

# Council Meeting – 25 February 2014

## Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council

### 1. Flooding Events

- 1.1 Following excessive rainfall of epic proportions we have a disaster occurring on the Levels and Moors and as water finds its own level its affect is far and wide into other District Councils areas. It is tragic to hear of the lost homes, businesses and livelihoods of those seriously affected and I offer my, and the Council's, deepest sympathy to those suffering from this unprecedented flooding
- 1.2 What we must do as the local authority is to ensure all possible is done to protect people and property and to start planning for the future. Firstly, the difficult task of recovery and the longer term plan of mitigation to reduce the dreadful impact of flooding that occurred this time. It is accepted the Levels and Moors will flood but it is the depth and duration they are flooded this time that has turned it into a disaster. We must do all possible to work with partners and other agencies to avoid a recurrence of these proportions.
- 1.3 Talking of working with others, it is only right that I acknowledge and thank all those in the community, the emergency services, the armed forces, Environment Agency and our own Council officers who have been maintaining a 24/7 response service to those in need and I would like to record my thanks to all and applaud them for their dedication and commitment - thank you.
- 1.4 Can I also reassure Members and our community that Taunton Deane Borough Council has not approved housing development within active flood plains. Any such application received would immediately be referred to the Environment Agency who would almost certainly recommend that we refuse the application. If, as the Planning Authority, we choose to ignore that advice and give approval then we have to report that we have not complied with the Environment Agency recommendation to Central Government. This has not arisen because we have always accepted the recommendations of the Environment Agency as the experts.
- 1.5 There is also concern expressed about the extensive new development taking place around Taunton and it contributing to the storm water run off so worsening the situation lower downstream. All new development has to be designed to meet "sustainable urban drainage systems" (SUDS) to ensure the run off of surface water from any new development is no greater than the existing use of the land before

development. In practice this generally means a mixture of permeable paving, large underground holding structures or attenuation ponds and the outfall from the latter two is controlled by the size of the outfall pipe restricting flow. In this way the watercourses taking the water away are not surcharged by the new development that is occurring.

- 1.6 We are constantly looking at the flood risk to existing and any new development and, in recent years, have implemented schemes such as the dam at Norton Fitzwarren and the attenuation ponds at Longrun Meadow, both holding back substantial amounts of flood water and releasing slowly as the floods subside. The current events make it all the more important to pursue the planned major new flood prevention scheme between Taunton and Wellington as that has the potential to hold back two million cubic metres of water in times of flood which has to be beneficial for areas below.

## **2. Budget Setting**

- 2.1 Hopefully by the time we reach this item our budget will have been approved by Members, but I must take this opportunity of acknowledging all the hard work by many that has gone into preparing and delivering the balanced budget for this year.
- 2.2 In setting this budget we have had to deal with year on year reductions in our Revenue Support Grant of 13.4% this year and a further 15.4% projected for next year. All in all just short of £3 million reduction in the five years to 2016 representing a 44% reduction in our funding from Central Government which has been necessary to meet the challenge of and help address the national deficit. I am pleased to say we have achieved this with minimum impact on front line services
- 2.3 It is also worth noting that even in these difficult times we have set aside the sum of £50,000 to deal with flooding issues and help with much needed dredging to try and mitigate the disaster we have witnessed this year. Also that £1,600,000 of our New Homes Bonus is being set aside to help with much needed investment in economic development and infrastructure.
- 2.4 As I referred to above a lot of hard work has gone in by many to reach this point and my thanks to Members for their engagement through Scrutiny and the budget pack, my colleagues on the Executive who have worked so closely with officers to achieve the outcome of minimum impact on front line services and the officers themselves who have worked so hard to deliver massive savings from an already reduced budget. My thanks to you all.

## **3. Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre**

- 3.1 I am pleased to report that Taunton Theatre Association have now taken on the tenancy and operation of The Brewhouse Theatre and have access to commence the considerable works ahead of them to ensure a safe reopening of the theatre on a long term basis.
- 3.2 Getting all the agreements in place has taken a little longer than hoped, but we are still anticipating an April opening proposing to build up gradually over the summer as funds are built and, importantly, the audience. A full programme is unlikely to be in place before September with a formal launch in the autumn. Two shows have already been booked for April, the Gang Show (25 Anniversary in Taunton) and the Young Musical Theatre Company (YMTC) production of High School Musical both involving youth groups based in Taunton. Bookings for these shows can now be made from the Taunton Tourist Information Office in case of the Gang Show and from [www.ymtcgroup.com](http://www.ymtcgroup.com) for High School Musical. I encourage all to support.
- 3.3 As I have said before, The Brewhouse is an important part of Taunton's night time economy and I welcome the fact that we are now on course for its full re-opening so it can play its part in keeping the performing arts alive in the town centre and contribute to our economy.
- 3.4 Finally, I must commend Taunton Theatre Association for its 'Christmas gift to Taunton' - the outdoor 'promenade' performance of the magical fairytale 'Hansel and Gretel', in Castle Green and flowing into the Somerset Museum just prior to Christmas. If this is a taste of the quality and ability that is yet to come then we will be truly well served.

#### **4. Taunton Town Centre Rethink**

- 4.1 This has been a review of our regeneration proposals as established under Project Taunton some years ago that due to changes in the national and international economic circumstances have not been deliverable. This Rethink has been prepared by independent consultants looking at Taunton as it is and how best it can attract economic growth. In the process they have consulted widely with interested parties in the private and public sector and the proposals have generally been well received, a mandate has now been given by Members to proceed with planning and associated consultation.
- 4.2 Within the plan there are various "quick wins" listed which we need to look at and where not already in progress how we deliver the remainder. A progress on the various items is as follows:-
- Improve waterfront in various areas by clearance of banks and provision of café facilities. We will need to review how this can be achieved and if banks are cleared then this will make it easier to attract a café operator.

- Reopen The Brewhouse Theatre. This is happening now and they will probably wish to operate external café facilities so assisting delivery of the above.
- Possible pedestrian enhancement of the town centre area. We have already commenced discussion about this with the County Council, but not moved forward yet because of the focus on flooding issues. This will be followed up when we get back to business as usual.
- Secure a high quality restaurant for the Market House. Negotiations are in progress and we hope to bring proposals to Members shortly for consideration.
- Support the Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) process. We are certainly doing all possible to support this and would urge all traders to support and ensure adequate resources and funding are available for the next five years, promoting the town and encouraging visitors.
- Develop markets and town centre events. This is already being successfully developed but to a great degree its growth will depend on the success or otherwise of the BID ballot in order to provide the resources to take it forward.

4.3 It is pleasing that Members have been generally supportive of the principle of the Town Centre Rethink and now the detailed planning and consultation through the planning process can commence.

## **5. Orchard Centre Development Proposals**

5.1 We have met with the owners of the Orchard Centre and seen some very interesting plans of their proposals, but do not have further detail about car parking provision or how our land and buildings are to be dealt with to facilitate development.

5.2 We have requested they provide Heads of Terms as to how they see any agreement between us moving forward which we await receipt of.

## **6. Sale of former Taunton Youth and Community Centre (TYCC) Site**

6.1 The sale of the redundant Youth Centre site is now progressing with LIDL and an exchange of contracts conditional upon planning is imminent. The TYCC Trustees are due to sign all contract documentation on 24 February 2014 so by the time of Full Council contracts should be formally exchanged or will about to be, which has

to be great news. The capital receipt from this is split three ways (at an agreed percentage) between Somerset County Council, TYCC Trustees and the Council but it is agreed that Taunton Deane will administer the Trustees receipt and it is to be directed to youth facilities as agreed with the Trustees.

- 6.2 Incorporated in the sale of the TYCC site to LIDL is an agreement giving the Council the option to proceed with a land swap involving the existing LIDL site and this would allow us to exercise a measure of control on the new use of this important riverside and town centre site. This is an option that can be exercised later.

## **7. West Park Employment Site, Chelston**

- 7.1 Demand for this popular site is outstripping supply and the developers, Summerfield, have to construct new blocks earlier than anticipated so reflecting a resurgence in business confidence.
- 7.2 Seven of the 14 commercial units available at the newly constructed Block 1 have already been sold, with a further 5 units under offer. The new block is the latest addition to the 3-block complex of Westpark 26's Enterprise Unit, which is aimed at accommodating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and saw its first 2 blocks, which together offer 26 units, sell out quickly.
- 1.0 The Enterprise Unit, which comprises a total of 40 units across the three blocks or terraces, represents the first phase of Summerfields' plan to create a wider mixed-use development on the site, which covers over 40 acres, and, subject to planning, will include distribution, manufacturing, trade, office and road-side uses.
- 7.4 In addition, planning consent is in process at present for a massive 100,000 sq ft building on the site for a fish farm in a controlled environment which is to be applauded as it is an inward investment and will be great news for Taunton Deane.
- 1.0 This demonstrates that business confidence is returning so what we must do is facilitate the planning process to be as efficient as possible, as we have been doing, and ensure a ready supply of further employment land is made available to provide choice. This reinforces the need to resolve Bathpool and Langaller sites and keep pressing for resolution of access problems to a strategic site east of the M5.

## **8. Taunton Forward**

- 1.0 This is a new business focused organisation with an aspiration to promote Taunton and encourage inward investment. As it happens we share the same aims so we applaud their efforts and particularly

welcome support for our “Taunton Rethink” from which we share mutual ambitions to improve Taunton.

- 2.0 I have always said that as a Council we welcome ambitious proposals and if the private sector is prepared to share the load going forward then this is to be harnessed for the good of the community. We look forward to hearing more of how they may contribute and provide the resources to aid the development being proposed and well be seeing how we may integrate these efforts with the Taunton Economic Advisory Board, which has private sector representation and the plan we have for Taunton Town Centre.
- 3.0 Of course funding is one of the main issues to be overcome, it is not a lack of vision or drive on the Council’s part, it is dealing with the reality of the situation that funding for major projects is virtually non-existent and if the private sector is prepared to take some of this load, by investment, that can only be for the good of us all and I personally welcome it. I have also offered to attend a meeting with them or arrange for a relevant Portfolio Holder to attend, to understand better the ambitions and constraints we have.

Councillor John Williams

# **Council Meeting – 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor Norman Cavill – Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism**

### **1. The Brewhouse Theatre**

- 1.1 A report on the progress in transferring The Brewhouse to the Taunton Theatre Association is included elsewhere on the agenda. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

### **2. New Inward Investment website**

- 2.1 The Economic Development Team has, this month, launched a new inward investment website for Taunton Deane, amalgamating the former Taunton Means Business and Project Taunton websites in to one attractive, single point of information [www.taunton.uk.com](http://www.taunton.uk.com).
- 2.2 The site was under preparation for four months and presents comprehensive information to potential investors on the attractiveness of Taunton Deane and the support available to facilitate their development. The site has been the subject of informal soundings amongst local development partners, and a favourable response has been received.
- 2.3 The launch of the site will be enhanced by a range of activities to attract the attention of the industry. Activities will include:-
- A national PR and media and social media (Twitter: *@tauntonbusiness*) campaign;
  - The addition of local champions via individual case studies. The site already features articles on specific successful local businesses, which will be enhanced as more growing and expanding businesses are contacted by the team;
  - Enhanced liaison with regional and national commercial property agents, particularly those representing national firms and investors;
  - A Developer Forum amongst local commercial property agents and developers of major employment sites;
  - The website will have clear links to Into Somerset and other investment agencies.
- 2.4 Members' views on the website would be welcomed.

### **3. Business Investment**

#### **Inward Investment enquiries**

- 3.1 Since Christmas the team has received six enquiries from external businesses looking to locate in Taunton Deane.

#### **Businesses recently supported**

- 3.2 Business grants awarded in the latest round total £3,000, comprising £500 to each of the following:-
- Rah Cattell towards the cost of a laptop and marketing for her dance business;
  - Mrs Lucilia Santos towards the cost of vital equipment for a new Portugese Restaurant being set up in Taunton Town Centre. The equipment to be purchased includes a cash register, dishwasher and a meat slicing machine;
  - Taunton Theatre Association towards the cost of a new server system to ensure all business areas are fully integrated to enable the necessary future marketing to take place;
  - Miss Nia Lawrence towards the cost of a new studio light, a back-drop and some publicity for her photography business “Fun ‘n’ fotos”;
  - Nicole Kirbyshire towards the cost of a new sewing machine for her business ‘Vintage Happiness’; and
  - Florica Tiplea towards the cost of marketing materials and a website for her Trust Inventory business.
- 3.3 Economic Development staff are also liaising with four of the Borough’s larger businesses to assist them to progress their investment and expansion plans.

### **4. Business Survey**

- 4.1 The Economic Development Team has compiled and circulated a survey to identify business views on a variety of issues such as premises, recruitment, advice and support, and training. The intelligence obtained will be used to inform the services available from the Council.
- 4.2 The survey will be live until the end of March and has been circulated via business networks and representative organisations. Please encourage as many people as possible to complete the survey <http://tinyurl.com/pvsyakp>.



## **5. Events**

### **Taunton Deane Advanced Engineering Forum**

- 5.1 In January, the Council held the second meeting of the Forum alongside Somerset College. Eleven larger engineering businesses attended to hear the Chief Executive of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership give a presentation on the LEP and sources of finance to assist business growth. The Forum will continue to meet on a bi-monthly basis and will address issues that are of relevance to our larger business community.
- 5.2 At the request of the Forum members, an Export Workshop is being organised at Somerset College on Monday, 24 February 2014.

### **Procurement Event**

- 5.3 The Economic Development Team has organised an event on 26 March, 2014 between 8-10am at the County Cricket Ground, to promote opportunities for local businesses to identify and bid for public sector contracts. Other agencies involved are Musgrove Park Hospital, Somerset Chamber of Commerce (promoting Hinkley Supplier opportunities), Avon and Somerset Police and delivered in partnership with Southwest One . Attendance is free and individual clinics will be available to businesses. To register click onto <http://tinyurl.com/pcmn83f>

## **6. Taunton Town Centre Company and BID (Business Improvement District)**

- 6.1 The Town Centre Company formally submitted to the Council in January 2014 its intention to hold a ballot amongst businesses in the town centre with a view to establishing a BID. The ballot, which will be of 400 businesses in the defined BID area, will close on 28 February 2014.
- 6.2 The BID would generate approximately £1,400,000 from the business community (and other organisations that pay Non Domestic Rates over £10,000 per property) over the five year term. That expenditure will be allocated mainly towards the marketing of the town to visitors and residents, and the provision of cultural events, and will be a welcome supplement to the Council's own activities.
- 6.3 The Council is supportive of the BID and has provided financial and staffing support to the company to assist it to canvas support amongst businesses. The Council is also required to hold the ballot, and officers of the Economic Development Team and the Revenues and Benefits Service have provided significant support to the company to ensure that effective ballot arrangements are in place.

- 6.4 As the owner of 13 individual heraditaments in the BID area the Council is required to tender its own votes. I can confirm that I have voted 'yes' in relation to each of the heraditaments.
- 6.5 The result of the ballot will be declared on 2 March 2014.

## **7. Hinkley C**

- 7.1 We have been invited to meet the FID 4 (Final Investment Decision) who are in fact the four main contractors in the construction and build of Hinkley C.
- 7.2 This is a first opportunity for all Councils to pitch their business support packages, connectivity and of course previous record on achieving planning decisions and job creation.
- 7.3 In short, this is an opportunity to sell Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils. This will give us an opportunity to create economic benefit for our area from this major project.

## **8. Somerset Growth Plan**

- 8.1 This plan whilst presented by Somerset County Council, has been created by joint working with all the District Councils. It lays out the overall strategic framework for growth in Somerset, and will be a key component of the Heart of the South West LEP plan (HOTSW). The plan of course is backed up by our own Taunton Growth Prospectus.
- 8.2 In the coming months considerable work will need to be done on the priority projects within that report; so that as soon as the opportunity arises, we are ready to go. It is through establishing these objectives and the funding that we will be able to apply for from the LEP that we will be able to move these projects forward.

## **9. Hestercombe House, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Taunton**

- 9.1 As many of you will know, Hestercombe Garden Trust now controls Hestercombe House. The Guildhall Centre for Young Musicians is going to use the top floor of the house, and other areas within Hestercombe for performances.
- 9.2 The Trust also wishes to establish an international centre for Landscape Studies and a major regional art gallery. They have already organised the loan of various pieces of art for the forthcoming first exhibition, and I hope we will be able to support them in moving their project forward.

## **10. Asset Management**

- 10.1 Our Asset Management Team have now moved back into The Deane House and at the moment are headed up by Tim Child. Work continues on a number of projects, in particular, to accommodate a number of top quality restaurants that wish to move into Taunton.
- 10.2 The team is working on bringing forward early delivery of the Monkton Heathfield employment land to service the enquiries we are receiving.
- 10.3 As you all know, Ian Franklin and Mark Green have recently left the Council. I think it is appropriate to record our thanks for the excellent work they did in bringing forward the Project Taunton Plans.
- 10.4 I would like to promote one of the great successes of Project Taunton - the construction the flood retention schemes on the Halse Stream at Norton Fitzwarren and at Longrun Meadow. A number of property owners have expressed their gratitude that in these trying times, their properties have not been flooded.
- 10.5 We now move onto the next scheme and St Modwen is presently working up new schemes to assess the viability of redeveloping the Firepool site along the lines of the Rethink proposals. It should not be forgotten that there is one remaining piece in the flood prevention jigsaw to complete, the retention pond on the upper Tone, with a capacity of 2,000,000 cubic metres.

Councillor Norman Cavill

# **Council Meeting – 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor James Hunt – Environmental Services and Climate Change**

### **1. Environmental Health / Licensing**

- 1.1 The Coroner's inquest into the tragic accident on the M5 following the fireworks display at the Rugby Club is due to take place on 31 March 2014 at Taunton Crown Court. There will be a report for Members following the trial costs review and while Taunton Deane's interest in this is only as an interested party, an additional report is planned for Members at the conclusion of all activities associated with the incident.
- 1.2 Environmental Health are also involved in the review of the explosives legislation which was already underway as part of the Loftstedt recommendations on consolidating legislation.
- 1.3 A free dog micro chipping day was held in Vivary Park in conjunction with the Dogs Trust on 29 January 2014. Sadly this was not particularly well attended, partly due to the poor weather, so another event is being considered for the future, maybe at an alternative venue, to try and encourage more participants. Dog chipping is encouraged as part of responsible dog ownership and can be useful if repatriating dogs who become separated from their owners. Dog chipping will become law in Wales in 2015 and England in 2016.
- 1.4 All Health and Safety Executive SE listed cooling towers under Local Authority control have been inspected as part of proactive health and safety priorities for 2013/2014 and all were found to be in compliance.
- 1.5 Environmental Health is purchasing with the aid of a Government grant the UK Food Surveillance System, which is a national database for the central storage of analytical results taken by enforcement authorities as part of their official controls. This new system allows our Environmental Health department to be able to submit all our sample details into a national database, which will be received by the host laboratory and the Food Standards Agency. As a result Environmental Health will be able to interrogate the database to determine trends in specific areas. This aids consistency across the UK and should have the advantage saving the department time.
- 1.6 The Food Team is working towards completing all high risk (categories A and B) food premises inspections due for 2013/2014 and are presently on course to complete the Category C food business premises inspections also. The work to catch up on the lower rated inspections has been hampered by the changing in staffing resources as a result of the M5 accident.

- 1.7 The Licensing Team have been offering advice and guidance as part of the multi-agency Safety Advisory Group involved in the initial planning stage and application preparation for the Rod Stewart Concert known as Somerset Rocks, which takes place at Somerset County Cricket Club on Wednesday 18 June 2014. The concert is being held in aid of St Margaret's Hospice and a premises licence application has now been submitted.
- 1.8 Licensing Officers from Taunton Deane and West Somerset joined forces with the Police and other agencies to tackle metal theft and monitor compliance with new scrap metal laws, as part of an Operation Tornado 'day of action' which took place at the Deane DLO depot on the 29 January 2014. The exercise was a resounding success, with results ranging from vehicle seizures to confiscation of metal from an unlicensed scrap dealer. Licensed metal dealers praised the effort which was being made to ensure a level playing field for legitimate businesses.

## **2. Deane DLO**

- 2.1 I would like to congratulate Chris Hall and his team of the fantastic work they have been doing over the last few weeks with regard to the flooding events in Taunton Deane. Their hard work has made a huge difference to families and the people affected.
- 2.2 There have been some misinformation incorrectly spread in the media, on social media and anecdotally, that Taunton Deane is charging for the supply of sandbags for those people affected by the flooding. This is absolutely not true. The Council has not been charging for sandbags and have not done so in years previously to this year's flooding events.
- 2.3 Taunton Deane is also working closely with other district councils and with Somerset County Council in a coordinated shared response to the flooding. Sandbag deliveries for example are being supplied by whichever Council with the best access or availability to a particular location and not simply dependent on which administrative area it falls in.

## **3. Climate Change / Carbon Management**

### **Carbon management and Local Resilience Strategy booklet**

- 3.1 Taunton Deane has now published its 'Carbon management and Local Resilience Strategy' booklet which is available in public places such as libraries and visitors centres.
- 3.2 I am sure you have all read the article about this in the January's 'Deane Dispatch' but as a quick reminder this is a community directory, strategy and action plan for managing carbon dioxide emissions and building local resilience to the three global challenges of climate change, population increase and depleting oil reserves.

## **Climate Change Officer Post**

- 3.3 This post has not been filled as a result of the successful applicant phoning on the starting date to say he would not be accepting the post thereby wasting a three month recruiting exercise. The budget under spend for the post has been agreed to be carried across to the next financial year and we are hopeful that this will allow us to continue to progress a new climate change project, possibly a new solar PC installation.

Councillor James Hunt

# **Council Meeting – 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor Mrs Catherine Herbert – Sports, Parks and Leisure**

### **1. Parks**

- 1.1 After a very successful 'Santa on the Run' in Vivary, the park has really taken a soaking and has been flooded for much of January and February. The team have been doing their best to open as often as possible but especially on the golf course we have lost some trees that will take some time to deal with due to the ground conditions..
- 1.2 Many of the team have been busy with duties associated with the flooding crisis and I would like to thank them all for their efforts in this especially when it has involved out of hours working.

### **2. Community Leisure and Play**

- 2.1 Station Road Pool Refurbishment – You will have seen the latest newsletter and we are looking forward to the re-opening in early April. The project team have worked excellently together to bring what has been a complicated refurbishment to fruition and I am very excited to see the finished works. Also very excited about meeting Mark Foster!
- 2.2 Blackbrook Pool and Spa – Work continues on this project and the project team is now complete and will be moving forward on things such as design in the next few weeks.

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

#### **Community, Sports and Health Development**

- 3.1 Tone continues to work hard to develop a number of community outreach programmes:-

#### **Health Development**

##### Flexercise/Seated Activities

- 3.2 Tone has trained a number of volunteers to launch and deliver a new seated activity class in Lambrook, Taunton which started in January 2014. It is entirely volunteer structured and led and funded by the Halcon One Team, as

increasing physical activity for older people has been deemed a priority by the local Councillors - working in partnership with Taunton Deane Housing, Age UK Somerset and Avon and Somerset Police.

#### Community Event - Cades Farm, Wellington

- 3.3 In partnership with Wellington Children's Centre, Knightstone Housing and Somerset Skills and Learning, a community event was hosted on the green space at Cades Farm housing development in Wellington for families at the end of October 2013. Over 100 people attended the event and participated in ultimate Frisbee, NHS Health Checks, ping pong and membership offers. Other agencies were on hand to offer nature trails, scrap store, theatrical face painting tuition, cake making and a baby/toddler soft play corner.

#### Sportivate Funding

- 3.4 Tone has been successful in securing additional Sportivate funding for four projects that are running at Wellsprings Leisure Centre; these are due to start later this month.

#### Sportivate - Social Return on Investment Report

- 3.5 Following the successful completion of Spring Sisters (a running project funded by Sportivate last year) Tone have completed a Social Return on Investment report on the project. This shows how successful the project was, not only in attracting new runners but in the social and health benefits a project like this brings. The project gave a social return of £8.66 for every £1 invested in the activity.

#### Proactive Physical Activity Referral Scheme

- 3.6 Wellington Sports Centre, Blackbrook Pavilion and Wellsprings Leisure Centre have all achieved re-recognition as providers of the Proactive Physical Activity Referral Scheme. All three centres produced a portfolio and received a site visit and assessment from colleagues at Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

### **Facility News**

#### Wellington Sports Centre

- 3.7 Work has finally commenced on the redevelopment works at Wellington funded by the Section 106 Agreement monies secured by Tone. Key facilities will be refurbished, with the focus to enhance the customer experience. The first of these projects will be the refurbishment of the Heath Suite facilities followed by the Reception with a new Fast Track entry system. Work is due to be completed by the beginning of April 2014.

#### Wellsprings Leisure Centre

- 3.8 This year's Christmas Party evenings were a huge success, with every night selling out. Definitely one of the best years for a very long time.



- 3.9 The centre has seen significant savings on its electricity bills since installing the sensors on the Sports Hall lights.

#### Blackbrook Pavilion

- 3.10 On Sunday, 23 March 2014, Blackbrook Pavilion will be holding a Sport Relief Mile; three and six mile runs, walk or crawl. There will be a number of different stands and fun activities for the spectators and children.

#### Taunton Tennis Club

- 3.11 Taunton Tennis Club has successfully secured £3,000 of funding from the British Tennis Foundation to spend over the next 12 months to expand Disability Tennis in and around Taunton. The funding will also enable the Club to host competitions for a network of wheelchair tennis centres from around the South West.

#### Vivary Adventure Centre

- 3.12 In December 2013 Helen Taylor started as the new site Manager overseeing both Golf and High Ropes.
- 3.13 Since late December Tone has struggled to open the golf course and, with several trees down, the course has been limited to 16 holes when it has opened.

Councillor Catherine Herbert.

# **Council Meeting – 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins – Housing Services**

### **1. Council House Building**

- 1.1 The contractors, Galliford Try, started on site with asbestos surveys being carried out in the New Year.
- 1.2 The Phase 1 sites, Normandy Drive and Bacon Drive together and Vale View at West Bagborough were put out to tender and these were opened on Friday, 14 February 2014.

### **2. Housing Revenue Account Maintenance Contracts**

- 2.1 There are currently 3 major refurbishment and repair contracts going to tender:-
  - Kitchen and Bathroom replacement;
  - Gas Central Heating installation; and
  - External decoration.
- 2.2 I have been visiting short-listed contractors with Tim Haynes, Property Manager, a surveyor and a member of the Tenant Services Management Board.
- 2.3 Air Source Heat Pumps - We recently passed the landmark 150<sup>th</sup> installation and work has begun at Monkton Heathfield following an open event for tenants on 7 February 2014. I had the privilege of attending to present a bouquet to the lady whose home benefited from this work and who is delighted with the system.
- 2.4 Air Source Heat Pumps will also be installed in the new homes at West Bagborough.

Councillor Jean Adkins

# **Council Meeting - 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor Mrs Vivienne Stock-Williams - Corporate Resources**

### **1. Corporate and Client Services**

#### **Corporate Services**

- 1.1 From 1 January 2014, the Corporate and Client Team became Corporate Services under the new shared services management structure. The key focus since then has been on taking on the functions moving into Corporate Services (Corporate Performance and Risk, Corporate Strategy, Complaints, Data Protection, Freedom of Information) and handing over functions that have moved elsewhere (Retained Finance, Procurement, Civil Contingencies and Parking, and clienting the Private Sector Housing and Waste Partnerships).
- 1.2 In addition, a number of services returned from Southwest One on 1 February 2014. These are now part of the new Corporate Services structure (Corporate Administration, Design and Print, Facilities Management and HR).
- 1.3 The current key objective for Corporate Services is the development of a new shared service structure for the next layer of management (tier 4/5) in order to bring together the corporate services functions at Taunton Deane and West Somerset. This work is progressing well and a draft structure is scheduled to be released for consultation in April 2014.

#### **Client Team**

- 1.4 The key focus for the Client Team has been ensuring the smooth return and transition of the functions returning from Southwest One (Corporate Administration, Design and Print, Facilities Management, Finance, HR, Property). The services returned on 1 February 2014 and so far the transition has gone smoothly.
- 1.5 The Client Team also continues to work closely with Southwest One to monitor the potential impact of the IBM/SYNNEX deal. The team is also working on succession planning options for the end of the Southwest One contract in 2017.

#### **Corporate Performance and Risk Management**

- 1.6 The Corporate Performance staff at Taunton Deane and West Somerset have worked with Members of the Joint Management Team (JMT) during January and February to produce a combined and refreshed joint risk register. This will be brought to Corporate Governance in due course.
- 1.7 The Quarter 3 (2013/2014) Corporate Performance Report was considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 20 February (and is to go on to the Executive on 12 March 2014). The 'Planning & Development' theme was featured as part of this report.
- 1.8 Initial work has commenced to review the Performance and Risk Management Frameworks at Taunton Deane and West Somerset (Corporate Business Plans, Service Plans, targets and measures, monitoring and reporting). The aim is to consider the potential for aligning processes, reducing duplication and adopting best practice to create a single, common and consistent framework that fulfils the requirements of both separate democratic Councils during 2014/2015. Members will be involved in any Performance and Risk Management Framework development.

## **HR**

- 1.9 The key focus for the Retained HR Manager and HR Team has remained the provision of HR support for key corporate projects, such as the Joint Management and Shared Services project, and supporting the return of services from Southwest One.

## **Strategic and Retained ICT**

- 1.10 The Retained Strategic ICT Officer continues to provide strategic ICT support to the Authority, manage the ICT functions not provided by Southwest One and assist in monitoring the ICT element of the Southwest One contract.
- 1.11 Work is progressing in relation to IT support for a number of key projects (Joint Management and Shared Services, the rollout of the Windows 7 upgrade and PSN compliance).

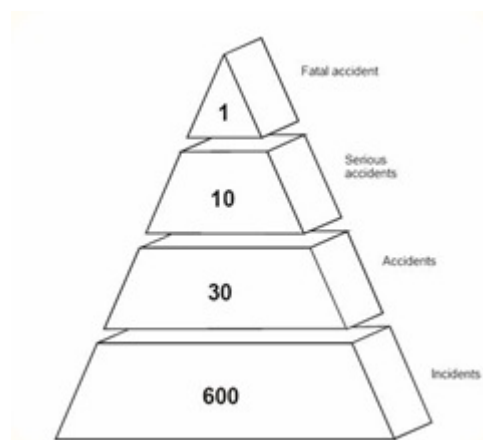
## **2. Corporate Health and Safety**

### **Manual Handling Training**

- 2.1 Manual handling toolbox talks have now been delivered to all Deane DLO teams. There have been no reported accidents involving manual handling operations since this training took place.

### **Accident Reporting**

- 2.2 Whilst it is positive that we do not have significant numbers of serious accidents within the organisation, in order for us to learn appropriate lessons we need to ensure that all incidents (including minor accidents and near misses) are reported. This will be addressed in the Health and Safety Strategy for 2014/2015 and the accident reporting procedure for the organisation.
- 2.3 The diagram below represents the theory on the proportion of near miss incidents to accidents and to those leading to more serious injuries and lost time (that is, 600 Incidents, 30 Accidents, 10 Serious Accidents, 1 Fatal Accident). If we learn lessons from the near miss incidents, then hopefully the more serious accidents can be prevented. Thus it can be demonstrated to staff why reporting of all incidents should be encouraged rather than discouraged.



### **Continuing Investigation Work**

- 2.4 Work on procedures has been continuing following the RIDDOR reportable incident relating to a Property Services employee being potentially exposed to asbestos fibres. The review process has led to improved documented procedures and a change in how contractors are notified where properties contain asbestos.
- 2.5 Asbestos awareness training is being delivered to all Deane DLO and Property Services employees and agency staff who may come into contact with asbestos whilst out on site.

## **3. Customer Contact Centre**

### **Achievement of all performance indicators**

- 3.1 The service has continued to perform well in line with its contractual performance indicators with no failures to report in the last quarter.

### **New Telephony Technology**

- 3.2 The implementation of the new Siemens Contact Centre has been highly successful. There has been no interruption to service as a result of system failure, which used to be a frequent problem with the previous system.
- 3.3 User feedback is largely positive and, together with the new wireless headsets, the implementation has significantly enhanced the end user experience.
- 3.4 Feedback from customers is also very positive. We have been able to introduce 'position in queue' notifications to our customers. This ensures that in busy periods customers are informed about their position in the queue. Analysis suggests that this is incentivising customers to stay on the line and wait instead of abandoning their call.
- 3.5 Whilst we have not yet gone live with automated payments for Taunton Deane, the Customer Contact Centre has done so for Somerset County Council (SCC) and this has been very successful. About 60% of customers contacting SCC to make an invoice payment have chosen to use the new automated system. It is envisaged that we will be able to go live with Taunton Deane payments in time for next month's Council Tax increase.

### **Our World at Work**

- 3.6 The Customer Contact Centre's staff forum, Our World at Work, continues to develop the scope of its influence. Recently the forum has been analysing the results from a staff satisfaction survey which they designed and distributed. The results are currently awaited, but the concept of empowering staff to be creative in finding solutions to problems seems to be working. Feedback has been very positive.

### **Service Development Plan 2014/2015**

- 3.7 The Service Development Plan (SDP) for 2014/2015 is currently in draft form and has been distributed to Client Services. The focus of the SDP for 2014/2015 is on channel shift. The Centre aims to support Taunton Deane's corporate channel shift and customer access strategies by utilising new automated telephony technology and the Council's website.

### **Launch of Twitter**

- 3.8 On 1 January 2014, Taunton Deane launched their new corporate Twitter account. The Customer Contact Team has been supporting the Council with handling inbound and outbound messaging and the account already has 250 followers. Having a Customer Contact presence on Twitter will allow us to help people using the service by signposting them to the right place, helping them to complete online services or by answering their questions directly.

## **4. Health and Wellbeing**

### **Declaration on Tobacco Control**

- 4.1 At the last Full Council meeting, Members agreed that the Authority should sign the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control. In the process, we became the first District Council in the country to do so. The declaration makes a firm statement of intent that the Council will in no way promote tobacco companies or products. We are also committed to taking actions to reduce smoking in our District. Work is continuing with the Somerset Smoke-free Alliance and the Council is in the process of installing smoke-free signs in Taunton Deane children's play areas.
- 4.2 We have completed a draft audit of the Council's services against the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This audit shows how many of our services make a real difference to people's health and wellbeing. The report will be brought to Community Scrutiny in March 2014 before going to the Executive. This audit will also be taken to the Health and Wellbeing Board and to the Taunton Deane Partnership (TDP), with recommendations on how best to use TDP funding to further support Health and Wellbeing in Taunton Deane.
- 4.3 We are also now supporting West Somerset Council in bringing together an audit that covers their area.

### **Directory of Services**

- 4.4 The next steps will be to develop a directory for patients and GPs that helps signpost our services better.

### **Dementia Friendly Council**

- 4.5 We have rolled out two dementia friendly training sessions, mostly focussed on front-line staff in Housing. In addition, we have now undertaken a commitment that both Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council will become dementia friendly Councils. A programme of short training sessions will be rolled out to all front-line staff over the next few months. These will ensure that staff have a better understanding of dementia, are better able to recognise it and can adapt conversations to provide improved customer service to people who suffer from dementia.

### **Prostate Cancer Awareness**

- 4.6 A promotion campaign is being undertaken both within the Council offices and our public toilets to raise awareness of the signs of prostate cancer by putting up advisory posters.

### **Better Care Fund**

- 4.7 The Council is contributing to workshops to help shape the use of the new NHS / Adults Social Care 'Better Care Fund'. The Assistant Director of Housing and Community Development is collating a county-wide strategic housing submission to show how better links and investment in housing could improve health outcomes and reduce 'downstream' costs to the NHS.

## **5. Legal and Democratic Services**

### **Legal Shared Services**

- 5.1 At the meeting of the county-wide Shared Services Task and Finish Group held on 17 January 2014, it was agreed that all six local Authorities work together to develop a business case for a shared county-wide Legal Service. It is aimed to produce a fit-for-purpose document for consideration by Members early in the next financial year. The basic principles underpinning such a business case are:-
- Provide savings of 15%;
  - Improve resilience for all partners;
  - The partnership to be flexible / extendable to other partners joining in the future; and
  - Levels of service will be maintained as a minimum.
- 5.2 One of the implications of exploring a wider partnership option is that it is not yet possible to be definitive about an intended implementation date for any new arrangement to commence. It is clear that this date will now be sometime after 1 April 2014. The current arrangements will be retained, therefore, until decisions are taken in respect of any proposed business case for shared services. From a practical point of view, this will mean that with effect from 1 April 2014 Roy Pinney, current Legal Services Manager, will undertake the role of Solicitor to the Council for Taunton Deane. Mendip District Council will continue to provide Legal Services for West Somerset Council.

### **Electoral Services**

- 5.3 The establishment of a joint Electoral Services Team is being fast tracked as a high priority, given the unfortunate particular circumstances that are well known to all.
- 5.4 With effect from 1 February 2014, Elisa Day was appointed as Joint Electoral Services Manager. She will be assisted by an Electoral Services Officer and Electoral Services Assistant. If these posts can be filled internally, it is hoped they can be in place by the middle of March 2014.
- 5.5 It is essential that both Taunton Deane and West Somerset operate using the same Electoral Services Computer system. A decision has



been taken for both Councils to operate using Xpress. The new system needs to be up and running as soon as possible after the publication of the new Electoral Register on 17 February 2014.

- 5.6 On 29 January 2014, the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive met with representatives of the Electoral Commission to advise them of the plans that were being put in place for a joint Electoral Services Team. The Electoral Commission confirmed that they were pleased and reassured by the progress that was being made.

### **Constitutional Issue – Recorded Votes at Budget Meetings**

- 5.7 The Council was informed by the Department for Communities and Local Government that new Regulations have been made which take effect from 25 February 2014. It will be mandatory for Councils to adopt the practice of recorded votes at their annual Budget and Council Tax meetings in regard to the substantive motions/decisions relating to agreeing the Budget and setting the Council Tax. The legal advice we have received is to adopt this practice forthwith. This ensures that any Budget and Council Tax decisions taken by the Council cannot be challenged.

### **Tonya Meers**

- 5.8 Tonya continues to receive treatment and is still doing valuable work behind the scenes to support the new Monitoring Officer and his team, which is much appreciated. This has included undertaking an update of the Constitution to reflect the recent personnel and management changes.
- 5.9 As this is the last Council meeting before Tonya formally ends her employment with Taunton Deane on 31 March 2014, I should like to place on record my appreciation of her service with the Council in her role as Monitoring Officer and Legal and Democratic Services Manager.

## **6. Revenues and Benefits**

### **Customer Satisfaction Survey**

- 6.1 Results from the Customer Satisfaction survey for the Revenues and Benefits Service have been distributed to all Members in an Information Report. The outcome for 2013 has been very pleasing, with overall satisfaction for Benefit customers improving to 91% and Council Tax and Business Rate customers' satisfaction improving to 84%. We will be using the feedback we have received to make further improvements to service delivery.

## **Corporate Fraud Policy**

- 6.2 On 10 March 2014, the Corporate Governance Committee will consider a new Corporate Fraud Policy. This follows from the decision taken last year to establish a Corporate Anti-Fraud function to lead or guide any investigations into fraudulent activity within Taunton Deane Borough Council. While the function and formation of a Corporate Anti-Fraud Team is yet to be fully developed in the joint structure for Taunton Deane and West Somerset Council, preliminary work in developing a Corporate Anti-Fraud Policy will provide a basis to create a strong and effective anti-fraud, anti-corruption and anti-bribery culture.
- 6.3 The policy sets out the high level priorities we need to achieve the Council's vision of zero tolerance for fraud, corruption and bribery throughout the Authority. It brings together existing policies on Whistle-blowing and Anti-Bribery as well as updating the Revenues and Benefits Service's anti-fraud measures. It also sets the context for anti-fraud activities in other Council services, such as Housing and Procurement, as well as plans and protocols to mitigate effectively against fraud within the Council.

## **Council Tax and Business Rates**

- 6.4 At annual Council Tax billing this year, we will consult all households on options and proposals to change our Council Tax Support Scheme from 2015/2016. This consultation was agreed by both the Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Executive following consideration of a report setting out significant reductions in funding for Council Tax Support next year and thereafter.
- 6.5 Council Tax bills will also be accompanied by information on recent changes on the Council Tax payable for annexes. This will ensure that anyone qualifying for reduced Council Tax for an annexe will be able to claim the appropriate discount.
- 6.6 Our Business Rate customers will receive information about the new discounts available for retail premises. Members will be aware of the extra help available to retail businesses through the recent briefing distributed on 30 January 2014.

## **Flooding Relief**

- 6.7 We are all very aware of the difficult situation for those households and businesses affected by flooding. The Revenues and Benefits Service have been supporting members of the community with queries regarding their Council Tax and Business Rates. In many cases, there are statutory discounts that can and have been applied to people's Council Tax bills – for example, where the home is uninhabitable. In collaboration with colleagues in Sedgemoor and South Somerset

District Councils, we have also been working together to agree what further discretionary help can be provided for those worst affected. A report on this matter is being presented to Council this evening.

Councillor Vivienne Stock-Williams

# **Council Meeting – 25 February 2014**

## **Report of Councillor Mark Edwards - Planning, Transportation and Communications**

### **1. Planning Policy**

- 1.1 Officers continue to work through the responses made to the recent Preferred Options Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP) Consultation. Around 550 representations had been received from in the region of 450 respondents. Whilst some sites had attracted a substantial level of comment, others had received none!
- 1.2 It is our intention to publish a Report of Public Consultation towards the end of February. This will summarise the key messages arising from the consultation and officers' initial responses to these issues.
- 1.3 Meanwhile work continues on putting in place the evidence base to support the draft Plan with a review of the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan now well underway. Further transport modelling will commence shortly as will viability testing and some further work on the Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.4 Officers still consider that it is viable to publish the draft Plan in Summer 2014 although this will be somewhat dependent on the timely completion of the technical work outlined above.
- 1.5 Having recently published the 2013 SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Assessment) which identifies sufficient land to meet the requirements of a 5% but not 20% buffer of deliverable housing land, attention will shortly turn to the completion of monitoring reports.
- 1.6 Officers will soon be undertaking the annual Housing Land Availability Survey visiting development sites across the Borough. This will provide an up-to-date snapshot of progress on housing sites and completions in the monitoring year April 2013 - March 2014.

### **2. Monkton Delivery Board**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 3 October 2013 the Taunton Economic Advisory Board agreed to establish a sub group focused on the delivery of the Monkton Heathfield urban extension. The main purposes of the Delivery Board will be to oversee the spending of the Large Scale Programme Capacity Fund award and to provide strategic direction for the delivery of both housing and employment land.

- 2.2 A key early focus will be to assist in resolving outstanding issues relating to the delivery of the Western Relief Road. The Board has representation at both officer and Member level from Taunton Deane and Somerset County Councils as well as from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), Local Enterprise Partnership, the Environment Agency and the three key developers.
- 2.3 The main purpose of the first meeting on 17 January 2014 was to get all parties up to speed with current issues and to agree terms of reference. The Board is scheduled to meet again on 14 March 2014.
- 2.4 It must be emphasised that the Board's role is to provide a strategic overview and there remains a need for continuing dialogue between this Council as Local Planning Authority and the developers.
- 2.5 These discussions which are supported by the HCA's ATLAS team are currently very much focused on the Consortium's applications to vary the existing planning obligations to remove the trigger for delivery of the Western Relief Road, replacing it with a financial contribution funded by a reduction in the percentage of affordable housing.

### **3. Duty to Cooperate - Mid Devon**

- 3.1 Mid Devon District Council have commenced work on their Local Plan Review and in line with the 'Duty to Cooperate' (arising from the Localism Act 2011) have held initial meetings with adjoining districts and organisations which may be affected by the emerging plan.
- 3.2 I attended a meeting in Tiverton under to better understand the proposals.
- 3.3 Mid Devon are considering allocating a site around Junction 27 (North Devon Link) for around 25 hectares of employment land, over 30,000 sq.m. of retail space and a leisure complex including multiscreen cinema, outdoor activity centre, hotel and 500 seat theatre/conference venue.
- 3.4 Taunton Deane has expressed concern at this proposal and the potential impact on Taunton and Wellington Town Centres as well as the development plan strategy for Taunton Deane. The proposal also does not appear to be justified in relation to the evidence base prepared by Mid Devon District Council.
- 3.5 As the Plan emerges Officers will report back to Members on progress in addressing this Council's concerns over these proposals.

### **4. Meeting with Nick Boles MP Minister for Planning**

- 4.1 In January I attended a meeting with Nick Boles MP, the Minister for Planning.
- 4.2 The meeting was a general question and answer session covering all aspects of the National Planning Policy Framework, Neighbourhood Planning, the five year land supply and the future of The Planning Inspectorate.
- 4.3 It was an extremely informative meeting and was extremely helpful in better understanding the challenges that we face balancing the housing needs of our communities versus the environmental constraints that exist.

## **5. Sandhill Park**

- 5.1 The main contractor for the conversion and repair of the Grade 2\* listed building has been approved.
- 5.2 Works on site preparation for the new build is underway.

## **6. Car Parking**

- 6.1 I am working with officers on plans to reburish the lobby and immediate areas at the Multi Storey Car Park and have asked for a valuation of the works that need to be prepared.
- 6.2 Due to John Lewis being heavily involved in the civil contingencies around the recent flooding this has been slightly delayed but I will be progressing this as soon as is practical.

## **7. Communications**

- 7.1 The Council has launched its own twitter account, @tdbc, and had attracted over 200 followers within the first four weeks of going live. This is about double the number we had forecast and has been increasing over the following weeks.
- 7.2 It is proving extremely useful as we can now make people aware of initiatives such as the free dog micro-chipping event, forthcoming Council meetings, progress on the Station Road Pool refurbishment and news releases.
- 7.3 Communications is working closely with the Customer Contact Centre to monitor tweets as Customer Contact has the technology to pick up and deal with issues that can arise – as they would with an email or phone call.

- 7.4 This ability makes our twitter account responsive and interactive which can only be good news.
- 7.5 Service areas in the Council are coming forward with some excellent ideas on how we can best use twitter – for example being able to tweet food hygiene ratings.
- 7.6 Other communications activity has included a media briefing on the budget proposals for 2014-2015, support for West Somerset Council's external communications and working on the daily issues around the severe flooding on the Somerset Levels.
- 7.7 We are currently working on some internal communications initiatives, including a new joint newsletter for staff and elected members at West Somerset and Taunton Deane.

Councillor Mark Edwards

# Council Meeting – 25 February 2014

## Report of Councillor Jane Warmington - Community Leadership

### 1. Flooding

- 1.1 The Somerset Levels and Moors are experiencing extensive, prolonged flooding following weeks of unprecedented rainfall. The drainage system of ditches, rhynes, drains and rivers has been unable to cope with such volumes and several villages have been inundated and remain so. Entire communities have been cut off, some now evacuated with water levels posing a threat to life.
- 1.2 Rest Centres staffed by volunteers have been set up to support those displaced from their homes. The situation is dire with the worst rainfall ever recorded and very strong accompanying winds. The flooding extends to over fifty square miles. Many farms are affected and stock has been moved out, winter fodder lost. Storms have also caused power losses and trees have blown down.
- 1.3 The Local Authorities with the Emergency Services led by the Police are prepared through civil contingency planning and the multi agency emergency response we have seen locally is little short of amazing. Boats and trucks have been deployed to support stranded communities and additional help on the ground has come from the Military (largely our own 40 Commando Royal Marines) helping to build temporary defences with sandbags, move things and people. There has been a lot of support from within communities themselves and from those outside the flood zone. Community updates are provided daily and Members receive these through our Press Office here at Taunton Deane.
- 1.4 The Environment Agency have been concentrating on getting flood water away (out to sea) with additional pumps but the continuing heavy rainfall means it is being replaced making alleviating any flooding in the short term impossible. The Press have been very critical but those involved have been full of praise for what they are achieving.
- 1.5 The area has received several high profile visits including His Royal Highness Prince Charles and the Prime Minister has now visited twice. There has been much reporting in the Press. Throughout this time the sensible, measured, considered, reasoned voice of Taunton Deane Borough Councillor Gill Slattery has stood out amongst everyone else, way beyond that of a local Councillor representing one of the flooded Wards. She has our admiration and thanks.
- 1.6 Several local appeals have been launched to help victims, both to help the clean up and support necessary work to reduce the awful impact of such weather in the future. Investment has also been promised for both from Central Government and we already have our own modest contribution.
- 1.7 There have been at least two previous Parrett Catchment Project/Plans. These and new initiatives are being pulled together by Somerset County Council and the



Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to produce a twenty year action plan to avoid flooding on such a massive scale again. The cost to achieve this will be many millions of pounds but as this local disaster has already cost several millions pounds, it is surely wise to invest in long term flood prevention.

## **2. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)**

- 2.1 Taunton Deane has two AONBs, the Quantock Hills and the Blackdown Hills. Both these areas extend across several District boundaries with much of the Blackdown Hills in Devon. Although most of the land is privately owned and farmed, there is either open or extensive access across both areas with well signed car parks. These areas are our biggest and best used local leisure facilities and contribute to healthy public enjoyment of the countryside.
- 2.2 The small AONB Services were set up to comply with our Statutory Duty along with the other Local Authorities to produce Management Plans and also manage increasing public use of these two areas. The open hill along the top of the Quantocks is particularly well used and the Local Authorities support a Ranger Service to help manage this.
- 2.3 The Ranger Service do many things. They coordinate group activities (not everything goes well together), lead public walks, give talks, run a group of conservation volunteers (stiles, swaling, scrub clearance, path maintenance, annual deer count) with the help of a number of Voluntary Rangers (who have a patch local to where they live) and liaise with the public. The Rangers effectively police the hill and liaise with the Police at Williton. As a result of all this, although the hills are well used, we experience very few problems.
- 2.4 The AONBs Services are paid for from the Local Authorities combined contribution which then levers in three times more from Central Government. So one quarter of the costs are met locally with three quarters coming from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in recognition of their national importance. This means that any reduction in local support has a much greater impact on their budgets which is not always well understood. There are understandable concerns around County Hall's proposal to drastically reduce its support in two years time. Taunton Deane is not proposing any changes to their support for AONBs in the next two financial years and would look to sustain the services into the future.

## **3. Halcon One Team – “Think differently, do differently”**

- 3.1 Ten months on and the new delivery and problem solving approach under the One Team continues to improve the lives of residents and those working to support them. Details have been included below to illustrate what is being done to start to make these changes. This approach is being looked at for other areas.
- 3.2 The Community Map shows 963 families in Halcon who need support from the Statutory Agencies which has now been documented under this process. This enables Family Plans to be drawn up for those families with the most complex needs. Some are referred on to Family Focus and have an allocated Family

Support Worker. Others are supported by One Team members who fulfil this role and hold individual Family Plans.

- 3.3 The One Team collectively made 26% of the total referrals to the Taunton Cluster One Children's Centres between April - November 2013 from Halcon alone, with Health Visitors who cover all four areas (not just one) making the most referrals. These referrals are now seeing the most vulnerable families making use of the Acorns Children's Centre and engaging with the One Team. These families are starting to change their lives for the better.
- 3.4 Taunton Deane's Rent Arrears for the Ward (two thousand homes) have fallen to £96,000, a reduction of approximately £15,000 in ten months (and this at a time of Welfare Reform). The three Estate Housing Officers as part of the One Team are providing a more holistic service with others to support our tenants.
- 3.5 The Link Power Project now has a dedicated Community Development Officer leading it, with an aspiration to build it into a Social Enterprise on behalf of the Link Partnership (we still await news of the bid to the Lloyds Foundation towards this). The Project now has a base in the old Brainwave Shop (it rather outgrew the Link Centre) which provides somewhere to meet, a reception area where residents can volunteer, book work (a system has been designed to pay for work bit by bit in advance), get information about Link Power, the Halcon One Team and wider services available throughout the Ward. The Project has also been boosted by the donation of a Mercedes box van from the Avon and Somerset Police Constabulary (ASP) which has been in use already to help a resident move house, collect trolleys and remove green waste from garden work undertaken.
- 3.6 Negotiations with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) now ensures that they refer those locally looking for work into the Link Power Project, so that unemployed individuals can become work ready and build a curriculum vitae to aid progress eventually into paid work. This does not affect their Benefits. Link Power may be followed on Facebook or on Twitter @Linkpowerteam.
- 3.7 'Chill & Chat' was the idea of John Hart, one of our two Housing Estate Anti-Social Behaviour Officers and developed through the One Team in response to significant Domestic Abuse issues across the Halcon Ward. This Project is now working with the Ward's previously hard to reach victims and offenders (offenders being directed to Link Power). The informal get-together on a Thursday mornings is where victims can meet each other and One Team professionals (out of uniform) with support from Women's Aid offering outreach and dedicated advice.
- 3.8 This has now expanded to include separate Self Defence Classes, Pattern Changing Courses (commissioned by the One Team to provide these locally), confidence building sessions from Tone Leisure and Somerset College are preparing a dedicated course for Chill & Chat regulars on improving their literacy and numeracy. These are helping to support victims of Domestic Abuse, which can be very isolating, within their own community alongside regular visits by members of the One Team.
- 3.9 VIDA (Women's Aid) have made a successful bid to the ASP Police and Crime Commissioner for funding towards a basic reading and writing course for parents in Halcon using the Acorns Children's Centre, having successfully delivered

something similar in Priorswood at the Hillside Children's Centre.

- 3.10 Tone Leisure has been commissioned by the One Team to provide Flexercise (part of their Active Lifestyles Programme) on the Lane Estate, a part of the Ward which has more elderly residents. This promotes mental health and wellbeing through regular chair based activity and is designed to work with groups of elderly or vulnerable residents, increasing fitness and getting them together within their own community. Sessions have just started at the Newton Road Community Hall one morning a month.
- 3.11 Supported by the One Team, a group of children aged between five and eleven years old have formed a Community Litter Pick Group and routinely walk around the Ward collecting rubbish and tidying up. The Group have been nominated for the BBC Pride in Somerset Youth Awards.
- 3.12 Police Community Support Officer Linda Ebdon led a group of children from Halcon Primary School through their Cycling Proficiency qualification in November, the first such course held within the Ward for many years.
- 3.13 The Citizens Advice Bureau provides money management advice to our tenants and on one day a week in the Halcon Ward. Chris Mitchell is kept busy. Poor money management for those on low incomes is a serious underlying issue which can lead to many other problems. Many tenants are in debt and have significant rent arrears. He is soon being joined by the Credit Union Somerset Savings and Loans who promote jam jar accounts which help make budgeting easier.
- 3.14 Somerset County Council is reconfiguring its Children's Centre Service concentrating some into Early Help Hubs with a wider remit beyond nought to five years up to nineteen to include parents with difficult teenagers. They have been impressed with the co-located services in the Acorns Children's Centre which has evolved into a base for members of the One Team and the benefits from this arrangement. Discussions are continuing around the proposed hubs as well as with those Children's Centres in less demanding areas where services are still delivered and appreciated.

#### **4. Other Priority Areas**

- 4.1 North Taunton and Wellington have both seen a recent rise in crime. This may be a blip as the District (and national) trend is that crime is still falling year on year from 2007. However, this year will see another reduction in overall crime reported across the Halcon Ward once final figures are pulled together. Indications are that the One Team problem solving approach is already having an effect.
- 4.2 Whilst Welfare Reform is an additional strain, it cannot be said to be the cause of poor budgeting, low educational attainment, not working, poor parenting, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, poor health and not feeding your children enough. These problems and more beset our Priority Areas. Once an individual or families problems are identified through a One Team approach, these can be tackled pulling together all the expertise, both statutory and voluntary which is already out there (just not necessarily directed where it is really needed).

- 4.3 This may seem intrusive (and the Troubled Families Programme undoubtedly is) but it has to be to make a difference. There is an extraordinary amount of hand holding required for these families and individuals who struggle and a sort of determination needed to do this. People in despair feel supported and they start to see a difference in their lives and feel happier. We also need to remember that there are many families on low incomes who manage their lives rather well and have no need for any intervention, so this is a realistic aspiration for those that do.
- 4.4 Strategies around Early Intervention, Early Help, Children's Services, Education, Policing, Health and Wellbeing, General Practice Services, Housing and Tenant Management are already in place. These must translate into different service delivery on the frontline. Sharing information, mapping/collating it, co-locating services (which makes this much easier particularly for frontline workers) and working together as One Team just seems to be the right approach.
- 4.5 Rural areas with scattered small communities may experience similar problems but these are often compounded by rural isolation, fuel poverty and difficulty accessing most services so require a rather different approach. This has been largely been solved in part of the Borough by Somerset Community Council's Village Agents Project funded through the Big Lottery Fund.
- 4.6 Village Agents are trusted local people employed part-time to offer help in their communities (a cluster of Parishes). They do not cold call but network extensively with Parish Councillors, Police Community Support Officers, social group organisers, transport providers, Church groups, Youth Workers and others within their communities. They receive referrals (or introductions) to people needing information or support. They often make home visits and provide high-quality information. They have direct access to a wide range of services and use a secure electronic referral system. They can carry out informal practical checks related to safety in the home (for example smoke alarms, falls prevention), Benefit entitlement and energy efficiency. They are able to arrange follow up visits from experts for example the Fire Service and Social Care. They identify unmet needs within their communities and are helpful at supporting new social and healthy activities.
- 4.7 They are able to build trusted relationships within small communities particularly with those who are vulnerable to help improve their quality of life by helping them to feel more secure, more cared for and more informed and empowered. They have been able to identify gaps in services and feed back this information in order to influence future service provision. They support communities to respond to an identified need where appropriate and help advise on this. They liaise with each other, statutory and voluntary organisations and use the skills of Community Council colleagues. They are delivering the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Strategy and our own Priority Areas Strategy across some of our rural Wards. Their link to us is through the Taunton Deane Partnership and its sub-group the Community Planning Working Group. We would like to support this Project to widen its cover across the whole of Taunton Deane.
- 4.8 There are eighteen Village Agents across Somerset and so far three in Taunton Deane. By coincidence they are in those clusters of Parishes most affected by serious flooding. Sarah Aston is the Village Agents Project Manager : [sarah@somersetcc.org.uk](mailto:sarah@somersetcc.org.uk).

At the time of writing the forecast is for more rain so conditions are likely to get worse before flood waters to start to recede. Getting back to normal will take a long time for some and the full extent of damage to property and place revealed only after all the water has gone. Those affected will need our support.

Councillor Jane Warmington