

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

Report of Councillor Gwyneth Bryant – Communications

Communications Strategy 2004-2007

Our Vision – “For Taunton Deane Borough Council to have good communications at the heart of its work and for all with an interest in the Council and its services to feel informed and able to give their views”

Over the last few months ‘communications’ has become a ‘buzzword’ around the Council. We are challenging the way we do things – the way we present ourselves inside and out, and we are discovering more effective and proactive ways to get our message across to build a stronger brand and to improve information for residents, the public and our stakeholders and their confidence in us.

We are working with staff to create good internal relationships and with members to improve ways of keeping everyone informed. We have held member and staff workshops, focus groups and have distributed questionnaires to find out what you think about communications and what we need to do to improve things. The Healthy Workplace Project Board recently put out an internal communications questionnaire and I would like to thank the 223 staff who replied – this is an excellent response rate of about 40%. The results of this will be put on the Council’s intranet.

Member consultation is also ongoing – and has already identified ways we can improve communications. I have taken on board the many comments you have made about being kept informed of what is happening in your wards and the need to promote more good news stories.

All of this has been used to inform the ‘Communications Strategy’ and the work plans that accompany it. The final draft will be considered at the next Review Board in a few days time before it goes to the Executive on 11 March.

In the Spotlight – our Media coverage

What a busy period! Lots of our achievements have been well reported by the media – too many to list in full! However, there have been a few ‘not so good’ headlines too and we will be looking at our media protocol to help us work more effectively with the media and to improve relationships thus keeping them better informed of the facts so they don’t bury the good news! My list of media high spots must include:

- **Wellsprings Sports Centre** successfully opened in January. We had excellent local press coverage and now the PR team is planning our media campaign to support the official opening at the end of April.
- **‘Taunton Vision’** Recognition that this is the most exciting project Taunton faces was well illustrated by the press reporting of the successful exhibitions we held at the Brewhouse, the Old Market and at reception in Deane House last November/December. A visit from the government Minister generated equally good headlines – *‘Taunton in final four for Whitehall shake-up’* and *‘Minister excited by Firepool plan’*. The ‘Vision’ has been the topic of conversation at Parish Council meetings in many villages across the Deane. We are responding positively to the suggestions of the CPA peer review – Cllr John Williams, Leader of the Council is spreading the word on TV, on radio, in the papers. He is giving talks to Parish Councils, schools, community groups and local business, encouraging them to get involved in Taunton’s future.

Additionally, 3 workshops on the ‘Vision’ were specially arranged for our staff to inform them about the project and to listen to their views.

- **Broadband** – The Council’s efforts to support rural business through its roadshows at Wiveliscombe and SCAT were a resounding success. By raising the awareness we are helping local communities reach their trigger points so they can get Broadband connections.
- Several departments have received praise in the papers for their excellent work including Economic Development & Tourism, Building Control, Housing/Stock Options and Electoral Services. Well done everyone – all of this helps promote the good work we do for the benefit of the people in Taunton Deane.

Web Site & Intranet

Visits to the web site are increasing – a new tracking system shows that we are getting over 15,000 ‘hits’ per week, with Planning being the most visited (25%). Interestingly, after the home page the most popular were

'The Council' (4.74%), A-Z of services (4.30%), and The Council - Councillors & Committees (4.18%) pages.

The intranet is essential for good internal communications and work has now commenced on its redevelopment. Consultation with both staff and members will be done soon to define the priorities for this significant project.

Deane Dispatch – the next issue is due to be published in the next couple of months.

Reputational Risk Workshop

Councillor Williams and I took part in a 'Reputational Risk' Workshop put on for our Corporate Management Team by Connectpoint Public Relations (Manchester).

Reputation often an organisation's greatest asset, is impossible to control, as it is a reflection of what others think about our organisation. It includes how we take people along with us and the risks we take for the greater good; the quality of our services and products; the way we treat our staff; our financial performance; our social and environmental responsibilities. We can manage this by recognising possible risks, where and how they could arise, the influence different groups of people/organisations can have on this, the effect this could have on the our ability to deliver our services, and what we need to do to minimise these risks and stay on track. Members and staff will be informed regarding this as our communications strategy is developed.

Public Relations Officer

Finally, many of you will already know that Nan Heal is leaving us after nearly 10 years. I am sure you would all like to join with me to thank Nan for her support and her contribution in raising the Council's profile and the services we give, and for the professional way she has handled all those tricky moments with tact and skill. We all wish you every success and happiness in your new career.

Councillor Gwyneth Bryant