the theme "Four Seasons in One Week", showed a continued interest in the junior activities being held at Wellsprings. Feedback from previous camps was taken into

account to offer exactly what the children wanted. It also gave the opportunity to provide tasters of the activities that will be running during the summer holidays.

- 5.1.2 The upcoming few weeks are building towards the Summer Camps, which will offer sports and activities that children may not always be able to do. Each week will be based around a different theme ranging from 999 to space travel and activities will include fencing, archery, fire sculptures and trampolining. With a build up involving visits to local schools and fetes, this summer will hopefully be the best yet.

## Fitness

- 5.1.3 June has seen the introduction of a National Men's Health Week. An opportunity for our male members and non-members to book in with our Instructors for a full health check including blood pressure, lung function, peak flow, height, weight, measurements, body fat analysis and nutritional information. As we know through research published through the NHS websites, men rarely go to their GPs for check ups or talk about any health concerns, therefore Wellsprings wanted to get involved and provide something a little different. The week was a great success and in total the team saw over 50 men.
- 5.1.4 July sees the start of the Ashes; commencing on the 8 July 2009 the Fitness Team are launching their Adult Fitness Challenge centred around this event, encouraging members to be more physically active and increase their intensity of exercise.

## 5.2 St. James Street Baths

- 5.2.1 St. James Street hosted Taunton Deane Swimming Club's annual Walsall Trophy Competition on Sunday, 10 May 2009. The competition was held over four hours, with six different teams competing. Several age and abilities categories were marked for technical and musical merit. Over 60 swimmers took part, making this year's competition the biggest it has been. A fantastic level of support for the competitors was evident with, at times, 100 proud parents, relatives and friends watching from the main pool balcony.
- 5.2.2 The Swimskool scheme continues to grow, with 1,611 children enrolled for this course.
- 5.2.3 The growth over the last couple of years in the small pool programme has been very positive; with more activities being held in the small pool the once designed 'drop off point' has now become a fully fledged viewing area. Tone Leisure has been working in partnership with Taunton Deane Borough Council to improve the ventilation in the small pool viewing area.

### 5.3 Blackbrook Pavilion

5.3.1 I am pleased to say that over the last 12 months there has been a significant growth in membership, due to the new gym and dance studio opening in October 2008. Membership is currently 1,569, which is slightly down on the May figure of 1,584.

5.3.2 Blackbrook are fortunate to have had three volunteers working in the gym while gaining their gym qualifications. This has had the effect of increasing staff presence on the gym floor without increasing expenditure. Total gym visits are up 35% over a twelve week rolling period on last year, 14,936 visits (2009) v 11,028 visits (2008).

### 5.4 Tennis Centre

5.4.1 The Junior Age Group Tournament, held recently over half-term at Blackbrook, was a huge success with over 90 children playing and many local successes - well done Team Taunton!

5.4.2 The Road to Wimbledon County Competition held recently at Blackbrook was once again dominated by Taunton players, with Bethany Eccles qualifying to represent Somerset at the All England Club in the National Finals in July.

5.4.3 Twins Sophie and Olivia Hamilton, aged 8, continue to dominate the national mini tennis scene and are 2 of only 21 players achieving the highest possible national ranking for their age group - 2 to watch!!!

### 5.5 Wellington Sports Centre

#### Free Swimming Initiative

5.5.1 Following the launch of the new Free Swimming Initiative on 1 April 2009, Wellington Sports Centre has seen a significant increase in swim visits. Throughout April and May registrations at Wellington = 1,830 Under 16s and 507 Over 60s. Total swim visits are +46% (Under 16s) and +6.5% (Over 60s). This has resulted in an average increase of 286 swims per week compared with the same period last year.

#### Youth Fitness Schemes

5.5.2 Following the ongoing success of the regular Friday evening Free 'Vibe' activity/ fitness sessions for young people in Wellington, the scheme was extended in April to attract more teenage girls - a notoriously difficult group to encourage to exercise in leisure centres. A subsidised fitness course attracted 11 girls (aged 12-15 years) who successfully completed the programme and some of whom now attend regular Fitness classes at the Sports Centre.

- 5.5.3 Plans are also being made to deliver a free community activity scheme for children and young people in parks and play areas in the Wellington area throughout the summer holiday period.

#### Fitness Membership Growth

- 5.5.4 Following the refurbishment of the GO Fitness Gym last year, Fitness membership at Wellington Sports Centre has grown by 12% (period January to June 2009). Usage of the new gym also shows a strong increase of 10-15% per week on average compared to last year.

6. I cannot complete my report without mentioning the World Ladies Cricket competition that commenced at the Somerset County Cricket Club in June. What a fantastic event for Taunton Deane to see take place here, and to a very lesser extent to be involved in, and to be able to support Somerset County Cricket Club. The England Ladies won the 20-20 Competition – and may I offer through this report the congratulations of Taunton Deane Borough Council to the England Ladies Cricket Team.

Councillor Richard Lees

# **Council Meeting – 14 July 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Tim Slattery – Environmental Services**

### **1. Environmental Health**

#### **General**

- 1.1 A Project has been started to benchmark all Environmental Health Services within our “Family Group”, with Taunton Deane facilitating and producing the analysis of results. Completed Questionnaires have been received from seven of the 18 Authorities, and a further two are expected.
- 1.2 Our Business Continuity Plan has been substantially revised in light of the Swine Influenza pandemic.
- 1.3 Recruitment to the post of Somerset Smokefree Coordinator, for which Taunton Deane was to have been the nominal employer was undertaken, but the candidate appointed has decided not to take up the post. The position is funded by the Somerset NHS, who are looking at a range of alternative ways of supporting the Smokefree agenda and reducing smoking prevalence across the County.
- 1.4 We have produced a Training Presentation for Customer Services Advisors on the work of Environmental Health. This is an automated and narrated Powerpoint presentation that introduces the work of the Unit. Using this approach means that the content can be viewed at any convenient time, without the need for a presenter and avoiding the need for a number of advisors to be absent from their posts at once whilst attending induction or refresher training.

### **2. Food Safety and Health and Safety**

#### **2.1 Prosecution**

- 2.1.1 Excellent local and national press coverage plus fines and costs totalling £21,000 were awarded following the successful prosecution of the Maharaj Restaurant in Staplegrove Road, Taunton for a serious pest infestation and other hygiene offences.
- 2.1.2 The restaurant had failed to respond to advice from officers and chose not to participate in the hygiene coaching available prior to the discovery of the offences at a routine hygiene inspection. Since the incident the restaurant has improved considerably and has managed to achieve a ‘3 star’ rating for hygiene. It will continue to be monitored by Food Officers to ensure standards are maintained.

#### **2.2 Pennington Report**

2.2.1 Following the publication of the most recent report by Professor Pennington into the fatal outbreak of E. Coli O157 in South Wales, the Food Team has reviewed their procedures to ensure the recommendations are being followed. As there were very few changes needed to the inspection and enforcement approach taken at Taunton Deane a programme of swabbing and sampling in butchers shops is being rolled out to test whether the systems the butchers have in place are sufficiently robust to provide acceptable standards of hygiene.

## **2.3 Recession**

2.3.1 The difficulties being experienced by many businesses during the current financial climate are increasing the work of both the Food and Health and Safety Teams. Unpaid or disputed bills are resulting in water and electricity supplies being disconnected by the utility companies in pubs, restaurants, takeaways and other businesses. The teams have to react quickly to prevent a public health risk should the business attempt to continue trading without the legally required facilities in place.

## **2.4 Licensing**

2.4.1 Licenses have been issued for two major events, these being a Jools Holland performance in Vivary Park on Saturday, 4 July 2009 and the Buddhafields event at Culmhead from 17-19 July 2009. Officers will be monitoring the events to ensure they take place safely, without causing disturbance to local residents and be enjoyed to the full by those attending.

## **3. Environmental Protection**

### **3.1 Air Quality**

3.1.1 Muir Environmental has submitted the first draft "Air Quality Detailed Assessment" for Nitrogen Oxides and Particulates as identified in the 2008 Progress Report. The assessment will establish whether the Council will have to consider extending existing air quality management areas or establish new ones. The report should be complete by the end of July.

### **3.2 Fly Tipping**

3.2.1 A resident of Monkton Heathfield was issued with a Simple Caution for Fly Tipping. He had paid 'white van man' to dispose of twelve cooking oil and sodium methyllate drums, all of which were empty.

3.2.2 A Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) interview for Fly tipping of 3 tyres at Hankridge Farm resulted in the issue of another Simple Caution.

3.2.3 The Team is proceeding with prosecution of a fly tipper following a PACE interview where the interviewee admitted to tipping a number of bags on the edge of the Quantocks. The date for the initial court hearing is 30 July 2009.



### **3.3 Welfare Funerals**

- 3.3.1 The team is to take responsibility for Welfare Funerals from Legal Services. There will be approximately 20 funerals annually and they will involve tracing any relatives, proceeding with funeral (cremation) arrangements and dealing with the estate. A joint visit to Minehead has been made with Legal Services for the first such Welfare Funeral investigation for the Team.

### **3.4 Gull Control**

- 3.4.1 This year's Gull plastic egg replacement programme in Taunton Town Centre has now been completed, with a total of 117 eggs replaced.

### **3.5 Training Event**

- 3.5.1 Taunton hosted a Local Authority Co-ordinators for Regulatory Services (LACORS) South-West regional event for Environmental Health Practitioners and Planners in the John Meikle Room on 29 June 2009.
- 3.5.2 The morning session was devoted to colleagues from other Councils within the South West region, as well as LACORS Policy Officers, in order to discuss key environmental protection issues and shape the work LACORS does to represent and support local authorities. The afternoon session was dedicated to exploring ways to help environmental protection professionals and council planners work more closely and successfully together.

## **4. EH Support Team**

### **4.1 Statutory Returns**

- 4.1.1 The following statutory returns were completed and submitted within deadlines set:-  
Health & Safety returns;  
Food Standards Agency Annual Return (via new electronic system);  
DEFRA Pollution Control Annual Statistical Return;  
DEFRA Fixed Penalty Return;  
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Noise Survey.
- 4.1.2 The Food returns were a particular challenge this year due to the new system introduced by the Food Standards Agency, which required considerable input from the Environmental Health Support Team Manager to ensure it was accurate and would be in future, this work puts us in a very good position for next year.

### **4.2 Partnership Work**

- 4.2.1 The Team Leader of EH Support Team has completed 4 days work with Sedgemoor District Council assisting them with their APP (Flare) system, as their Systems Administrator was on long term sick leave

### **4.3 SW Audit**

- 4.3.1 Members of the team have recently assisted South West Audit staff with Audits of the Pest Control Service and the Food Safety Service.

Councillor Tim Slattery

# Council Meeting – 14 July 2009

## Report of Councillor Hazel Prior Sankey – Housing Services

### 1. **Another New Housing Minister!**

- 1.1 John Healey follows Caroline Flint and Margaret Beckett to become the third Housing Minister in twelve months!
- 1.2 Following on from the Prime Minister's announcement of a £1.5 billion house building fund, Mr Healey has promised greater responsibility for Councils in commissioning and developing homes.
- 1.3 He has also confirmed that plans to reform the controversial Housing Subsidy system will be published before the Parliamentary recess on 21 July 2009. He stated that the Government wants to devolve responsibility to local authorities, enabling them to finance their own business from their own rents and to build and commission more of the new homes that people need in their area.
- 1.4 This is exciting news, but as ever we need to see the detail and examine carefully how the proposals would affect Taunton Deane Borough Council.

### 2. **Negative Subsidy Task and Finish**

- 2.1 It is time to re-convene this group to consider the proposals coming out of the Housing Subsidy Review, so that the Council can respond within the 12 weeks of the consultation process. This will fulfil the longstanding commitment to use this small group of Councillors, who have built up a store of knowledge in this specialist area of housing finance, to help guide the response of the Council.

### 3. **Tenant Services Authority**

- 3.1 The new social housing regulator, the Tenant Services Authority, has recently concluded a "national conversation" with social housing tenants and this process confirms what most members will instinctively know:- *that the service which tenants care about most is the repair and maintenance, and improvement, of their homes.*
- 3.2 This will be a crucial issue for Members to consider when proposals are brought forward from Phase 3 of the Core Council Review, which includes the Housing DLO. I urge Members to take particular note of the results of a consultation on Phase 3 with tenants drawn by invitation from

the Tenants' Forum, the Sheltered Housing Forum, the Tenant Consultation Group and local Tenant Associations.

- 3.3 Tenants are doubly interested because of the big spend in investment in their homes, and the fact that they are also Council Tax payers as well. Twenty-nine tenants attended the event, which was held on Monday, 29 June 2009 and was attended by our Director, Brendan Cleere and John Williams, the Chief Housing Officer.

#### **4. Special Executive and Full Council - 11 August 2009**

- 4.1 Members will be aware that a special Executive and Full Council has been called for the 11 August 2009 so that a decision may be made on the opportunity provided by the Government to reduce the rent increase from the 6.2% agreed at Council on 17 February 2009 to a (national average) of 3.1%.
- 4.2 The meetings will also provide the opportunity to take forward the Tenant Empowerment report, which was considered at the Community Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2009.

#### **5. Choice-Based Lettings**

- 5.1 The introduction of the Homefinder Somerset scheme from December of last year has proven to be a great success. This unique county-wide introduction of a common allocation policy and the installation of shared IT software across the five districts, is a great example of how organisations can work together to introduce big projects.
- 5.2 As with any good project plan, there needs to be a period of review, to examine what is working well and what improvements, based on the experience of users and staff, can be made. If Members have any comments which they would like considered in the review, please forward them by email to the Chief Housing Officer.
- 5.3 I thought members would be interested to see the following statistics, which show successful lettings within Somerset and Taunton Deane categorised by banding, for the period from December 2008 to 3 July 2009:-

	Somerset	Taunton Deane
Gold	511	121
Silver	523	119
Bronze	82	16

It is encouraging to see that it is not only people in the gold band who are being housed.

## **6. Free Event for Private Sector Landlords**

- 6.1 The five districts have also teamed up to produce a “Private Sector Landlords Expo” at Sedgemoor Auction Centre, Market Way, North Petherton on 15 July 2009, beginning at 4 pm for any Members interested in attending. A good range of exhibitors will be on hand to provide private sector landlords with advice on all aspects of the private rented sector.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

# Council Meeting – 14 July 2009

## Report of Councillor Nicola Wilson – Corporate Resources

### 1. Southwest One Human Resources (HR) Service for Taunton Deane Borough Council

1.1 The Southwest One HR Service was restructured with effect from 1 April 2009. The HR team based at Taunton Deane Borough Council has undergone considerable change over the last few months and is no longer the sole provider of all HR services.

1.2 Below is a quick summary of the changes to the delivery of HR Services for Taunton Deane:-

- HR Advisory Team - consisting of Laura Holland, HR Manager, Amy Sutton, HR Officer and Sue Morrissey, Clerical HR Assistant. This team will remain based at The Deane House providing advice and support to managers and staff on a range of employment issues. Until SAP e-recruitment goes live later in the year, the team will also continue to administer the recruitment process.
- HR Administration and Payroll Services - All payroll activities will be dealt with directly by the HR Administration and Payroll Services Team based at County Hall. A representative from the team will be present in the HR office at The Deane House on pay day and the day after.
- Learning and Development – delivery of training is now managed by Ron Westcott, Learning and Development Manager and his team based at County Hall. They also provide support for any testing in connection with recruitment selection.
- Health and Safety – David Woodbury remains the point of contact for Taunton Deane but is now part of a larger team based at County Hall.

1.3 The HR Advisory Team have been continuing to support the Retained HR Manager and CMT with the Core Council Review. The team managed the redundancies of 14 employees, 12 of which were voluntary and 2 compulsory. One redundancy was appealed and not upheld.

1.4 Recently the HR Manager supported the selection process of the new Theme Managers for Phases 2 and 4 of the Core Council Review.

## **2. SAP implementation**

2.1 SAP went live on 1 April 2009 at Taunton Deane. Employees with access to a computer now have Employee Self Service (ESS) and managers have Manager Self Service (MSS). ESS allows employees to update their own personal details, manage their annual leave and shortly they will also be able to claim expenses electronically. Through MSS, managers can authorise annual leave, input sickness absence and view employee details.

2.2 The HR Advisory Team have been supporting the SAP Back Office Project Team solve some teething problems with the system, in particular the correct calculation of annual leave entitlements for part time employees.

## **3. Revenues and Benefits**

3.1 The refurbishment of the Benefits Reception area at The Deane House has received a positive response from our customers. The feedback that has been received suggests they feel there is improved privacy for confidential issues and the additional interviewing facilities we now have in place have decreased waiting times.

3.2 In moving towards more customer led service delivery, the team held their first Customer Focus Group for the Revenues and Benefits Service during June. Whilst the turnout was disappointing, those who attended were able to offer considerable insight with regards to how the service could be developed in the future. The team will be looking to use some of the practical suggestions supplied by attendees into immediate effect. At the next meeting in September, customers will be assisting with improving the style, content and tone of some of our letters.

3.3 Council Tax collection at the end of May 2009 held up relatively well with "in year" collection (Council Tax due for 2009/2010) of 25.74%. However, this is 0.12% down in comparison with collection results at 31 May 2008 and it is clear the recession continues to affect our ability to recover local taxation. Enquiries on Benefit related issues at The Deane House reception have increased by 30% in the last 6 months, while telephone enquiries increased by 29.4% with the Benefits Advice Team handling on average 2,000 calls each month.

3.4 The team are gradually beginning to understand the new processes regarding the Bank and Cash Postings within the SAP system. Whilst this

means a prolonged period of change and additional workload to the team they have managed to contain any problems in house with minimal impact to our customers.

#### **4. Performance and Client Team**

- 4.1 The new Performance and Client Team, which was formed in April 2009, is responsible for the management and monitoring of the Corporate Performance including the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), providing a client function for the Authority's various partnerships and the implementation of the various Southwest One transformation projects within the Core Council.
- 4.2 The overall priorities for the team since its formation in April have been to:-
- Recruit the new team (we now only have one outstanding Lead vacancy which we hope to fill shortly);
  - Deal with the issues affecting customers and Core Council Services from the SAP system implementation on 1 April;
  - Identify the priorities for the team and develop a service plan for 2009/2010;
  - Understand the new Comprehensive Area Assessment and the changes we need to make across the Council to improve our Corporate Performance regime; and
  - To maintain the client function.

#### **5. Southwest One Transformation Projects**

- 5.1 *SAP Back Office* – this has enabled the consolidation of a number of different systems (for example Payroll, Finance, Sundry Debts and HR) into one system. The new system went live on 1 April 2009. There have been a number of 'teething' problems (particularly around paying invoices, allocating payments received and issuing invoices) which we have been working in conjunction with Southwest One and IBM to fix.
- 5.2 Good progress is being made, the backlog of invoices awaiting payment has been cleared and the cash posting problems have largely been resolved. Where the initial problems were largely of an IT technical nature they are now more around getting users comfortable with working with the new system and understanding the new processes. However, the resolution of these issues is still a priority for the team.
- 5.3 *SAP Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) and new Website* – this element of the SAP system directly impacts on customers. Consequently the go-live date has been put back until the autumn to



ensure that it is fully tested and to allow time for resolution of the outstanding issues on the SAP Back Office system.

- 5.4 *Procurement transformation* – the procurement transformation savings are on target. To date this has resulted in savings of £173k.

## **6. Corporate Performance**

- 6.1 We are currently working in conjunction with the Somerset County Council Corporate Performance Team to improve the Authority's performance management regime and to help us prepare for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). We have agreed an action plan which will include revamping the service planning process, improving our performance monitoring and reporting processes and in preparing for CAA.

## **7. Customer Contact Highlights**

- 7.1 Customer Contact for the Taunton Deane and County Hall teams are now successfully co-located on the second floor of The Deane House and some resource sharing has started. Issues with the new telephony suite plus the delays in implementing SAP CRM have meant that we are still unable to fully merge the teams as planned. It is still the plan to ensure this happens by the end of the year.
- 7.2 We have been heavily involved in testing the new SAP Customer Relation Management (CRM) programme and first indications show that this will be a powerful new tool for us to move forward with. Further testing is due to take place from mid-July and we are working with the SAP Training Team to finalise materials and training programmes for later in the year. Discussions are still taking place regarding an implementation date but this is likely to be during the last quarter of the year.
- 7.3 The new quality monitoring programme has been successful and feedback to teams has proved beneficial to all. We continue to develop our training programme and we are working with People Excellence Model (PEM) to ensure skills normalisation is complete and they can move forward with their programme.
- 7.4 We have now been using our new workforce management tool QMAX within the office for the Taunton Deane Team only and this has proved extremely effective and has already assisted us in actively managing call volumes and resource requirements. We are now in the process of rolling it out for the remaining County Council teams.
- 7.5 Statistical Information:-

	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>
<b>Volume</b>	<b>14383</b>	<b>13449</b>	<b>15448</b>
<b>Abandoned calls</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<b>% answered in 20 secs</b>	<b>83.38</b>	<b>85.20</b>	<b>83.97</b>
<b>% answered at first point of contact</b>	<b>94.4</b>	<b>94.1</b>	<b>96.3</b>

7.6 A total of 11,105 people have been helped at The Deane House Main and Planning Receptions and 2,765 people visited Wellington Community Office. We have dealt with 1118 Web and Email enquiries during this time.

7.7 We have started to trial an automated customer survey tools for customers within the Somerset County Council environments. This will assist us in discussions with the client teams about the way forward for determining external customer satisfaction. If proved, then we will purchase a complete system which will work across the whole contact centre.

7.8 Future Activities:-

- Complete trial of automated customer satisfaction survey and determine way forward;
- Participate in phase 2 testing for SAP CRM;
- Train all staff in SAP CRM; and
- Implement SAP CRM – Date to be determined.

## **8. Democratic Services**

8.1 The Legal Shared Services work stream for Pioneer Somerset is underway and the Monitoring Officers around the County met up for an away day to start to put forward some proposals for the Project Initiation Document. The day was very productive and everyone is very positive about this project as it is felt that it will certainly help to give a better service provision by joining up and the group are confident that efficiencies both cashable and non-cashable will be made.

8.2 Erin Taylor started with Democratic Services as the new Scrutiny Officer on the 5 May 2009.

8.3 The County Council and European Parliamentary Elections went well on the 4 June 2009 thanks to the hard work of the Elections Team and their staff.

8.4 The Mayor hosted Taunton's first British Armed Forces Day event in Vivary Park on Saturday, 27 June 2009 where he presented Councillor Meikle with his Veterans Badge.

Councillor Nicola Wilson

# **Council Meeting – 14 July 2009**

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

### **1. Pioneer Somerset**

1.1 The Pioneer Somerset Board is now focussing activity on three areas – shared services, customer access and community leadership. As a priority, a number of services are now developing proposals for shared delivery of those services:-

- Major schemes;
- Housing strategy and operations (not landlord);
- Legal;
- Equalities and diversity; and
- Decriminalised parking enforcement

The Board will shortly be determining the next areas to be reviewed.

1.2 The Customer Access Project is being managed by Taunton Deane and a cross partner project team is currently being established. This team will be tasked with developing proposals for joined up customer access across the partners.

1.3 The Community Leadership workstream is currently tasked with developing proposals for sharing corporate management between the partners.

1.4 The Board has been concerned about the relatively limited progress with Pioneer Somerset, particularly since the short-lived appointment of the Project Manager last year. The Board considers that a new project management team is required to drive the project, and is currently seeking funding from each partner authority.

### **2. Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)**

2.1 David Smith has recently resigned from the Community Council and as Chairman of the LSP. David has given a lot to the LSP in a number of roles and will be missed.

2.2 However, with David's departure it is perhaps timely that we look afresh at the structure and working practices of the LSP to ensure that they are still fit for purpose.

2.3 Key matters for the LSP are:-

- Alignment of the Local Area Agreement with the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- Clarity about priorities and a focus on outcomes; and
- Performance Management.

2.4 A review should enable the LSP to better drive innovation and challenge performance. The success of the LSP is critical for local communities in addressing their local priorities. It is also critical for partners within the context of the new assessment regime - Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

2.5 The LSP Members will be asked to submit nominations and a new Chairman will be elected at the LSP Board meeting on 8 September 2009

### **3. Community Partnerships**

3.1 There have been no meetings of the various Community Partnerships for several months. It was considered that the current arrangements were not delivering effective community involvement.

3.2 During April 2009 a multi agency meeting was held in Bridgwater chaired by Avon and Somerset Police to explore a common approach to community engagement. This meeting proposed two ideas to be taken forward:-

- Focusing on using existing PACT (Police [or more commonly] Partnerships and Communities Together) arrangements as a way of addressing community concerns. The focus here will be mainly on the 'safer stronger communities' theme; and
- Proactively consulting communities, developed under the 'community leadership' workstream of Pioneer Somerset.

3.3 The first area of work is being taken forward by Avon and Somerset Police and Sedgemoor District Council, as lead local authority on behalf of the whole county. The second area of work is being taken forward under Pioneer Somerset. Somerset County Council is examining task/finish scrutiny arrangements.

3.4 Taunton Deane will be actively engaged with the development of both ideas. It is expected that a clearer picture will emerge during autumn 2009.

### **4. Community Safety Agenda**

4.1 The Community Safety function continues to be busy with several projects due to come to fruition this summer. The boxing ring at the Fire Station replaces the existing provision which had to close and should provide members of neighbouring estates with another outlet for

their exuberance. A football day on 1 August 2009 will be run by the Police, supported by Taunton Deane in terms of access to the land and providing small funding to help put on the event.

- 4.2 CCTV cameras have come on line at Duke Street and Halcon, Taunton. The Duke Street camera protects an area which has been subject to vehicle crime and arson in recent months and the Halcon camera replaces the existing camera outside the Link Centre. Four more cameras are due to come on line in the Halcon, Lane and Lambrook estates as the summer goes on. All of these cameras will be linked to the 24 hour control room at Sedgemoor District Council.
- 4.3 The Energize disco continues to be a huge success, regularly attracting in excess of 600 young people, which is backed by the licensee and the Police. Energize activity days will take place once again in the summer.
- 4.4 Finally, the Restorative Justice Scheme continues to run in Wellington with an increase of referrals expected with warmer weather and the school holidays pending. A further project covering the unparished area of Taunton is currently being explored.

## **5. Equalities and Diversity Agenda.**

- 5.1 The Strategy Unit continues to drive the authority forward in response to the national Equalities and Diversity agenda through facilitating and supporting managers, staff and Members to embed equalities into daily working practices.
- 5.2 The Strategy Unit continues to work with the Somerset Equalities Officers Group to join our policies and practises and share resources where possible. Continuing this theme of joined up working, the Pioneer Somerset Board have agreed that Equalities and Diversity should become a shared service by 2011 the finer details of this are still to be agreed.
- 5.3 All service areas have recently refreshed their Equality Impact Assessments and are ensuring that action is taken where negative impacts on vulnerable groups are occurring.
- 5.4 The Strategy Unit continues to support the Taunton Disability Discussion Group, funding the group to meet on four occasions throughout the year to engage with the authority in shaping its services. The authority and our partner authorities across Somerset have also entered into an agreement with the Forum for Equality and Diversity in Somerset to provide us with consultation and critical friend opportunities.

## **6. Healthy Living (Cutting Carbon and Congestion)**

- 6.1 .....I drove in each day, and like so many others I either timed my journey to avoid congestion or sat in traffic frustrated by the growing number of (other) cars on the road!
- 6.2 Partly in response to losing free parking on a daily basis and in part thanks to encouragement from the Bike Users Group, I have now become a regular cyclist - although this is still only when it's not raining!
- 6.3 It's been a slow shift, as I didn't have a decent bike or the confidence to cycle in town. I have taken advantage of the training and finance available through the Travel Plan and now I genuinely love my journey to work. Who wouldn't? I get exercise, fresh air, set off when I like, pass fellow cyclists and walkers, as well as swans and cygnets and I'm not paying a fiver a day to park.
- 6.4 I know I'm not alone in feeling frustrated about traffic problems; it is the issue the public want tackling most (Place Survey 2008) but I now feel I can be part of the solution. I would wholeheartedly encourage others to take advantage of the various schemes and support packages available. I appreciate not everyone is able to walk or cycle, but for every car we don't use, or journey we share with someone else, we are improving matters.
- 6.5 There is more that can be done, such as improved information and signage.....

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

# **Council Meeting –14 July 2009**

## **Report of Councillor Alan Paul - Communications**

### **1. Pioneer Somerset**

- 1.1 Taunton Deane is an active partner in the Pioneer Somerset Communications Group which meets regularly to share information, best practice and update the Communications Strategy.
- 1.2 The group, involving the five District Councils and Somerset County Council, works hard to reduce duplication, exchange ideas and provide mutual support if a major incident occurs.
- 1.3 Two examples of recent work undertaken by the group are the launch of the Pioneer Somerset Microsite and the joint promotion of District Council services at the Royal Bath and West Show at a stand provided by Somerset County Council.
- 1.4 The Microsite provides an overview of Pioneer Somerset and will be regularly updated as the project develops. It is accessible via Councils' intranets.
- 1.5 The show provided an excellent chance to tell people about the work carried out by districts and we provided a range of factsheets giving statistical information. We also provided a complaints and suggestions sheet for future follow-up.

### **2. Newsletters**

- 2.1 Closer to home, Communications produced an electronic newsletter on carbon management and is working on an electronic newsletter based around the Local Development Framework.

### **3. Press Releases**

- 3.1 Recent press releases have covered a range of services from the Affordable Housing Open Day, which attracted a radio reporter from Heart FM, to the nursery providing bee-friendly plants in Taunton Deane for the annual summer displays.
- 3.2 Progress on the sensory garden in Vivary Park was reported via a press release on a new exhibition on sculptures and designs for the area at the TIC in Paul Street.
- 3.3 We also kept the media updated over decisions affecting the Brewhouse which attracted considerable radio and newspaper interest.



#### 4. **The Weekly Bulletin**

- 4.1 I am discussing with Richard Bryant how this might be improved, following some helpful criticism by Councillor Meikle. The core of the Bulletin is to inform members of decisions made by the Executive and other branches of the Council, such as Licencing and important Mayoral and other events which Councillors may wish to attend. Times as well as dates of events and reasons for / implications of decisions are important for these to be meaningful.
- 4.2 I will be exploring whether the Bulletin could become of wider interest to both Members and officers. Possibly it could be a vehicle for articles giving insights into the activities of service areas and occasional personal perspectives by officers or Members, avoiding party political content. It could also help to keep Members and officers up to date with changes within Council services.
- 4.3 Clearly we do not have the officer time to extend the scope of the Bulletin, unless individuals offer articles on a voluntary basis as a way of communicating about issues within their scope of responsibility. Items which are now issued as separate e-mails may be incorporated into the Bulletin. It could have articles about aspects of life in Taunton Deane which go beyond direct decisions or council services.
- 4.4 These are just a few preliminary thoughts. Input from Members would be very welcome.

Councillor Alan Paul

# **Council Meeting – 14 July 2009**

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

I should like to start this report by extending my congratulations to Tim Burton who took up his new position on the 1 July 2009 as Place Development Manager. I am sure all Members will join me in wishing Tim every success in his new and challenging role which I am sure he will fulfil with his normal consummate skill.

### **1. Regional Spatial Strategy**

- 1.1 The Government has announced a delay in the publication of the final Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West.
- 1.2 The final version of the Strategy, which will guide development in the region up to 2026, was due to be published at the end of June. However, following a High Court Judgment stating that the plan in the East of England Region did not meet certain requirements, the Government has delayed the publication of the South West plan until the potential implications of this ruling are known.
- 1.3 The draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was submitted to the Government in April 2006. An “Examination in Public” inquiry ran from April – July 2007.
- 1.4 Regional Leaders are clear that their strategy for the South West (as submitted in April 2006) will deliver the new development needed for future prosperity and meet long term housing needs in the most sustainable way. They did not support the extra development proposed by the Minister.
- 1.5 Chairman of the Strategic Leaders’ Board, Councillor Angus Campbell, said:-

“The delay to the publication of the final RSS is disappointing as it means further uncertainty for authorities and other partners. However, it does give the Government further opportunity to reflect on the significance of the scale of growth and change that has been proposed for the South West. Given the slow down of the economy and development as a consequence, it suggests that the position proposed by the region in the draft RSS is a more realistic approach, and also has the benefit of being broadly supported by local authorities and partners in the region when it was submitted.”
- 1.6 Councillor Mike Bawden, Chair the Regional Planning Group said:

“We would urge the Government to take this opportunity to consider carefully the implications for the South West, but to minimise further delays. The region prepared the draft plan in just two years and submitted it to Government in April 2006. It is disappointing that over three years later we still do not have the final document on which planning decisions for future growth and development can be based.”

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

- 2.1 The Government Office for the South West has formally agreed the LDS submitted in May 2009. The LDS sets out the work programme for the preparation of our Local Development Framework. The public consultation on the Core Strategy is programmed for this November - December.

## **3. Design Leadership Training Day**

- 3.1 The Architecture Centre in Bristol led this event on Friday, 3 July 2009 in the John Meikle Room to raise the awareness of the importance of high quality design in new development for Members and partners. It was a very well attended event and interest was maintained throughout the day by a variety of excellent speakers.

## **4. New Building Conservation Officer**

- 4.1 Nigel Pratt started with Taunton Deane in January 2009. He is working with Diane Hartnell to provide building conservation advice on development proposals. His advice is helping the Council to meet its application targets in an area where workload has remained high.
- 4.2 Nigel is also preparing Conservation Area Appraisals for the Council's 41 Conservation Areas. So far he has prepared two that will soon be circulated for comment. Nigel is building on the work that Ben Webb started several years ago. It is anticipated that he will be able to produce 10 appraisals a year so that the Government target of Borough- wide coverage can be completed by 2012.

## **5. New Local Nature Reserves**

- 5.1 Taunton Deane presently has 13 Local Nature Reserves which include a diverse range of habitats such as: Ash Common – lowland heathland; Childrens Wood – riverside meadow and woodland; and Swains Lane - traditional orchard and wildlife pond. For every 1,000 head of population there is now one hectare of Local Nature Reserve.
- 5.2 To keep ahead of demand, the Heritage and Landscape Team are presently working with Deane DLO and Somerset County Council to prepare a 10 year maintenance programme for the Silk Mills Park and Ride site's flood attenuation area. The area is already popular with wildlife and locals and should be ready for designation later this year.

## **6. Southwest One**

- 6.1 Improvements have been carried out to the Benefits Reception Area at The Deane House to include improved disabled access, two new interview rooms and new furnishings. The work has been funded and facilitated by Southwest One in order to provide more room and better privacy facilities for our customers and staff.
- 6.2 The work has met with approval from staff and customers alike and has also eased the pressure on the main Reception Counter at a time when we are, because of the economic climate, experiencing a rise in the demand for these services.

## **7. Congratulations**

- 7.1 I should like to end my report by congratulating Russell Williams on his successfully completing the first year of his MA Town Planning Course. He is a hard working and upcoming officer and a prime example of home grown talent flourishing under Tim Burton's leadership.

Councillor Simon Coles