

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. Core Council Review

- 1.1 Full Council gave approval in February 2009 for Phase One of the Core Council Review. This phase should, as we all know, save the authority £342,000 a year. Senior positions have been filled in key positions such as the Strategy Manager and Performance and Client Manager and I would like to welcome Simon Lewis and Richard Sealey to these new posts. I would also like to congratulate all of the other staff members who have been successful in the ongoing recruitment.
- 1.2 Details of the proposed timetable for all other phases of the Core Council Review will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 21 April 2009. This has been a very challenging time for many people and of course some staff have left the authority and that is never easy but this was always envisaged as part of the process. Thanks to all of those staff who have left Taunton Deane for all of their work over many years in some cases.
- 1.3 I would also like to thank our Senior Management Team who have been delivering this process in a very difficult climate. I believe that we are on course and the use of reserves will be within our target area previously outlined.

2. Free Swimming

- 2.1 The 1 April 2009 was the launch date of the free swimming initiative. I am proud that this Council is participating in this scheme and I know that this will be very popular for over 60s, children and families in general.
- 2.2 I spoke to Joel Chapman at Tone Leisure who told me that they had 100 people pre-register for the scheme before it even started at Taunton Pool. Also I visited Wellington Sports Centre and they also told me of how people are enjoying this new scheme in the first few days. This scheme as I said before really helps the healthy living agenda and is the right thing to do.

3. Plastic and Cardboard

- 3.1 The trials in several areas are to continue and that is also the right thing to do and we hope that the trial areas will “morph” into the first areas to roll out. I am very pleased to see that the call in of the

decision taken by Councillor Mullins has been withdrawn. The answers provided by Joy Wishlade were very detailed and answered any questions anybody would have about the process.

- 3.2 I am sorry but I just did not understand the call in. To consider withdrawing this popular service for people in several areas would have been very unpopular and also very hard to explain as well. It is time that everyone got behind this scheme.

4. Town Centre Manager

- 4.1 Graham Love has been appointed as the new Town Centre Manager. The Chief Executive, Penny James, and I will be holding a meeting with him very soon to introduce ourselves and discuss the various issues which are of interest to us all. This is a very important role particularly at this time and I will give him as much support as I can.

5. Pioneer Somerset

- 5.1 Kevin Toller is going to be the new Lead Officer for us on Pioneer Somerset. Kevin and I have been discussing a questionnaire which he will be sending to all Members to help us shape the development of Pioneer Somerset.
- 5.2 We need to move forward at a much quicker pace with Pioneer Somerset. The structure which is outlined in Councillor Wedderkopp's report will give us the means to achieve our objectives and move forward.

6. Southwest One

- 6.1 Southwest One was recently nominated for a national Local Government Award. The Local Government Chronicle nominated Southwest One as one of the five best public private partnerships in Local Government.
- 6.2 It is always rewarding to obtain national recognition and importantly by a panel of judges drawn from the local government family. A reminder to those who still detract this partnership that it is saving public money.

7. Wiveliscombe and West Deane By-Election

- 7.1 I would like to extend a warm welcome to Eddie Gaines who won the recent by-election in the above Ward. I would also like to thank all the staff who worked a very long day on the election and Craig Morse for yet again managing a smoothly run election.

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

Before moving into the report as such, I would like to publicly thank Steve Hughes who was our Sports Manager for all the dedicated, hard work, he has done for the Council over the years. He has decided to leave the Council as of 31 March 2009, and may I wish him well in whatever he does in the future. We will miss his expertise. May I present my report as follows:-

1. Community Leisure

- 1.1 Vivary Park summer Sunday bandstand concerts have been programmed beginning on 7 June, continuing until 7 September 2009.
- 1.2 The Easter edition of The Deano has been sent to all primary school aged children in Taunton Deane and the summer edition will be issued in June. This publication gives details of activities for children in the main school holidays.
- 1.3 West Monkton Village Hall has been successful in their application to the Somerset Joint Committee for Voluntary Village Halls and Community Centres for grant aid assistance. The award has been made for an extension to the hall to provide extra facilities for the current population of West Monkton parish. The Committee is joint funded by both this Authority and Somerset County Council.
- 1.4 Letters have been sent to Parish Clerks and Playing Field Committees inviting applications to the Parish Play Area Grant fund by 30 April 2009.

2. Play

- 2.1 French Weir Park, Taunton
 - 2.1.1 The new play space in French Weir Park, opened on 16 March 2009, has brought a new lease of life to this town centre park. The design was undertaken with children from North Town Primary School and parents from a local pre-school group.
 - 2.1.2 The Friends of French Weir Park are reporting that it has been an enormous success with around 200 people in the park on Sundays playing, picnicking and playing ball games as well as just enjoying the atmosphere and, on weekdays, the sand play area is constantly full of toddlers with their parents. The play space was funded from a number of local housing developers' Section 106 Agreement contributions.

2.2 Howard Road, Wellington

2.2.1 A smaller play space designed to reflect the needs of young people from three schools in Wellington, opened on 27 March 2009. This is a smaller scale play facility reflecting its more local nature. It was funded principally by a Playbuilder Grant from the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF) administered by Somerset County Council with some Section 106 Agreement funding.

2.3 National Play Strategy

2.3.1 This was published earlier this year by the Government outlining the importance it is now giving to children's play as a vital ingredient of a happy and healthy childhood, supporting children's physical, emotional, social and educational development. The government has issued a new National Indicator on play against which Councils will be measured showing children's satisfaction with play provision.

2.3.2 The DCSF has written to every Councils' Chief Planning Officer highlighting the importance of play, of safe access to playspaces and of making the built environment play-friendly. It has also produced a video to promote the strategy which features the play space at Holway – Hawthorne Play Area. Both the Strategy and video can be viewed on the website at www.dcsf.gov.uk/play

2.4 Year 2 Playbuilder

2.4.1 Work has begun with the community in Oake to provide a play space on the village playing field. Oake is one of the wards identified as having the greatest need for new play provision in the Taunton Deane Play Strategy.

2.4.2 So far a Steering Group has been formed of local organisations, parents and young people. Barnardos has undertaken consultations with the local primary school children and a play day is planned in the village on 25 April 2009 to engage older children and adults and it is hoped to have a draft design completed in late May.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

3.1 Sports and Health Development

3.1.1 Active Somerset – An over 50s exercise class taking place at Milverton Victoria Rooms on a Monday afternoon, supported through Active Somerset in partnership with Age Concern Somerset, is proving a massive hit, with up to 20 participations at a time. The vast majority of attendees are new to exercise.

3.1.2 A new 'volunteer led' netball group was launched at Taunton Vale on 1 April 2009. So far 17 people have registered an interest. Active Somerset funding

is being used to provide a coach and support venue costs.

- 3.1.3 A new women's cricket group is being set up in Wiveliscombe at Kingsmead Community School. The group will predominantly be made up of wives/partners of Brompton Ralph Cricket Team, with additional participation from the local community. These sessions will commence on 14 April 2009 and, again, Active Somerset funding is being used to support venue costs.
- 3.1.4 All of the above initiatives are designed to encourage women into taking part in physical activity on a more regular basis, linking in to LAA stretch targets around this.

3.2 Facility News

Wellsprings Leisure Centre

- 3.2.1 The events programme at Wellsprings is proving to be a great success again this season, with an amazing line up of comedians. Russell Kane, 'if comedy' award winner, brought the house down with his show on St. Patrick's Day, feeding off the audience. The next event held at Wellsprings was the Strictly Dance evening starring Ian Waite and Camilla Dallerup. The dancing seen on this evening outshone anything the centre has seen before. Over 300 people took part in the group participation session. Forthcoming events will see the return of The Superstar Wrestling, Jethro with his 2009 Tour, Jimmy Carr with his Joke Technician Tour and we will welcome Dave Spikey to the centre with his The Best Medicine Tour, which is proving very popular. For all those getting married, the Tone Wedding Fair is set to be the best ever, with many stands returning and a large number of new ones. For a list of all the forthcoming events please e-mail j.white@toneleisure.com or visit www.toneleisure.com. Taunton Tigers Basketball Team won their first game of the season last weekend (about time boys!).
- 3.2.2 Junior Activities - Wellsprings staff have been involved in the Wild Play Days free session, helping children over 5 years old have fun play outside building sports dens, getting messy, traditional games and lots more. The turnout and response has been good. Wellsprings has introduced Music with Mummy pre-school music sessions into the programme. Easter Camps will be held throughout Easter for children aged 5+.

Taunton Pool

- 3.2.3 Taunton Pool is fully prepared for the Free Swim Initiative commencing on 1 April 2009. Registration started on Saturday, 21 March 2009 and approximately 60 customers have already signed up for the initiative. A lot more have taken the registration packs away with them. The pool is launching the start of the two year scheme with a Hawaiian themed party from 4-5 pm on 1 April, with the local media coming along to take photos, and I was pleased to be there with a few other Councillors.

St. James Street Baths

- 3.2.4 Swimskool - Over the last 12 months St. James Street Swimming Baths' Learn to Swim Scheme has grown from strength to strength. The programme has grown in not only its diversity but also its occupancy. With the introduction of a Swimmers Referral scheme we have seen demand for all levels continue to be strong. The programme now has 1,560 swimmers, a progression of 120 swimmers from this time last year.
- 3.2.5 New Sessions - Working in partnership with Quantock Vale Surgery, we are now able to offer a session on Tuesday afternoons for adults who have struggled to get into keeping fit. The session is designed as a comfortable environment for people who have been deterred from swimming due to medical or weight concerns. We now have 15 swimmers partaking regularly and are keen to see the session continue to grow.
- 3.2.6 Scuba diving at St. James Street! Scuba Scene is now offering an exciting programme for all abilities on Wednesday nights. The pool is a buzz of activity, with Instructors taking all ages and abilities through their qualifications working with St. James Street staff to offer a safe environment to learn a variety of skills before the open water.

Blackbrook Pavilion

- 3.2.7 Health and Fitness - At the beginning of March Blackbrook Fitbuzz membership has risen to 1,514 members. Blackbrook now has the largest number of Fitbuzz members within all Taunton Deane sites.
- 3.2.8 The centre has been close to achieving new member sales targets for the first quarter of the year (January sales 166/target 160, February sales 120/target 125 and March currently sales 90/target 100). These results have been achieved by intense sales activity and successful lead generation initiatives. The new gym continues to be successful, with total gym visits up 17% on last year. This is due to an increase in both Fitbuzz and casual member usage. The new equipment of Powerplates and Gravity Training machines are increasing in popularity.
- 3.2.9 On Comic Relief day the Fitness Team worked with Sainsbury (Hankridge Park) to generate funds. While celebrities may have climbed Kilimanjaro in real life, the Tone Leisure Fitness Team had the more mundane task to climb Kilimanjaro on one of the gym's stepper machines. Both achieved their goal with equal success, although our fundraising was certainly of a more humble amount.

Tennis Centre

- 3.2.10 George's 90th - George Duncan, one of the regular players at the over 50s coaching and matchplay sessions held on Monday and Wednesday mornings celebrates his 90th birthday on 6 April 2009.

Mini Tennis Ratings

3.2.11 Congratulations to the following players for their achievements

Robbie Broomhead - first Taunton boy to achieve Red level 1.

Olivia and Sophie Hamilton - first Taunton and Somerset girls to achieve Red level 1 (Orange 2).

Bethany Lacey - first Taunton and Somerset girl to achieve Orange level 1.

Robbie Davey - first Taunton and Somerset player to achieve Orange level 1.

Edward Shattock - Orange level 1.

Tristan Coore - first Taunton and Somerset boy to achieve Green level 1.

Wellington Sports Centre

3.2.12 Free Swim Initiative - The scheme to offer customers aged 60+ and under 16 years free swimming is currently being promoted and is due to commence on 1 April 2009.

3.2.13 New Fitness Scheme for Teenage Girls - Working in partnership with Court Fields School and the Police and Youth Services and with the support of Councillor Andrew Govier – and my personal thanks to Cllr. Govier here - a trial six week scheme is to be launched after Easter offering subsidised fitness classes to teenage girls. These classes are aimed at teenage girls who are currently unable or unwilling to participate in mainstream adult fitness classes and who would prefer to exercise independently of the teenage boys who are attending the Friday evening activity sessions at the Sports Centre.

3.2.14 Chemical Incident - An incident involving a chemical spillage occurred in early March at Wellington Sports Centre which was widely reported in the press. The spillage was of a cleaning product, fairly minor in nature and isolated to the cleaning store cupboard. One member of staff was affected by feeling unwell, with sickness, dizziness and a sore throat, was checked at Musgrove Park Hospital and released that same evening with no lasting effects. A thorough investigation has been undertaken and control measures improved as a result.

3.2.15 Improved Swimming Lessons Scheme - Wellington Sports Centre has now fully adopted the revised National Swimming Plan introduced by the Amateur Swimming Association. The key benefits are a more varied and fun scheme for children, together with increasing swimming lesson time for some of the more advanced groups, with the aim being improved retention on the programme.

3.2.16 Although this has been mentioned several times in this report, I must end my report by saying that the Government's Free Swimming initiative commenced on the 1 April 2009, and though it is very early days the staff of Tone Leisure inform me that they are pleased with the way things have gone so far.

Councillor Richard Lees.

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Mel Mullins–Environmental Services

1. Environmental Protection Team

- 1.1 Notification has been received from Mama Stones live music venue in Wellington that they have vacated the premises, which has been closed for trade since 23 March 2009 due to the recent planning permission refusal. The Environmental Protection Team had served a noise abatement notice on the premises on 10 December 2008, which had been appealed by the owner of Mama Stones. The appeal was due to be heard by Taunton Magistrates on 6 May 2009 and we await clarification from the appellant as to whether they wish to continue.
- 1.2 Sainsbury's new mobile petrol station is now up and running for the next 12 weeks whilst the new petrol station is constructed. An Environmental Permitting Regulation permit has been issued and is the first of its kind for a mobile petrol station in the country.
- 1.3 The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has officially accepted the outcome of the Air Quality Progress Report and Action Plan Progress Report 2008.

2. Food Safety and Health and Safety Teams

- 2.1 Both the Food Team and the Health and Safety Team have successfully completed the high risk inspections planned for 2008/2009.
- 2.2 The report into the E.Coli outbreak in South Wales that claimed the life of one child and caused long term ill health in numerous others has finally been published. The case was centred around the supply of cooked meats to schools. In the light of the report Food Officers are reviewing the way in which they carry out inspections of cooked meat suppliers and checks are made on all inspections to ensure they are completed to a standard that will stand up to scrutiny.
- 2.3 A County wide work programme for Food and Health and Safety has been developed to improve the use of shared resources and foster closer working between the authorities. Officers will collaborate on initiatives and projects in key areas of work including improving consistency, workshops for childcare providers on infection control, health and safety in catering establishments.

3. Licensing Team

- 3.1 Two applications have been received by Avon and Somerset Police to review premises licences. One resulted in the Premises Licence Holder/Designated Premises Supervisor being removed from the licence and new tenants taking the Lease/licence over.
- 3.2 The other is due to be heard by the Licensing Sub-Committee towards the end of April 2009.

- 3.3 An application has been received for the Buddhafields Event to be held near Culmhead for the second year running. This years event is due to take place from 15 to 19 July 2009. A multi-agency meeting has been held with the organisers of the Buddhafield Event to discuss the detail of the proposal for this summers festival. The Environmental Protection Team has recommended noise conditions to prevent nuisance and these have since been agreed by the event organisers.
- 3.4 The Police and Crime Bill is expected to be enacted into law in the Summer of 2009 and will result in a number of new mandatory conditions being added to all premises certificates that allow the selling of alcohol. These conditions will be mainly prohibitive and will be aimed at reducing binge drinking and underage sales.
- 3.5 Officers have been working with the Taxi trade locally to produce a new handbook to consolidate the Council's Policies and Procedures in relation to Taxi Licensing. The Council's approach in some areas required updating and this work will culminate in a report to the Licensing Committee at the end of April 2009.

4. Environmental Health Support Team

- 4.1 The hard work over many months that has been done by the Team Leader and nominated Superusers to ensure that the transfer to the SAP system goes smoothly is about to come to fruition.

Councillor Mel Mullins

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey, Housing Portfolio-holder

1. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Consultation : Changes to Finance Rules to encourage Councils to build new Council Houses

- 1.1 The Negative Subsidy Task and Finish Group considered this consultation paper on 24 March 2009 and were instrumental in producing the Council's response, which has now gone to the DCLG.
- 1.2 The Government's stated aim is to remove all financial barriers to Councils building new Council homes for rent and this is a significant and historic change.
- 1.3 The Government's change in policy is long overdue and is to be welcomed, but it needs to be accompanied by changes to the subsidy system which effectively returns the setting of rents and the use of rental income to local authority control. The Negative Subsidy Task and Finish Group will be asked to reconvene when we have the proposals of the national Housing Subsidy Review.

2. Housing Strategy Team

- 2.1 I would like to acknowledge the work of the individuals who made up the Housing Strategy Team and who have now left the organisation, for their valuable work over the period I have been Executive Councillor for Housing.
- 2.2 Although I could mention many projects, the highlights for me have been the very successful project management of the introduction of Choice-based Lettings. This was a large-scale project which has been remarkably trouble-free – its size and complexity is perhaps underestimated simply because it has been managed so well.
- 2.3 Another highlight of the last year has been the large amount of investment attracted from the DCLG, in partnership with Taunton Association for the Homeless (TAH), which has transformed services for rough sleepers and other homeless people in our community.

3. Council Housing Rent Increase

- 3.1 The Government's announcement that they will enable Councils to reduce rent increases for this financial year to a national average of 3.1% must have sounded like very good news to council tenants.

- 3.2 However, what really happened is that the Government began a consultation process which could go on for some time. Tenants of Taunton Deane are unlikely to see the benefit of this for some months, and only if the Council formally reverses its previous decision-making on rent levels.
- 3.3 That the Government announced this change of mind **after** Councils had set rent levels and had written to tenants giving them formal notice of the increase (in our case 6.2%) is indefensible. What is even worse is that they are saying they will not cover the administrative costs of any change, which has been estimated nationally at an average of £10,000 for each authority. This will be money taken from rent payers' budgets, **if** the Council makes that decision, to pay for the fact that the Government did not do their U-turn a week or ten days earlier.
- 3.4 The Chief Housing Officer is currently working to identify the potential cost to Taunton Deane Borough Council of the proposed reduction. There would be costs involved in software changes to the Housing Academy IT software, the cost of changes to the SW1 IBS Housing benefit software, as well as the additional printing, postage and other administrative costs of the exercise.
- 3.5 The Government point out that this is a small cost compared to the large amount the Government will give to Councils to compensate for the loss of rental income – this argument is only persuasive if we forget that the Government is projected to take £6.1 million from Taunton Deane Borough Council this financial year in negative subsidy.
- 3.6 When the consultation period is complete and we are aware of all the possible implications of a reduction, a report will be brought forward on this issue.

4. Decent Homes Standard

- 4.1 A report by the Chief Housing Officer for the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 16 April 2009 will confirm that the Council is on track to achieve the Decent Homes' standard in its 6,000 Council properties in advance of the Government deadline of March 2011.
- 4.2 It is very pleasing to confirm that the target will be achieved ahead of time, but furthermore that the Council is expected not only to maintain the standard after March 2011, but that resources will also be released to align investment with the expressed wishes of tenants.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith – Corporate Resources

1. Democratic Services

- 1.1 The new scrutiny Officer Erin Taylor has now been appointed and she will be starting on 5 May 2009.
- 1.2 The changes to the Scrutiny arrangements are at Full Council for approval. Tonya Meers has been working with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the current Scrutiny Committees and the Group Leaders on this new structure, which should give more flexibility and clarity for scrutiny and was also one of the recommendations from the IDeA Peer Review that was carried out last September.
- 1.3 Regulations have come into effect with regard to the charging for personal searches in Land Charges. The new fee structure means that we will now be charging Personal Search Agents on a cost basis for the searches they require whereas before it was set down in statute and the fee was only £11 per search.
- 1.4 Progress is now being made on the implementation of the Land Charges and Building Control modules to add to the Accolaid system and this will be implemented over the coming months.
- 1.5 We are shortly to receive a visit from Dr Michael McCauley of Teeside University. Dr McCauley is a reader in Governance and Public Ethics and is carrying out research for the Standards Board for England on good practices. He is very interested in our Parish Liaison Officer and the work that is undertaken by David Greig with the parishes in connection with our ethical governance agenda. He will be attending our Standards Committee on the 15 April 2009 to talk to our parish representatives as well as David, Tonya and Anne Elder, Chairman of Standards Committee.
- 1.6 The Mayor's handbook has been updated and a copy will be available in the Member's Room for information and reference purposes. The handbook is very useful both for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor but also for Members to understand the role of the Mayor and what is to be expected.

2. Customer Services

- 2.1 As you are aware the Taunton Deane Customer Advisors were relocated from Flook House to the newly refurbished Contact Centre in

The Deane House on 26 January 2009 and have been operational since that time. It is anticipated that the Somerset County Council (SCC) Customer Advisors will join their Taunton Deane colleagues in The Deane House by the end April 2009.

2.2 Over time, this will enable cross-skilling to take place which will ultimately result in a more resilient and efficient service. Service levels have been consistent throughout the First Quarter although March was extremely busy with a high volume of calls in respect of Council Tax and Garden Waste in particular. Volumes were 7% higher in March compared to the same month in 2008 and the average call duration was 40% higher. A customer advisor from SCC was temporarily transferred to The Deane House to support the team at this busy time.

2.3 The statistics for the First quarter are as follows:-

	Jan	Feb	Mar
Volume	15187	14193	17663
Abandoned calls	3.5	4.4	5.1
% answered in 20 secs	84.5	83.4	80.22
% answered at first point of contact	98.0	97.2	95.0

2.4 Towards the end of March the first stage of the new Work Force Management System (Qmax) was implemented. Once this is fully deployed it will enable the Contact Centre to more accurately match the work force to the profile of incoming calls. This will further underpin the service and will also allow future call volumes to be predicted more precisely. All advisors were trained in the SAP ESS application in readiness for the 1 April 2009 implementation.

2.5 Future Activities - move SCC Customer Advisors to The Deane House; trial automated customer satisfaction survey; participate in testing for SAP CRM; train all staff in SAP CRM; Implement SAP CRM – current target June 2009.

3. Revenues and Benefits Service Unit

3.1 We successfully concluded annual billing for Council Tax and Business Rates for 2009/2010 during March 2009. As well as sending out over 50,000 bills, we also wrote to all Housing and Council Tax Benefit recipients telling them of their revised entitlement.

3.2 At the end of February 2009 we had collected 97.46% of Council Tax due for 2008/2009 - ahead of our target for in year collection and more than achieved throughout the whole of 2007/2008. We are still slightly behind target for Business Rates (NNDR) having collected 97.63%. However, this is again ahead of performance achieved at this point last year and it is notable that from information obtained through CIPFA, of

the 50 authorities reporting on NNDR collection, we were the only Council that improved recovery on 2007/2008 levels.

- 3.3 You may have noticed the work being carried out in the Reception Area at The Deane House. This is in direct response to feedback given by Revenues and Benefit Service customers on the lack of privacy and interviewing facilities. The adaptations will transform existing back office space into two interview booths with open access for customers from Reception.
- 3.4 Improvements are also being made to our two existing interview rooms. The secure interview room will remain with the protective glass replaced by a more modern and 'friendly' version. The PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) interview room will remain but we will also use it for customers who have asked for more privacy. There will be easier access for people using wheelchairs and all new interviewing facilities will have a fresh coat of paint and some new matching furniture. The work, fully financed by Southwest One, should be completed by mid April 2009.

4. Financial Services

- 4.1 Over recent weeks Financial Services have been finalising the new coding structure that the Council will be implementing for SAP. In addition preparations for the closedown of the 2008/2009 accounts are being made, and this will dominate much of Financial Services work until the end of June. The training of staff regarding year end procedures and also some of the fundamental changes that SAP will bring are also being implemented.
- 4.2 The first phase of the Core Council Review is now complete and Financial Services have also been providing Corporate Management Team with the detailed costing information.
- 4.3 Preparations are being made for the completion of the numerous statistical returns that have to be returned to Government following the finalisation of the Council 2009/2010 Budget, including Revenue Accounts and Capital Estimates Return.
- 4.4 Finally congratulations to Paul Carter who has now formally moved over to his new role in SouthWest One running the shared accounting service and Emily Collacott is acting up in Paul's old role.

5. Performance Management

- 5.1 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter – the External Auditors published their Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (AAIL) which was presented at a meeting to Members on 26 March 2009.
- 5.2 Data Quality – the Council is currently meeting minimum requirements.

The External Audit recommendations are being implemented which includes adoption of a Data Quality Strategy which has been drafted for approval. Staff awareness training is being provided.

- 5.3 Use of Resources Assessment – for 2007/2008 the Council was assessed as 2 out of 4. In respect of 2008/2009, the Council has submitted its self-assessment and the External Auditors are now undertaking their review. A more rigorous assessment criterion applies for 2008/2009 and improvements are being implemented wherever possible.
- 5.4 Direction of Travel 2008 – the Council completed a self-assessment that was reviewed by the External Auditors in February 2009. The results, detailed in the AAIL, state the Council has continued to make progress with the delivery of most of its priorities and has improved the performance of a number of its services.
- 5.5 Performance Monitoring - The Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring Report was scrutinised by the Strategy and Performance Panel on 10 March 2009. This showed that 52% of the Councils Corporate Strategy Objectives were on course and 38% had actions pending to meet the objectives, 10% were off course.
- 5.6 The Corporate Strategy 2009-2012 was approved by Council on 17 February 2009. The revised strategy reflects the content of the Local Area Agreement, revised budget position and Councillors and community priorities for the next 3 years.
- 5.7 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) – the Audit Commission released its final guidance on 10 February 2009 and the Council now needs to communicate the new requirements to Members and Officers.

6. ICT

- 6.1 One of the largest ICT projects undertaken within Taunton Deane is now reaching the critical phase, with the first elements, Employee Self Service and Manager Self Service going live. Both the Applications and the Infrastructure Teams have been working incredibly hard with the SAP team to over recent weeks to enable us to reach this milestone, and as more modules are scheduled to go live in the coming months this will undoubtedly continue.
- 6.2 Government Connect - Taunton Deane now has had its Government Connect Code of Compliance (CoCo) approved with just three outstanding actions still to be completed. This CoCo must be approved by a Government Connect assessor before Taunton Deane will be allowed to connect to Government Connect, which enables secure, encrypted communication between local authorities and other Government Departments and Agencies.

- 6.3 The first service that will use this facility will be Housing Benefits, who will use it to securely communicate with Department of Work and Pensions. In order to reach this stage of compliance, we have had to make changes to various aspects of the security configurations the ICT infrastructure, and over the coming weeks and months these changes will impact on all users, not just the Housing Benefits Service users as at present. Communications and training is being planned as part of these changes.
- 6.4 Technology Services Organisation - The structure of the Southwest One Technology Services is currently going through some major changes as we build an organisation to deliver a true shared-services approach to the Councils, the Police and also Southwest One. The top tiers of this organisation are being appointed at the moment and over the next couple of months this process should be completed. Details will be published of the new structures and who is responsible for the various elements of the service.

7. Human Resources

- 7.1 Staff changes - Kirsty Lowe, HR Administrator has started her maternity leave. Linda Kirchin, HR Officer and Julie Bryant, HR Administrator will be leaving with effect from 31 March 2009.
- 7.2 The Southwest One HR team will be restructured with effect from 1 April 2009. The HR Advisory Team (consisting of Laura Holland - HR Manager, Amy Sutton - HR Officer and Suzie Rea - HR Administrator) will remain based at The Deane House providing HR advisory support to managers and staff. All payroll queries will be dealt with directly by the HR and Payroll Services Team at County Hall. Training and Development will be picked up by Ron Westcott, Training Development Manager based at County Hall.
- 7.3 Core Council Review - The HR team have been continuing to support the Retained HR Manager and CMT with the Core Council Review. Throughout March we have been carrying our interviews for the new posts within the new Strategy and Corporate Theme. We have also been meeting with individuals to confirm redundancies.
- 7.4 SAP implementation - The HR Manager has been involved in providing information and testing for the implementation of SAP.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

Before moving into the report as such, I would like to thank Jane Chipp who was our Change manager - Pioneer Somerset and Steve Hughes who was our Sports Manager, for all the dedicated hard work they have done for the Council over the years. They have decided to leave the Council as of 31 March 2009 and may I wish them well in whatever they do in the future. We will miss their expertise.

1. The Pioneer Somerset Board

- 1.1 This Board will be the principal decision-making forum of Pioneer Somerset. Its Membership is the Leaders of each Member Council (or their substitutes).
- 1.2 Its role is to act jointly:-
 - Ensuring Delivery of the Pioneer Somerset Programme;
 - Recommending Programme Initiation Documents/PID Variations to Member Councils;
 - Approving Programme Action Plans (PAPs);
 - Monitoring Delivery of PAPs;
 - Recommending actions to Member Councils including making appropriate entries in their Medium Term Financial Plans;
 - Monitoring achievement of outcomes; and
 - Receiving reports from Scrutiny Committees.
- 1.3 Its Decision-making will be by unanimous assent at events at which all Councils are represented.
- 1.4 The representative of each authority attending the event will have unconditional delegated powers to agree recommendations of the Chief Executives' Group in accordance with their own Council's individual decision-making arrangements. This will ensure joint decisions will bind all authorities to PAPs.
- 1.5 Its meetings will be chaired by the Leader of each Council in turn for terms of six months.
- 1.6 The Board will be open and transparent by each decision of each Council representative being subject to:-

- (a) it being recorded in accordance with their own Council's access to information arrangements for individual decision-making;
- (b) collective scrutiny by a Joint Scrutiny Panel; and
- (c) each Council's scrutiny arrangements for individual and other decision-making.

2. Local Area Agreement

2.1 This is to provide Members with an update on the delivery plan for National Indicator 39, reducing the number of alcohol related hospital admissions.

2.2 The baseline year for this indicator is 2006/2007 and is measured annually

2006/07 baseline year	2008/09 target	2009/10 target	2010/11 target	Performance based on 2007/08 year
1,389	1,570	1,643	1,697	1, 443

2.3 This is a challenging target that seeks to slow the increase down. In line with the NHS vital signs performance measure, Somerset has agreed a 1.3 percentage point reduction on the increase year on year.

2.4 The alcohol plan focuses on 3 core work areas:-

- Alcohol education and awareness;
- Tackling alcohol related crime; and
- Delivering a range of interventions

2.5 The primary aim of the campaign is:-

- "To raise awareness about units contained in alcoholic drinks."
- "To bring about behaviour change among the target audiences when considering and consuming alcohol."
- All the key messages centre on the slogan "Look out for your mates".

2.6 Implementation of the campaign commenced in January 2009 and will run through to Autumn 2009. At this point the quantitative and qualitative survey will be repeated to assess the impact the campaign has had.

2.7 Delivering a range of interventions - This area in the plan covers a number of initiatives for example:-

- Extending the use of theatre in education to inform and educate young people about alcohol. 'Time in a Bottle' is being performed in 27 schools across the County this year;

- Commissioning a targeted service for young people that will ensure early intervention in young people's drinking behaviour. This started in February 2009 and will function within the Children's Local Service Teams;
- To reduce the number of alcohol-related admissions to Accident and Emergency (particularly repeat admissions);
- To identify attendees with harmful or hazardous drinking habits and provide brief advice to help them reduce their alcohol consumption; and
- Evidence from elsewhere in the United Kingdom suggests that this approach can contribute to a reduction in violence related attendances at Accident and Emergency.

3. Comprehensive Area Assessment : A new way of scrutinising public services

3.1 The introduction of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) is a radical step forward from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. For Councillors in particular, CAA offers the opportunity to better understand how local public services are working together to provide real improvement to the quality of life of local people, especially those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable.

3.2 CAA has five key characteristics:-

- (1) It assesses what makes a real difference to people - with CAA the focus will be on outcomes for local people, not organisational process;
- (2) It looks at how public services work together, as much as individual organisational performance;
- (3) It focuses on local, as well as national, priorities;
- (4) It provides robust, but proportionate, assessment of local services; and
- (5) We will report our assessments directly to the public in straightforward.

3.2 CAA will be carried out by six inspectorates working together - the Audit Commission, the new Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorates of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation and Ofsted.

3.3 CAA will move beyond a narrow scrutiny of a council or Primary Care Trust, to look at quality of life at large, bringing into the picture local issues such as carbon emissions and sustainability, life expectancy, teenage pregnancy and other indicators of well-being. CAA will enable us to examine how effectively local agencies are working together to tackle their local problems.

3.4 The information will be a tool for Councillors giving them an authoritative

view of what local agencies are doing, and how well, and allowing Councillors themselves to measure their Council's performance against other similar authorities.

- 3.5 CAA has been designed to reduce the administrative burden on local bodies and will rely more on information and data that should be readily available. Requiring less on-site activity by inspectors, staff time and resources can be focused on delivering services.
- 3.6 CAA will also be readily accessible to local people, as well as those working in or with public services. A dedicated website will provide citizens, tax payers and service users with plain English assessments of how local priorities are being met, with green and red flags indicating exceptional performance or significant concerns.
- 3.7 We believe CAA will be of real value to Councillors whatever their role - cabinet member, scrutiny chair or front-line councillor, as they look to improve the quality of life for local people.

4. Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Services

- 4.1 Unfortunately, we are not in a position right now to give an update on the Service Level Agreements, as the new officer has only been in post for 3 days, however he will be holding meetings over the coming couple of weeks to progress this.
- 4.2 The first phase of the Core Council restructure is currently being put in place to form the Strategy and Corporate Theme. So far half of the positions have been filled, however there are still a number of key vacancies, with four Lead posts and five Officer posts still to be filled.
- 4.3 The priority now for the new Strategy Manager and Client and Performance Manager is to recruit into these posts as early as possible to bring the teams up to capacity.
- 4.4 The Strategy Manager, and Client and Performance Manager have been lucky to have an effective handover of work from outgoing staff. The next step is for these managers to work closely with CMT and portfolio holders to agree what the priorities are moving forward and how new thematic ways of working will deliver better outcomes.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting –14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Steve Brooks - Communications

1. Public Relations

- 1.1 Partnership working continues to be a focus for public relations. We worked closely with the Police and the Army on arrangements for the military funeral of Corporal Tom Gaden, together with officers from Democratic Services and Parking Services.
- 1.2 We co-ordinated media coverage for the very moving occasion, writing press releases and working with media representatives on the day.
- 1.3 We are also working closely with other districts on Pioneer Somerset and are making arrangements for district council services, including those provided by Taunton Deane, to feature in Somerset County Council's display at the Royal Bath and West Show in late May.
- 1.4 Internally, we are producing a newsletter for all staff and members on the Carbon Reduction Strategy, outlining what steps are being taken to reduce the Council's carbon footprint and how everyone can help to make a difference.
- 1.5 The start of Spring has seen the opening of two new play areas - at French Weir, Taunton and at Howard Road in Wellington - and the launch of the new sensory garden planned for Vivary Park. All attracted media coverage.
- 1.6 The March edition of Deane Dispatch featured the pledge by two Councillors to quit smoking while the April edition will look at community safety and green initiatives.

2. Website Update

- 2.1 The majority of the content is now written and we are in the testing phase for the new website, working closely with Southwest One. The testing will continue to several weeks. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Web authors within Taunton Deane services for all their hard work in enabling us to meet all deadlines.
- 2.2 Following the testing phase, we will be moving into the quality assurance phase, going through each page of the new website to check the content and making sure the correct documents are attached.
- 2.3 We have now completed the designs for the new website and if any Members would like to have a look at the proposed design, please contact John-Mark Strange, Web Content Officer.

3. Ruth James

- 3.1 Last but not least, I wish to thank Ruth James our Communications Manager for all the hard work and dedication, put in to the Communications portfolio. I will personally miss her help and support given to me over the last two years, and wish her well in her new role.

Councillor Steve Brooks

Council Meeting – 14 April 2009

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Strategic Housing Land Area Assessment (SHLAA)

- 1.1 Baker Associates were commissioned last September to prepare a SHLAA for Taunton Deane and Sedgemoor. This study is part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and the methodology follows Government Practice Guidance.
- 1.2 The key output of the study will include details of sites found to be deliverable in the first five years (April 2009 – March 2014) and sites or broad locations that are developable by 2026. There has been a call for sites which have now been assessed. A selection of sites will be assessed by a Panel and a draft report is expected by the end of April 2009.

2. Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

- 2.1 Fordham Research have been commissioned to prepare a SHMA for Taunton and South Somerset Housing Market Areas. It follows Government SHMA guidance and PPS3: Housing (November 2006). The study identifies an acute need for additional affordable housing (either social rented or intermediate) across the study area. The LDF Steering Group meeting on 15 April 2009 will consider the conclusions of the study and its implications for the LDF Core Strategy in detail.

3. Development of Acolaid IT Back Office System to its full capability.

- 3.1 The Acolaid Development Management System went live on the 13 October 2008, in conjunction with the restructure of the support teams. The initial “bedding down” period was very successful with minimum disruption to the service.
- 3.2 The focus for 2009-2010 is the development of the Acolaid system, with high priority being the introduction of technology to allow planning officers to access Acolaid remotely (by mid 2009).
- 3.3 Ongoing in-house development will include quality assurance of documentation and data, increased use of automated systems such as e-mail and changes in working practice to incorporate e-government initiatives.
- 3.4 As Acolaid is developed there will be implications for staff resources

and training requirements. This will need to be monitored and reviewed throughout the year.

4. Adopt a Project Management Approach and employ Development Management Tools in response to all Major Developments

- 4.1 It is generally accepted that the most effective way of responding to major development proposals is through front loading with particular emphasis on pre-application work. Whilst Taunton Deane already operates a pre-application service, this has in the past operated on the basis that pre-application work is fitted in around the processing of applications. As a result application based work still dominates.
- 4.2 It is critical that this balance is shifted significantly. Whilst the relevant National Indicator on major application performance is currently being met, this is achieved primarily through ensuring that the less significant major applications are processed within thirteen weeks, whilst the most complex applications often still take considerably longer to determine.
- 4.3 It is therefore proposed to suggest that there be a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) approach in relation to all applications where it is concluded that a decision could not reasonably be made within thirteen weeks.
- 4.4 PPAs were proposed in the Planning White Paper as a means of speeding up the delivery of large scale applications. A protocol will be prepared (along the lines of that recently produced by South Somerset District Council), followed by a six week consultation period with key stakeholders with the aim of introducing PPAs as a means of project managing major development proposals across the County by August 2009.
- 4.5 Proposals for the various areas of major growth are at varying stages of gestation. However, there is a need for the Development Management Team to play lead role in both the formulation and implementation of Master Plans and Development Briefs in relation to the urban extensions as well as bringing forward proposals for the various Project Taunton sites.
- 4.6 The first stage in this process is to define timescales for the various pieces of work and allocate necessary resource. The Development Manager therefore needs to discuss these key issues with the relevant Corporate Director at the earliest possible opportunity and to play a lead role in subsequent discussions.
- 4.7 The Council needs to undertake a fundamental review of the pre-application service relating to the level of service provided and the charging regime. Any such review needs to take into account the implications of the Core Council Review. The timing will therefore be governed by the review process. However, any review must take into

account the work currently being undertaken by Arup in conjunction with the South West Councils.

- 4.8 It is fundamental to both the speed and the quality of the planning process that key stakeholders are engaged as early as possible in the process. However, it is also accepted that it is not always possible for all stakeholders to attend pre-application meetings with developers. A regular Development Team meeting has recently been introduced whereby key stakeholders are invited to discuss with Planning Officers the relevant issues relating to emerging proposals. This can also be used as a means of addressing potentially conflicting Section 106 bids.
- 4.9 Officers from both Taunton Deane (eg; Leisure Development Manager, Housing Enabling Manager) and other agencies (eg Somerset County Council Transport Development Group, Environment Agency) attend this meeting. This area of work needs to be developed further. It is hoped that a Council Design Champion can be found and consideration should also be given to setting up of local Design Review Panel.

5. Use potential downturn in application work to assist in the preparation of Development Guidance and Development Management Core Strategy Policies

- 5.1 The economic downturn will mean additional capacity for Planning Officers, at least in the short term. The Government has consistently advised that rather than laying off staff this should be used as an opportunity to produce relevant guidance and assist with LDF preparation to put the authority in a good position to accommodate future growth. There is already a commitment from Development Management to assist in LDF preparation. This needs to be developed further once the level of resources available in Strategy is known.
- 5.2 There are various design guidance documents that need revising and updating. These include those relating to shop fronts and advertisements as well as the District-wide Design Guide which needs to be updated to accommodate innovative and sustainable methods of construction.

6. Review approach to monitoring Planning Conditions

- 6.1 A critical area of the end to end delivery aspect of Development Management that needs to be reviewed is the monitoring of development. The enforcement section does some monitoring of conditions, but needs to be more focused to maximise use of limited resources.
- 6.2 The focus needs to be on major developments and systems set up to monitor compliance with key conditions such as agricultural ties and holiday let conditions. This work stream should be a priority for the

Enforcement Team once the outcome of the Core Council Review is known.

7. To carry out a review of the format of reports to the Planning Committee

- 7.1 Concern has been expressed in terms of the format of reports to Members. This will be reviewed in association with the development of ACOLAID. Member's views will be sought in Spring 2009.

8. E Government

- 8.1 The Government directs that all Local Planning Authorities must develop technology to receive, consult and notify all stakeholders involved with the planning process. Current projects include electronic submission of planning applications, householder appeals processed on-line, national consultation hub.
- 8.2 During 2009 we will continue to promote on line planning submissions through the Planning Portal with particular emphasis on supporting our regular customers. We will develop the online householder appeals process in conjunction with The Planning Inspectorate. We will work with Plantech and with the Planning Portal and other external agencies to develop procedures, policies, software and working practices to consult electronically.

9. Management of Historic Data

- 9.1 Development Management holds data relating to all applications from 1974 onwards. There is now a major issue with regards to the storage and retrieval of this data. Applications since 2005 are fully electronically recorded. However, prior to that very limited information is available on the CRM.
- 9.2 During 2009-2010 we will carry out a project to make recommendations for the future management of this data.

Councillor Simon Coles

Council Meeting – 17 February 2009

Report of Councillor Jefferson Horsley – Economic Development and the Arts

Part 1

1. Into Somerset

- 1.1 There is little to report on this. The other districts and the Somerset County Council have accepted that we will remain as partners whilst not becoming members of the limited company. A separate but similar Service Level Agreement will be entered into for the Council.
- 1.2 The arrangement with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce is to continue for a further six months until September 2009 and in the interim the company is seeking tenders from the market to undertake the management of the organisation with effect from 1 October 2009. Similarly, appointment to the Board from the private sector is being advertised to make up the complement to 13!

2. The Brewhouse

- 2.1 Negotiations are taking place to see how the Board will cope with the accumulated deficit. Somerset County Council found £50,000 to fund the last quarter losses referred to in my report of February 2009.

3. Economic Downturn

- 3.1 Phil Sharratt, Ruth James and myself attended the meeting held at Exchange House on 31 March 2009. The County will be putting out information weekly on the theme “Business as usual” to attempt to overcome the gloom and doom scenario.
- 3.2 There is evidence that the southern part of Somerset is faring better than the northern part (especially Mendip) in terms of less % loss of jobs and production as the recession deepens. There will be co-ordinated attempts to ensure that we bring forward as many of the spending plans as possible especially such Building School for the Future and the Transport schemes in the pipeline. The meeting was urged not to overdo the publicity. We will have a report on how the retail offer is faring throughout the county at the next meeting.

4. Project Taunton

- 4.1 I will report on this verbally at the meeting. It is pleasing to note that developments are moving very smoothly on the Firepool site. Members will have noticed that we have taken steps to use the site as

a temporary car park in the papers which went to the Executive on 1 April 2009.

5. Asset Management

- 5.1 I have to report that there has been little work done on this important aspect of my portfolio. I am concerned that despite our pleas to maximise the use of our asset base little has so far been achieved. I will report verbally at the Council on a meeting I will have had with Southwest One.

6. Economic Strategy

- 6.1 Phil Sharratt will report on this more fully in Part 2. It suffices to say that good progress is being made with both the Assessment and the Envisioning Process to enable us to meet our schedule of having a Strategy in place after full consultation in the autumn. Please keep 30 April 2009 in your diaries for the first of these sessions here in The Deane House at 2.30pm.

7. Taunton Town Centre Company (TTCC)

- 7.1 At their latest meeting held on 25 March 2009 it was agreed that the temporary makeover of the High Street would not occur until January 2010. The hiatus with Paul Haynes leaving as Town Centre Manager has left relationships between the Council and the TTCC strained. There is a vacuum there which both sides seem reluctant to pick up and run with.

8. Other Items

- 8.1 I also believe that we must pay far greater attention to the role of the Transition Town movement is making as to how we conduct our economic futures. I am instigating regular informal meetings with Transition Taunton at their request.
- 8.2 I repeat my firm belief that Economic Strategy should be driving the Forward Planning and Local Development Framework process and not vice versa.

Part 2

9. Local Economic Assessment

- 9.1 A local economic assessment for Taunton Deane has been completed and the report is available for Members to view in hard copy in the Members Room or electronically from Stephanie Payne within the Economic Development Unit (01823 356534). Delays in the changeover to the new website mean that the document is not available to download from the website but members of the public may

also obtain an electronic copy of the report on the telephone number above or by email to s.payne@tauntondeane.gov.uk

- 9.2 The report was commissioned as a first step in creating an Economic Development Strategy to 2026 to coincide with the time period of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The Government data used for the assessment is historical and therefore does not reflect the recent economic downturn. However, interpretation of the data has allowed certain assumptions to be made.
- 9.3 The results of this assessment clearly show that Taunton Deane will have to build a more competitive knowledge economy, characterized by higher levels of skills, creativity and innovation, in order to make the area a more productive and prosperous place.
- 9.4 There is an over-dependence on public sector employment that has 'squeezed out' private sector jobs which, whilst providing a cushion for the current economic downturn, poses a threat in the near future as the public purse is squeezed to recover Government investment in macro economic policy.
- 9.5 The recession will mean setbacks for Taunton Deane's outcome performance. Earnings are already low and there is an urgent need for quality private sector jobs that can create demand pressures for improving skills within the workforce, and to create attractive career ladders that will encourage young people to remain and settle within the area.
- 9.6 The general conclusion is that Taunton Deane's economic structure was weak before the recession, and the balance of high-value/low-value business activity and the balance between private sector/public sector employment have been unfavourable for some time. The recession could lead to a worsening of the private sector/public sector balance and to a lower starting point for rebuilding the private sector knowledge economy required in the future.
- 9.7 The recession has made the need for an informed and proactive long term Economic Development Strategy for Taunton Deane even more urgent and necessary.

10. Work Premises and Employment Land Needs Survey Headline Results

- 10.1 A total of 7,200 questionnaires were distributed to around 4,000 businesses during January 2009 within the boundaries of Taunton Deane and to businesses within an area 10/15 miles outside of the Borough boundaries. A total of 884 questionnaires have been returned allowing the 'headline results' to be published.

- 10.2 The paper is available for Members to view in hard copy in the Members Room or electronically from Stephanie Payne within the Economic Development Unit (01823 356534). The paper is still in draft format and has not been validated so is not available to members of the public. However, once the figures have been fully interrogated it is intended that a full report will be available by the end of April 2009 in time to coincide with consultation on the report on the Envisioning process.
- 10.3 In summary, responding businesses are upbeat about the future with more than half anticipating annual growth in excess of 5% over the next five years, including 14% anticipating year-on-year growth in excess of 15%.
- 10.4 Notwithstanding this optimism, businesses are expressing concerns about their lack of competency to deal with the current business climate and a number of development areas have been identified including Financial Management, Change Management, Marketing, and Recruitment and Training.
- 10.5 The economic situation is having an impact on businesses and this is reflected in a number of ways including an increased demand for easy-in/easy-out tenure premises.
- 10.6 Nearly half of the respondents felt that Taunton Deane Borough Council were supportive of businesses but it is recognised that there is much to be done to create a more positive response from the other half.

11. Economic Development Envisioning Process

- 11.1 At the beginning of March 2009 the Economic Development Unit Commenced an 'Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Deane Economy' with partners and local business leaders.
- 11.2 The report will present an economic vision for Taunton Deane based on an intensive programme of consultation during March 2009, validated by further data analysis and interrogation by Geoeconomics, the appointed consultants, and their team of analysts within the Economics Department of Birkbeck College, London.
- 11.3 The consensus view of the stakeholders is that Taunton Deane needs a 'step change' in its economic performance over the next two decades – the alternative scenario is felt to be long-term decline. The challenge that this represents, the 'inconvenient truths' and the 'headline' strategies required to achieve a more prosperous economy will be presented in the final report.
- 11.4 The first draft report will be available on limited distribution for further consultation from 30 April 2009, with the final report available from

June 2009.

12. Public Art and Design Consultancy Project

- 12.1 The Economic Development Unit are hosting the independent Cultural Consultants working on behalf of the Public Art and Design Panel to review the progress in development of the Public Art Policy, to make proposals on the content of a revised guidelines document and develop an outline programme for public art on designated sites within Taunton Deane.
- 12.2 Initial recommendations will be presented to the Public Art and Design Panel on 15 April 2009.

13. Recession Support for Businesses

- 13.1 The Economic Development Unit has taken a conscious decision to use the economic downturn as a period to plan for Recovery. However, we are cognisant of the needs of businesses during this difficult trading climate and are working closely with partners to provide support in the short term.
- 13.2 Regular 'Business Advice Clinics' are held in The Deane House, offering one-to-one sessions with a business adviser. The next three clinics will be held on 7 April, 14 May, and 4 June 2009.
- 13.3 On 21 April 2009 a free event will be held for businesses at Taunton School to offer essential advice, information and support on topics ranging from cashflow management to marketing. At least 10 public sector partners will be present to provide 'recession proofing' support and offering their collective assistance.
- 13.4 The Agricultural Support Officer is organising a marketing event for Farmers Market traders which will cover subjects such as attracting the public to their stall, merchandising produce, engaging customers, and best practice selling techniques, in order for participants to maximise their sales.
- 13.5 As a further response to the economic downturn, the Employment and Skills Officer is working with partners to plan a 'Business Support Week' at the end of May 2009 with a series of 10 – 12 events, seminars, and clinics over an intensive five day period across Taunton Deane.

Councillor Jefferson Horsley