

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Leader of the Council

1. Pioneer Somerset

- 1.1 I attended the latest meeting of the Pioneer Somerset Board last week. I would like to thank Kevin Toller and Penny James for working so hard behind the scenes to try and draw up proposals for a new way forward for Pioneer in light of the decision of the new Conservative administration to withdraw from the already agreed Pioneer management structure which had been signed up to by all six councils.
- 1.2 Frankly, it has been very frustrating waiting to get clarity from the County Council for its considered opinions on Pioneer. The new administration came into office on 5 June 2009 and yet the decision to withdraw from the Pioneer Somerset management structure was only made on Monday, 28 September.
- 1.3 We have waited for months to have official confirmation from the County Council of its intention to withdraw from the agreed position of all Somerset Councils and frankly the failure of either the Leader or Deputy Leader to turn up to regular Pioneer Somerset meetings is disappointing and does not indicate the necessary political leadership required to take this initiative forward in partnership.
- 1.4 This all means that we will not now be making a commitment of £13,500 to this body. That being said, walking away, to me, is not an option. I applaud the work of Kevin, Penny and others to try and rescue the situation. The easy decision would be to walk away but I will not support that. The next meeting is in November and I have strongly urged that the time to really sit down and discuss specific major savings ideas is long overdue and we must move away from the longstanding debate on management structures.
- 1.5 One idea I did float at a Group Leaders Meeting, as a possible way of saving money and showing the way forward by partnership working, is by way of us sharing a Chief Executive with another authority. I feel that someone has to make a move and try and start to float these ideas. This is happening all across the country at present as Councils see the writing on the wall and realise that things cannot remain as they are. Sadly, I was met with total opposition from the leading opposition Group.

- 1.6 That in effect means that for the time being the idea is dead as without cross party support in a no overall control situation it is not going to happen. It is not an option any more to just oppose these sort of ideas because without radical action we will not get anywhere near where we need to be in the next few years.

2. **Core Council Review**

- 2.1 Themes 2 and 4 have reported to the Corporate Scrutiny Board last week and I would like to thank the Theme Managers, CMT and the PAs for working so hard to bring forward these proposals and dealing with the very difficult tasks which are necessary as part of this process. These proposals are now working their way through the Scrutiny and Executive process and will reach a conclusion next month.

3. **DLO Review**

- 3.1 This is a very important piece of work. I totally support the new approach to this in that all options are being evaluated and tested before coming back to scrutiny. This way will ensure that all the necessary information will be available when scrutiny decides which option it wishes to recommend to the Executive.
- 3.2 At this stage none of us can say which of the options will emerge but by the time we do decide we must ensure that we have all the answers to the very detailed questions this initiative is posing and I am confident that the new approach will deliver the required information.

4. **Rent Increase/Decrease**

- 4.1 I would like to thank all staff involved with work that has gone into the above. I fully support the Government initiative on this but frankly the timing was unfortunate after many Councils including our own had already set rent levels for this financial year.
- 4.2 It was good to see cross-party support for this decision at the Special Full Council which took place on this matter but not so good to see the Conservative Group making very negative comments in the press about the decision we took just one day after they had voted with us to support it.

5. **Visit of Lord Coe to Taunton**

- 5.1 It was a pleasure to represent the Council alongside Joy Wishlade at the recent visit of Lord Coe to Taunton. He was visiting Taunton to meet elite young sportsmen and sportswomen in Somerset who have real aspirations of representing Team GB at the London Olympics in three

years time. Some people are concerned about this country holding the Olympic Games but I feel it is a once in a lifetime opportunity for this country. You cannot fault Lord Coe for his drive and enthusiasm for the Olympic Games and it would be great to see Taunton Deane athletes on the team.

6. Council Report

- 6.1 You will have seen in the Corporate Scrutiny Committee budget papers the report which states that currently the budget gap stands at around £1,200,000. The administration has detailed plans for closing this budget gap and this will become clear in the next few weeks. Closing the gap gets harder each year but I am confident that the preliminary works prepared by the Executive and CMT will stand us in good stead in the budget round this year.

7. Climate Change

- 7.1 Many of you will have enjoyed the Climate Change Workshops arranged by the Transition Taunton Group who gave us more sessions than originally planned. My apologies for not being able to attend this event but I am looking forward to attending the session arranged by Kevin Toller at Wellsprings for the Green Policy Champions Group. I have booked myself onto this session and thank Kevin for organising this event. With climate change in mind, I have advised CMT that I want this Council to sign up to the "10:10 Initiative".

8. Standards

- 8.1 I have met with Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Committee and assured her of the strong commitment of this Council towards standards and ethics. This is such an important part of what we do and I get very frustrated when people rubbish this agenda. It is our own responsibility both personally and corporately to uphold high standards of behaviour at all times

Councillor Ross Henley

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Simon Coles – Planning and Transportation

1. Regional Spatial Strategy

- 1.1 On the 25 September 2009 the Government announced that it intends to carry out a new sustainability appraisal of the proposed changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West of England.
- 1.2 In the light of the High Court's judgement on challenges to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, the Government wishes to be satisfied that the Sustainability Appraisal for the South West tested reasonable alternatives to Areas of Search for strategic housing, business and other development proposed in the Strategy.
- 1.3 It has therefore decided to carry out a new Sustainability Appraisal, to ensure that alternatives to its proposals are properly tested.
- 1.4 It expects this new Appraisal to be completed early in the New Year.
- 1.5 In the light of the Appraisal's findings the Government will then decide what action to take to progress the Strategy to provide the clarity and certainty about the future framework for growth in the region which all partners are keen to see.

2. Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and Site Allocations

- 2.1 The statutory Public Consultation under Regulation 25 on the LDF Core Strategy and Site Allocations is planned for January and February 2010.

3. Extensions to the time limits for implementing existing planning permissions and minor amendments

- 3.1 New provisions came into effect on 1 October 2009 which allows planning permissions which are about to lapse to be kept alive via a simplified application procedure.
- 3.2 The consultation on this suggested that it would apply to major applications only, but the Government has widened the power to cover all planning permissions and listed building consents which are extant from on 1 October onwards. The proposed fees are £500 for major developments, £50 for householder developments and £170 for other sizes of development

- 3.3 Members will recall that we withdrew our minor amendment scheme due to case law which suggested that such procedures were unlawful.
- 3.4 The Government is therefore introducing a new power to enable us to consider “non material amendments” to existing planning permissions, although this does not apply to listed building or conservation area consents. The process being introduced will not be as straightforward as that we previously operated, but will prevent the need to go through the full planning process for relatively minor variations to schemes.

4. Amendments to Parish Delegation Scheme

- 4.1 Following the Executive decision in June 2009 to revise the delegation scheme that enables eight Town/Parish Councils to determine minor planning applications, Burrowbridge and Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Councils have chosen to withdraw from the scheme.

5. Longrun Meadows

- 5.1 An application for the change of use of approximately 27 hectares of land to a country park stretching from French Weir to Bishops Hull has been submitted.
- 5.2 This includes the creation of a network of pathways and cycle routes creating access to and from Somerset College, Castle School and Silk Mills Park and Ride, three bridges across the River Tone, general amenity parkland for informal recreation, bird and animal hides and areas/structures for picnicking, teaching and meeting. The working title for this is Longrun Meadows.

6. Pyrland Hall Farm

- 6.1 Pre-application discussions and a public consultation meeting have taken place for a proposed affordable housing exception development at Pyrland Hall Farm, Taunton.
- 6.2 The site is immediately to the north of Ladymead School and there are a number of planning issues that need to be balanced including landscape impact, bat foraging/feeding areas, highway access, existing underground infrastructure on the site and the provision of affordable homes.

Councillor Simon Coles

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Francesca Smith - Economic Development and the Arts

Part 1

- 1.1 I attended a draft presentation with Councillor Richard Lees of the Longrun Farm, Bishops Hull proposals for landscaping with the Swan Paul Architect and Karen Hughes. There are some very exciting ideas that should come to fruition subject to funding being obtained.
- 1.2 I met with Rachel Davies the Principal of Somerset College to discuss Economic Development in Taunton and working with the College: how this can be developed, and also to understand the College's perspective and how it wants to develop within the town.
- 1.3 I have regular updates with the Project Taunton team and attend the Steering Group and Advisory Board meetings. I met with local businessmen, Councillors and officers to look at the High Street and the work that is required to develop and generate more businesses and shops into the area and how Taunton Deane can work with the stakeholders to develop this.
- 1.4 As most of you are aware we are extremely fortunate to have the advice and experience of Professor Mark Hepworth and his team in helping us develop the Economic Strategy for Taunton Deane and I have met with him several times to discuss how we inform and develop this strategy and I look forward to being able to present a draft of this at the next Full Council in December.
- 1.5 Robert Maguire was in Taunton on Friday, 25 September 2009 to meet with the Forward Plan officers and also met with Councillor Coles and myself. Robert is a specialist in planning and regeneration and has worked on the Canary Wharf development in London and also Stoke and Sheffield redevelopments.
- 1.6 I attended the Town Centre Company meeting on 25 September 2009 and this is an important forum for local Businesses and the Council to inform and be informed of the town centres priorities. A presentation was given by Project Taunton and also by Graham Love the Town Centre Manager on its ideas for the future.

Part 2

2. Economic Development Delivery Strategy

- 2.1 Work has commenced with Professor Hepworth to prepare a new Economic Development Strategy (EDS) with a robust delivery plan. The delivery plan will be comprised of projects that help Taunton to realise its 2026 vision: *To become one of Europe's most successful and sustainable towns with a dynamic knowledge economy and a high quality of life.*

- 2.2 The Steering Group monitoring this work includes Viridor, EDF, IBM, Institute of Directors, Somerset College and representatives from smaller businesses and social enterprises.
- 2.3 The “Green Knowledge Economy” will be the framework for developing projects, programmes and partnerships and through September and October 2009 there will be a series of workshops and interviews with representatives from strategic stakeholders, the public sector, local businesses and community groups from across Taunton Deane to identify projects for inclusion in the delivery plan. These will form the basis of the new economic development strategy that will be presented in draft to Full Council on 8 December 2009.
- 2.4 Early discussions have identified the desire and funding to create a “Green Technologies Research Institute” in Taunton, which will achieve our aspiration to have postgraduate level research activity in Somerset.
- 2.5 In partnership with IBM, a Smarter Transportation workshop has been organised for October 2009 that will consider the use of ICT and other technologies, including Cloud technologies and next generation broadband. Together with infrastructure planning and business operations to reduce peak time travel journeys and improve efficiency and effectiveness of businesses and public sector organisations, this will result in a programme of action points that will feed into the EDS.

3. Employment and Skills

3.1 Business Matters

- 3.1.1 A new brand “Business Matters” and programme of activity has been developed to address the concerns of the business community that Taunton Deane was not a ‘business friendly’ location. In partnership with Business Link and Exchange House, a series of seminars are being held during October to address the identified needs of local businesses. Full details are available on the Taunton Deane website through the Economic Development home page.
- 3.1.2 To compliment this work a database of local businesses is being developed within an Excel format that can be transferred to a CRM system in the future and a relationship management activity including communication strategy will be considered within the EDS.
- 3.1.3 Significant businesses and employers have already been engaged and contributed to the Envisioning and EDS processes.

3.2 Employment and Skills Board

- 3.2.1 A new Taunton Deane Employment and Skills (E&S) Board has been constituted as a sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) reporting to the Economic Leaders Group (ELG). The E&S Board will drive current employment and skills opportunities, and identify future skills requirements to meet demand for

employment within a 'Green Knowledge Economy'; promoting the transition from blue to 'green collar' employment that will feed into the Government target of creating 400,000 new green jobs.

3.2.2 Project Taunton will continue to lead on establishing a Construction Skills Academy on the Firepool site and report on progress to the new Board.

3.3 Enterprise Solutions Hub

3.3.1 Early discussions with Plymouth University to establish an 'Enterprise Solutions Hub' in partnership with Somerset College are progressing with a target launch of the new service in November 2009.

3.3.2 The 'Hub' will be targeted at retaining management and technical competencies within Taunton Deane in response to white collar redundancies and graduate unemployment and provide training and work placement opportunities that will add greater competence to local businesses and help them drive forward their growth plans to create new employment opportunities.

3.4 Enterprise Gateways

3.4.1 Plans to establish 'Enterprise Gateways' in North Taunton, East Taunton and Wellington are progressing and it is anticipated that the first Gateway will open in East Taunton before Christmas.

3.4.2 These Gateways will provide the 'community hub' from which to promote employment and training opportunities created by Project Taunton and Growth Point construction activity and, in the first instance, a job club activity to assist local people find employment or re-skilling opportunities during the economic downturn.

4. Inward Investment

4.1 Two initial investment enquiries are now being actively supported and managed by Economic Development:-

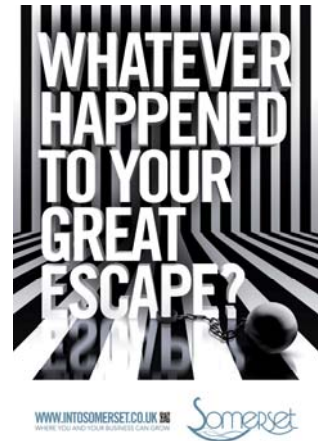
- An enquiry from an investor to establish a biomass processing plant, utilising 'clean technologies' that will produce 80 million litres of biofuel per annum, creating employment for 45 people. Two sites are under consideration and a further meeting with the Managing Director will take place early October 2009.
- An initial enquiry to 'long list' a site in Taunton Deane to establish a distribution centre by a major ethical and sustainably aware company that could create employment for between 600 – 800 people. A decision on the final selection of the site is not expected for 9 – 12 months.

4.2 Into Somerset

4.2.1 I am very sorry to report the very sad and sudden death of the Chairman of Into Somerset, Honor Chapman.

4.2.2 Into Somerset has incorporated the latest mobile phone barcode technology into a railway poster advertising campaign to get instant responses at mainline and branchline stations in and around London to encourage entrepreneurs to relocate to Somerset 'where work life is better by a country mile'.

4.2.3 The posters, which are running for at least two weeks from 21 September 2009, includes Quick Response technology, allowing mobile phone users to instantly access Into Somerset's website at www.intosomerset.co.uk to download further information.



5. Tourism

5.1 Somerset Tourism Partnership (STP)

5.1.1 The STP continues to work county wide to support the visitor economy, tourism businesses and market the county as an attractive destination for days out, short breaks and holidays.

5.1.2 A review of the partnership activity is underway evaluating what has been achieved since April 2006 and planning for future activity and delivery.

5.1.3 Current activity includes the production of the 2010 Somerset Jewel of the South West Brochure, launch of a Somerset Cider Lovers Guide and promotions on Heart 102.6 FM to promote Taunton Deane and Somerset to local residents.

5.2 Taunton Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

5.2.1 The TIC is busy this autumn acting as the Box Office for events including the Chinese State Circus, Big Gig Weekend and Taunton Sinfonetta.. The centre is also busy promoting the 10 Parishes Festival, Somerset Arts Week and the Quartz Festival.

5.2.2 The Travel Centre continues to grow from strength to strength working with local and national partners including Berry's, Bakers Dolphin and National Express. The centre is able to source and book great value days out and breaks away by coach and ferry.

5.2.3 The TIC is under a period of review with part of this work looking at the feasibility of relocation to the Brewhouse premises.

5.2.4 The TIC will be hosting the Cards for Good Causes Charity Christmas Card Shop from early October until mid December.

6. Arts and Culture

6.1 Empty shop units in the heart of Taunton are being transformed into mini art galleries to cheer up the town and provide artists with their own show space.

- 6.2 Shop Art Showcase, a joint initiative organised by Taunton Deane Borough Council and Taunton Town Centre Company with local artists and commercial agents, was launched on 18 September 2009 as part of Somerset Art Weeks. The old 'Art' shop and the unit behind Wave Games in the Old Market Centre are displaying eye catching 3D works by the Kingston Studios Art Group members, Richard Holt and Andru Fijalowski until Sunday, 4 October. Martin Joiner is also screening a video digital instillation on Thursday to Sunday evenings at No.5 East Reach entitled 'People watching the people-watchers', thanks to Cluff Commercial.
- 6.3 It is intended that this initiative will continue with other artists and units taking part in future months.
- 6.4 Both the 10 Parishes Festival and Somerset Art Weeks have provided a wide programme of events and exhibitions this September increasing visitor numbers during the shoulder season. Over 450 artists are showcasing their work at more than 90 venues across Somerset as part of Somerset Art Week, which focuses on group collaborations this year.
- 6.5 Street Jam, the summer programme of circus skills events in Halcon and Priorswood with Fuse Performance have proved a success, with over 180 young people taking part in events in East and North Taunton. Twenty four young people volunteered their time contributing to the street dance workshops, parcour and circus activities, and we are now developing a programme for the winter months which includes a 'Halcon's Got Talent' show and a street arts troupe for outdoor celebratory events in Taunton.

7. Project Taunton

7.1 Firepool

- 7.1.1 The delivery team are working well with St Modwen and positive progress is being made. Plans are being finalised to take forward on-site demolition in mid-October and investment in infrastructure and a detailed marketing strategy are being discussed.
- 7.1.2 "The Auctioneers building" is going to be refurbished and retained in the medium term as a marketing centre. Work is due to start in October.

7.2 Cultural Quarter

7.2.1 Cricket Club

- 7.2.1a The Pegasus development and new stand is now complete.
- 7.2.1b Somerset Square is due to be completed at the end of October.
- 7.2.1c The construction of the SCCC Club Hub is complete. Work to convert the pavilion to a 600 seater conference facility should start in September 2009 with completion at the end of March 2010.

7.2.2 Brewhouse Theatre

- 7.2.2a The delivery team have commissioned an architectural feasibility study for the incremental extension and conversion of the Brewhouse building and this work is well progressed. The architects have given a presentation to the Coordination Group meeting and a presentation to the Trustees will be arranged.
- 7.2.2b Phase two of Somerset Square, which is the area to the front of the Brewhouse, will be on site at the beginning of October and the contract should be complete by 15 November 2009 (Christmas Light switch-on).
- 7.2.2c A structural survey of the Brewhouse building has been undertaken to ensure that the costs and liabilities associated with the building are properly understood.

7.2.3 Coal Orchard

- 7.2.3a The delivery team hope to be in a position to start preparing a brief later this year/early next year.

7.3 Museum

- 7.3.1 The main contractor is on site for the refurbishment of the Museum and reopening is planned for April 2011

7.4 Castle Green and Goodland Gardens:

- 7.4.1 The planning application was submitted in May and now includes the demolition of two of the Castle Hotel garages, the wall surrounding the car park and its replacement with a lower and more appropriate wall and the resurfacing of the car park. These works will be paid for by the Castle Hotel.
- 7.4.2 Work is likely to start on site early 2010, although the reduction in Growth Points funding might require a rethink of the specification and possibly phasing.

7.5 Tangier

- 7.5.1 Midas have now met Taunton Deane and discussions are ongoing, including with the Homes and Communities Agency to see if this might qualify as one of their 'stalled schemes' for which funding might be available.
- 7.5.2 Early meetings with Musgrove Park Hospital and Somerset College have indicated a possible interest in a mini campus in this part of Taunton.
- 7.5.3 The Third Way road and bridge is ready to start on site at any time but is being delayed by an individual objection.

7.6 Bus station

- 7.6.1 The delivery team are commencing discussions with Somerset County Council and First Group regarding the possibility of developing this site which will include

the provision of a smaller scale bus station, without any long term bus or car parking on site, together with other uses at higher levels if appropriate.

7.7 Retail

7.7.1 EPF have started their £3.5m refurbishment of The Old Market Centre and this is due to be complete at the end of October 2009.

7.8 Longrun Farm, Bishops Hull

6.8.1 Swan Paul has been instructed to prepare plans for the landscaping of the land at Longrun Farm, part of which should fulfil the planning obligations. Good progress is being made with this work. A stakeholder information meeting has been arranged at the Genesis Centre on 27 October 2009.

7.9 Community

7.9.1 The third Young Taunton newsletter will be circulated to schools and libraries during the second half of the autumn term.

7.9.2 A public information event will be arranged at Firepool when the refurbishment of the Auction House is complete.

7.10 PR and Marketing

7.10.1 Project Taunton's website V2 is due to go live very soon. In its new form, the website will have a more dynamic interface; secure sections for project documents and larger, more exciting images.

7.10.2 An electronic newsletter is due at the end of September 2009.

7.10.3 Media activity: Somerset Square, Firepool demolition, Longrun Meadows

7.11 Funding

7.11.1 Taunton Deane is facing a 45% cut in Growth Point capital allocation for the 2010/2011 financial year although the revenue element appears to be safe at forecast levels.

7.11.2 The current budgeting assumes that there are no further Growth Point funds beyond 2010/2011. This will restrict activities and revenue funding for the Project Taunton Delivery Team will run out in March 2011.

7.11.3 Through the Living Places partnership, Transformation Funding has been secured to enable informal heritage learning in an empty town centre shop during the period when the Museum is closed.

8. Employment Land

- 8.1 Three small sites have been identified that provide the possibility for an early release of employment land:
 - 8.1.1 Walford Cross – around 2ha of Greenfield land that is of interest to both the Biofuel processing plant and the green technologies Research Institute
 - 8.1.2 Crown Land – around 2 ha of Crown owned land for mixed-use development including an element of employment (retail with small office usage above, and small light industrial units)
 - 8.1.3 Frobisher Way – discussions have commenced to assess the viability of working with a third party to develop a number of small light industrial units on the Council owned site of 0.3ha to make available freehold units to the market to meet an identified demand. A paper will be brought to Members at an appropriate time where it is expected that it will be recommended that gains from the sale of these units will be ring-fenced for further economic development activity.

9. Asset Management

- 9.1 A management and monitoring process to progress the development of an Asset Management Plan (AMP) has been agreed with Southwest One, with a target to bring a draft AMP to Members by early 2011.

10. LARC (Local Action for Rural Communities)

- 10.1 There are no changes to the programme at the moment. All three LARC projects are now open for funding bids from Community and Business groups.

Councillor Fran Smith

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Richard Lees – Sports, Parks and Leisure

1. Community Leisure

- 1.1 The Vivary Park summer season of free bandstand concerts ran successfully from June – September with 11 bandstand concerts.
- 1.2 The Chinese State Circus has made a welcome return visit to Vivary Park.
- 1.3 Capital grant aid has been awarded under the Parish Play Area Grant Scheme to Corfe Parish Council for the redevelopment of the children's play area at the Queen's Acre Playing Field.
- 1.4 Capital grant aid applications are being processed, for voluntary village halls and community centres and sports clubs.

2. Sport

- 2.1 The opening ceremony for the new sports pavilions at Hamilton Gault and Galmington Playing Fields has been carried out.

3. Play

- 3.1 Longrun Meadows Development
 - 3.1.1 A steering group of stakeholders has been meeting to discuss ideas for the setting out of this area of land for future public recreation. Although acquired to provide compensation for flooding issues in the town centre, the 26 hectare site has great potential for recreation subject to the creation of new bridges to link it to the town (the only access currently is at the rear of Castle School).
 - 3.1.2 A Stage1 application to Natural England's Access to Nature grant fund is being developed which would provide site based Rangers and a range of activities for schools, the community to learn about and develop the site and its wildlife.
- 3.2 Playbuilder
 - 3.2.1 Consultation will start shortly on the designs for the new play provision for 8-13 year olds at Hamilton Gault park and Lyngford Park. The designs reflect the consultation done to date with children and the community over the last month. Playbuilder is money received from the

Government Department for Children, Schools and Families via Somerset County Council and this will be the second of 3 years' of funding from this source.

3.2.2 The Playbuilder money will be matched with any other available funds such as Section 106 funds for play local to the two sites that have been received. The third Playbuilder site this year is at Oake which is currently out to tender.

3.3 Vivary Park

3.3.1 Public consultation on designs for extending the play area at the rear of Vivary Park has now finished and the plans will be amended and tenders invited for building the site. It will complement the existing play space within the confines of the model train track and include water and sand play.

3.4 Strategy Development

3.4.1 A number of new or updated strategies will be available for consultation shortly. These will complement those published last year on Play and Community Halls and will support the development of the Local Development Framework to ensure that adequate leisure provision is made for the future in Taunton Deane.

3.4.2 The Allotments Task and Finish Group has met three times recently and will publish a draft strategy for consultation in October 2009. Its work has taken forward the research and consultation undertaken in the last couple of years.

3.4.3 The Playing Pitches Strategy is also about to be published in draft for consultation.

3.4.4 The Open Spaces Strategy Vision session was held recently and will set the direction for our new strategy.

4. Parks

4.1 South West in Bloom Competition

4.1.1 Taunton again gained the Tesco Cup in the large towns category, as well as Silver Gilt. Wellington gained Silver Gilt in the small towns category, just missing out to Truro in the title race for the Portman Cup. All the plants used were nurtured in the Council's state-of-the-art nursery in Stoke Road for the first time.

4.1.2 Last year Taunton not only won the Tesco Cup, but took national honours as well by winning the Britain in Bloom title for large towns. Competition rules mean that Taunton will not be in the nationals this year.

4.1.3 Taunton and Wellington in Bloom involve huge commitment for the community and this was reflected in the category honours board: the award for the best horticultural display went to Taunton Police Station while Neighbourhood awards – all Merit – went to Victoria Park Action Group, St George's Primary School and Kingston Road Allotments.

4.1.4 In Wellington Neighbourhood Award winners were: Wellington Action Group and Swains Lane, both deemed outstanding while the Basins Woodland gained a Merit. Fantastic results all round.

4.2 French Weir

4.2.1 Thanks to our staff and the Friends of French Weir a fun day was held on the 16 August 2009. It was really good to see many families and especially the children having so much fun in the park and by the river bank.

4.3 Victoria Park

4.3.1 Thanks go to Councillors Williams and Herbert for obtaining a granite slab which was installed in the park on the 11 September 2009 to allow young people to skateboard – on a very small scale – but nevertheless, it certainly is being used and a welcome addition to the park.

4.4 Green Flags

4.4.1 The green flags in Vivary, Victoria and Wellington Parks were raised by the Mayor recently. Thanks to all concerned for again ensuring these parks gained this award for another year

4.5 Wellington Rugby Club

4.5.1 I was delighted to attend on the 6 September 2009, the official opening of the Wellington Rugby Club stand and associated facilities which we were able to provide a grant for. This really was impressive, and I was extremely pleased that the Mayor was able to attend too.

5. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Play Development

5.1 Play Days

5.1.1 Tone Leisure have co-ordinated seven play days since the beginning of July 2009. On 12 July they held the Giant Play Day at Wellsprings Leisure Centre, which was funded by Somerset Play Forum. The afternoon was very well attended with over 400 children and parents attending. Despite a very stormy start to the day, the afternoon was dry and children took part in a large number of activities including archery, trampolining, skateboarding, fire lighting, and a variety of arts

and crafts. Tone Leisure received a lot of very positive feedback for the day.

5.1.2 Over the summer holidays Tone Leisure have held sessions at Bishops Hull, Galmington Playing Fields, Hudson Way - Staplegrove, Milverton, Ruishton and at Hatch Beauchamp. The Play Days have been particularly successful in encouraging children and young people to play in their local communities and gives them lots of new ideas to use their play spaces. The children took part in a variety of activities, including fire lighting, cooking, woodland crafts, clay modelling, sports (football and cricket) and played lots of games. These sessions were supported by the Big Lottery Fund. It is good to see such activities being provided for young people within our community, and there will be two more sessions during the October half term.

Young People

5.2 Energize

5.2.1 Energize held its Summer Activity Days on 23 July and 27 August 2009 in Vivary Park. Hundreds of young people attended the afternoon between 12 Noon and 5 pm. The FREE attractions included an Inflatable Pole Joust and Bouncy Castle, Circus Skills, Drum Workshops, Climbing Wall, Youth Projects, Street Dance, Music, Displays, HM Coastguard, Creation Station Arts, Tone Leisure's Dance Mats, Mini Tennis and Tri Golf, Orienteering, Volleyball, Football and Cricket.

5.2.2 Local youth organisations attended, such as the Scouts, Trailblazers and the County Youth Workers, who provided information on activities and services in the town. The park was busy all afternoon and all the young people and their families agreed it had been a fun-packed event. Energize partners include Taunton Deane Borough Council, Avon and Somerset Police, Taunton Deane Local Service Youth Team, Tone Leisure and Taunton Retailers Against Crime.

6. Facility News

6.1 Wellsprings Leisure Centre

Junior Activities

6.1.1 Wellsprings hosted a successful Summer Camp with a good level of interest from customers. The programme, that was based around a different theme each week, included activities such as trampolining, archery, fencing, gymnastics and dance. Children were also given the opportunity to tell staff what activities they wanted to do during the October half-term. Total number of children on this Giant summer camp was 875 children.

- 6.1.2 The new Autumn term has seen a few changes to the junior activities programme as, unfortunately, Wellsprings has lost its Ballet Instructor. Though this has shown a slight impact, Tone Leisure are still searching for a new instructor and there are many new and exciting activities in the pipeline to ensure that Wellsprings continues to grow.
- 6.1.3 As an addition to Tone Leisure's extremely popular toddler activity programme they will be introducing "Balanceability", which is an innovative programme designed to teach children as young as 2 years old the skills required to ride a bicycle without stabilisers. They are also working to re-introduce a new football skills course in the new term. Due to popular demand an extra Active Tots session will be starting on Monday mornings, which allows parents to use the facilities while their child is looked after in a fun and interactive play session (over 2 years only)
- 6.1.4 Wellsprings are working towards enhancing its teenage programme at present. A teen version of their well liked Boxercise course started in September, along with a new session of Teen Gym on Saturday mornings and Open Day for people to try out activities and find out more.

6.2 St. James Street Baths

- 6.2.1 St. James Street Swimming Baths Summer Programme 2009 for learn to swim lessons was a great success. Over 200 swimmers learnt to swim this summer on the crash courses. Children learnt a variety of aquatic skills over five lessons, each gaining a certificate and badge as recognition of their achievements.
- 6.2.2 Tone Leisure has been working closely with the ASA (Amateur Swimming Association) to launch free swimming lessons. The ASA, in partnership with Sport England, are offering pots of money to swimming lesson providers for senior citizens and young people.
- 6.2.3 St. James Street was able to access this funding through our work with the Somerset Black Development Agency. The ASA's criteria for free swimming lessons enabled St. James Street to provide 6 hours of lessons for up to 12 children during the summer holidays. Both children and parents enjoyed the lessons, with many of the children booking onto main stream lessons on Tone Leisure's Swimskool programme.
- 6.2.4 Tone Leisure is continuing to work with the ASA to access more funding to provide more free swimming lessons across all its wet facilities.

6.3 Blackbrook Pavilion

- 6.3.1 Through May, June, July and August the Blackbrook Pavilion continued to meet sales targets. Innovative marketing, keen membership offers and a team of staff 'switched on to sales opportunities' have achieved this. Membership is currently 1,588, up from 1,543 at the end of March.
- 6.3.2 At a time of year when it would have been anticipated a drop in membership Tone Leisure have been delighted to see this increase. These figures justify the building, equipment and programme developments implemented in Autumn 2008 and have been achieved in less than favourable economic conditions.
- 6.3.3 Gym usage is 15,466 for the current financial year, up 45% for the same period last year, which shows the hard work and dedication put in by the staff of Tone Leisure.
- 6.3.4 The Group Exercise programme has consistently maintained high attendance figures through the summer. Year to date attendance is 7,146, up 22% on last year.
- 6.3.5 The increase in membership and participation enables Blackbrook Pavilion to rightly claim that Tone Leisure are giving the opportunity for 'More People, to be More Active, More Often'.
- 6.3.6 At the beginning of September Tone Leisure launched 'Teen Fitness'. This programme is for 11-16 year olds. It includes 3 gym sessions and two combat classes per week. It is hoped this will give an opportunity for teenagers to use the facilities at the same time as other family members. It is also in line with the National Agenda tackling obesity and increasing physical activity for young people. Instructors have promoted 'Teen Fitness' in conjunction with the Youth Service at the 'Energize' events held in Vivary Park at the end of July and August.

6.4 Tennis Centre

- 6.4.1 I am delighted to say that, Taunton Ladies Team came fifth in the Aegon Team Tennis National Finals. This prestigious event was contested by eight teams. Team Captain Natalie Ayton writes:-
- "Having qualified through the South West Regional League and then winning a play-off match against Rayne's Park London, Taunton Ladies Tennis Team went to Bournemouth on the 4-6 September 2009 to compete in the National Finals on the clay courts at West Hants Tennis Club. The finals consisted of the top eight men's and ladies' clubs in England and Wales."
- 6.4.2 A truly superb result, and I felt it only right that I should include that comment in this report.

6.5 Wellington Sports Centre

Health and Fitness

- 6.5.1 Health and Fitness is growing stronger and stronger each month. With a Fitness Membership target for August of 45, Wellington has embraced the new fitness product and sold an amazing 70 memberships.
- 6.5.2 Casual usage is the main focus to ensure all members are being swiped through and the membership system confirms the numbers that are expected. Classes continue to grow, with the main focus on the New Body Attack programme and Body Combat.
- 6.5.3 The most exciting news for August was the success Tone Leisure had in achieving funding from the Big Lottery to develop the long awaited Junior Fitness area up in the old bar area. The development background work has already started and Tone Leisure aim to complete an update for Councillors to review their progress and inform of their plans.

6.6 Free Swimming

- 6.6.1 Free swimming has gone from strength to strength over the summer holidays, with over 950 visits from both the seniors and under 16 year olds during August. Part of the free swimming initiative allows the centre to apply for funding to run an additional three courses of free swimming lessons for the junior market. Wellington has identified three such courses that will be rolled out this Autumn.
- 6.6.2 All in all, a very satisfying summer, with grants being allocated, success in various ways, and improvements in our facilities all round.

Councillor Richard Lees

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Tim Slattery – Environmental Services

1. Management/General

1.1 Benchmarking

1.1.1 In August we hosted a benchmarking exercise of Environmental Health (EH) units within our Family Group.

1.1.2 Eight Authorities responded to questionnaires, from a total possible of 18. The results have now been collated and show that Taunton Deane is well placed among its peers in terms of staffing levels, services provided and value.

1.2 Restructure

1.2.1 Changes to the management of EH have taken place as a result of the appointment of James Barraah, Chief EHO, to one of the Theme Manager's posts.

1.2.2 Two members of staff have been appointed to management positions and two existing managers have taken on new responsibilities. The changes are temporary, pending implementation of the Core Council Review.

1.3 Core Council Review

1.3.1 The Core Council Review proposals for Theme 4 have now been published, and the indications point to a challenging future for the Unit.

1.3.2 We now embark on a full month of consultation, during which time contributions from all staff will be welcomed, before the proposals are finalised for Members to consider.

2. Food Safety/Health and Safety Team

2.1 Economic Problems

2.1.1 Business operators continue to face difficulties due to the economic climate. This has led to an increased number of cases where shortcuts in standards of food safety and health and safety have been taken. As a result, higher than usual numbers of enforcement actions have had to be considered. Four such actions, involving potential Prosecutions or Cautions are currently being reviewed.

2.1.2 This places an additional burden on Team members, who continue to support businesses with advice on compliance with the law, wherever possible.

2.2 Health and Safety Partnership Action Day

2.2.1 Taunton Deane hosted a Partnership Action Day on the 22 September 2009. I welcomed the delegates at the start of a very successful event, attended by around 50 officers from the Somerset Authorities.

2.2.2 Speakers included representatives from the Health and Safety Executive, Torbay District Council, Cheltenham District Council and 'Workwell Dorset'.

2.2.3 The day provided good opportunities to be updated on current issues affecting Health and Safety enforcement, and to share ideas about best practice and consistency in Service delivery.

3. Environmental Health Support Team

3.1. Website

3.1.1. Team members have completed the detailed revision of all the Environmental Health web pages in preparation for use by Customer Services when the CRM software goes live. This was a major undertaking over many weeks to meet external deadlines.

4. Environmental Protection Team

4.1 Air Quality

4.1.1 The "Air Quality Detailed Assessment" for Nitrogen Oxides and Particulates has been submitted to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for approval.

4.1.2 The assessment recommends that the existing Air Quality Management Area in East Reach should be extended into the town centre. If Defra approves the report, the Team will consult with Members and the public on a number of options. These Consultations are likely to begin in the New Year.

4.2 Fly Tipping

4.2.1 A Taunton man was ordered to pay costs and compensation totalling £203 by Taunton Magistrates' Court after admitting a charge of fly tipping.

4.2.2 He was given a conditional discharge and was told it was a serious offence. The offence involved the illegal dumping of a number of plastic bags of rubbish in a hedgerow.

4.2.3 In another case, the Team is proceeding with prosecution of the landlord of a local public house, after Officers traced the source of two large quantities of fly tipped waste to the nearby licensed premises.

4.3 Welfare Funerals

4.3.1 The team has now taken responsibility for Welfare Funerals from Legal Services and since August two such funerals have been arranged. In addition to the funeral arrangements, the work involves dealing with the estate and contacting relatives of the deceased, where possible, in order to try to recover costs. This can be a time consuming process.

4.4 Major Entertainment Events

4.4.1 Officers monitored noise levels at the two major events held during the summer, these being Jools Holland in Vivary Park and Buddhafields at Culmhead, to ensure that licensing conditions were being met.

4.4.2 As a result, Officers are now confident that Buddhafields, which has become an annual event, can operate without causing noise nuisance to neighbouring residential properties.

4.4.3 Water samples were from the supply system set up at Buddhafields to ensure that the people attending the festival had a safe supply of drinking water.

5. Licensing Team

5.1 Compliance Inspections

5.1.1. Adjustments to the Team's routine workload have enabled a limited compliance inspection programme to be started again.

5.1.2 The programme, which is non statutory, had been suspended due to the recruitment freeze which has led to staff capacity problems. The programme will concentrate on visits to the higher risk premises, where Conditions relating to safety or the prevention of nuisance have been imposed.

5.2 Taxi Handbook

5.2.1 The Team has now published its book, the full title of which is Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook.

5.2.2 At just under 60 pages, it informs all those providing taxi or private hire car services exactly what is required, how to obtain the necessary operating Licences, details of relevant legislation, and Council policy.

5.2.3 The Handbook has been welcomed by the trade. It is sent out to all new Licence applicants and is available on the Council's website.

6. Waste Management Board

6.1 SORT IT PLUS

6.1.1 The Somerset Waste Board has re-affirmed that Service Package 5 as the best option should be adopted. This has been done in the interest of efficiency, service performance and increased value for money in what is a high-profile and volatile public service.

6.1.2 The wider effects of the recession heralded by the credit crunch provided other significant changes in the operating environment. Despite the fact that all partner Councils have had to tighten their belts, the SORT IT PLUS trials, have been an undoubted success and has proved that district wide recycling rates can be boosted to levels approaching 60% with strong customer satisfaction.

6.1.3 I am please also to share the excellent news that Somerset Waste Board topped the County league tables for performance and innovative governance.

Councillor Tim Slattery

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Hazel Prior Sankey – Housing Services

1. Housing Inspection Visit

- 1.1 The Audit Commission requested and were provided with a large quantity of information prior to their visit to Taunton Deane during the week commencing 28 September 2009. The Housing Service has welcomed their involvement as a “critical friend” to provide constructive support and challenge, particularly in those areas identified as potential weaknesses.
- 1.2 The desired outcomes of the visit are:-
 - o to give a common understanding of current performance and identify further areas for improvement;
 - o help the Council to identify opportunities to deliver its housing services in a more customer-focussed and cost-effective way; and
 - o provide the Council and its tenants with an independent and impartial report that can be used to inform the Council and its partners’ improvement plans

2. Councils Build Again

- 2.1 Housing Minister John Healey has recently announced that 47 Councils will receive £127 million to build 2,021 homes. The successful councils have had to match the Government funding.
- 2.2 Whilst this has been described in the trade magazine *Inside Housing* as the “first large-scale council house building programme for 20 years”, in reality it is a welcome but so far modest rebirth of council new-build.
- 2.3 In the coming months Taunton Deane Borough Council will celebrate achieving the Government’s Decent Homes’ standard and the time will be right to seriously consider whether there is the potential for adding new properties to our stock.

3. Housing Subsidy Reform

- 3.1 The Negative Subsidy Task and Finish group reconvened on 14 September 2009 to consider the Government’s proposals on the reform of the Housing Subsidy System. As a Council in “negative subsidy”, this

- year contributing approximately £5.4 million to the central pot, a successful resolution of this issue is clearly of the utmost importance to us.
- 3.2 Whilst we welcome the Government's intention that this unfair and discredited system should be abolished, it is sad that the proposed solution involves a redistribution of the national housing debt of £18 billion.
 - 3.3 Tenants will wonder why they are expected to take on a portion of debt which was incurred decades ago in other areas of the country.
 - 3.4 Redistribution of our tenants' rent payments, it seems, is to be replaced by the redistribution of debt. Officers are conducting further work to try to quantify just how big the burden of debt Taunton Deane Borough Council might have to take on under the proposals and will bring a report to the Community Scrutiny Committee so that our response to the proposal may be fully debated.

4. What Recession?

- 4.1 Although a majority of social housing tenants are living on very meagre incomes, they are apparently not so poor that they cannot afford to pay Housing Association Chief Executives quite breathtaking salaries. I commented last year on this issue, but since then Housing Association Chief Executive pay has increased by an average of 7%.
- 4.2 The highest paid Chief Executive is that of Anchor Trust, whose salary was £391,000 in 2008/2009. The top ten earners on the list have enjoyed a 91% average pay rise since 2001.
- 4.3 The Chair of the Tenants and Residents' Organisations of England (TAROE) is quoted as saying, "It is totally outrageous that tenants' money is being used to make the fat cats grow fatter".

5. Rents Go Down!

- 5.1 As Members are aware, the rent decrease operates from 5 October 2009. This has been a very demanding and complex administrative task and I would like to express my appreciation of the hard work put in by staff, especially those who had to work during the weekend of 3 and 4 October.
- 5.2 This is good news for tenants in very difficult economic times.

Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Nicola Wilson – Corporate Resources

1. Southwest One HR Service

- 1.1 The following is a brief summary of the key activities the team are engaged in at the present time:-
- 1.2 The team have been busy working on a number of investigations and personal cases.
- 1.3 The HR Manager has been working with the SAP team on the next release phases of the SAP system; this includes e-recruitment and the Criminal Records Bureau checking process. The team have also been involved in work to rectify problems with part-time annual leave allocations in SAP.
- 1.4 The HR Manager has supported the Taunton Town Centre Manager through a restructuring process of the Taunton Town Centre Company resulting in one redundancy.
- 1.5 The team have been supporting the Retained HR Manager with a review of all employee benefits.

2. Core Council Review

- 2.1 The HR Advisory team have been continuing to support the Retained HR Manager and CMT with the Core Council Review.
- 2.2 Tim Hazell, HR Officer has joined the team as full time support for the Review. Recent activity includes producing an establishment list, preparing letters and supporting managers with individual and group meetings.

3. Revenues and Benefits

- 3.1 With the economic downturn affecting nearly every part of our community, the team have seen our Housing and Council Tax Benefits caseload increase by 7.2% in the last 12 months. However, they have been able to maintain good turnaround times, averaging 20.41 calendar days in

- processing new claims and 10.18 days for customers who have changes in their circumstances.
- 3.2 Council Tax Collection rates at 31 August 2009 were 0.66% down in terms of meeting our annual target of 98.5% but it is inevitable that recovering debt is extremely challenging when so many people are struggling to meet their financial obligations.
 - 3.3 The team are offering support to employers who, due to the recession, are making redundancies. They are visiting workplaces offering support and advice to employees about claiming Housing and Council Tax Benefit.
 - 3.4 The Revenues and Benefits Service is particularly busy at present. The annual billing process for the Business Improvement District Levy is scheduled for the last week of September 2009. During the first week of October the team will be recalculating rebates for all Council tenants due to the rent reduction applied to accounts from April 2009. October will also see a mass recalculation of benefits due to the new disregard rules on Child Benefit. Running parallel to these activities are the on-going surveys into customer satisfaction as well as the Audit Commission's annual subsidy inspection.
 - 3.5 The national roll out of the "In and Out of Work" initiative takes place during the end of 2009 and early 2010 following successful pilots. This project will, commence both at Taunton Deane and South Somerset on the 30 September 2009 and will allow for a more streamlined and prompt service for working age customers claiming Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support where they need further help in claiming Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Tax Credits.
 - 3.6 The team will lose Paul Harding as Principal Revenues Officer as he moves to a new career within the Performance and Client team. While this is a wonderful opportunity for Paul, after over 20 years in the service, his experience will be sorely missed by everyone in Revenues and Benefits.

4. Update on progress with Investors on People Action Plan

A summary of the latest position is as follows:-

- 4.1 **Coverage and consistency of PREDS reviews**
All managers have produced plans showing their plans completing PRED review meetings during the next few weeks. The need for these reviews at this time will be reinforced shortly and follows the Core Council Review report.
- 4.2 **People Management Framework**
Training sessions for senior managers have been held (7 and 24 September 2009). This introduces a new competency framework for

managers and reinforces the need to hold regular one-to-one meetings and team meetings.

4.3 Team Meetings

Managers have sent schedules of future meeting dates. A system is to be set up to enable a central diary of all team meetings to be held by CMT.

4.4 Investors in People Working Group

This is taking shape although volunteers from some areas of the council are still needed.

4.5 Management Development

Work is progressing in the Corporate and Strategy theme with the assessment of managers in key management skills to enable development areas to be identified.

4.6 Mentoring

Leads have been matched with Theme Managers and the mentor meetings will start in November following training.

4.7 Training Plans and budgets

Training plans received from most areas and budget allocations now being considered based on those plans.

4.8 Skills Audit

A date is being fixed for Somerset College to conduct a skills audit with managers in the Corporate and Strategy Theme to provide information and possible funding and support for appropriate training.

Work is to commence on developing theme working initially in the Corporate and strategy Theme but also extending to the whole Council in time

Training in application and interview skills for people involved in the next phase of the Core Council Review is being planned and organised.

5. Customer Contact Highlights July – September 2009

5.1 SouthWest One Customer Contact continues to develop and improve the service to Taunton Deane customers. Additional CSAs (Customer Service Advisors) have been recruited to assist with testing and training requirements for the new Customer Relationship Management (SAP CRM) system which is now due to be introduced towards the end of 2009.

5.2 These temporary staff will remain with us until the end of the year by which time it is expected CSAs will be fully familiar with the system. SAP CRM will enable the team to deliver more to the community from the first point of contact and will assist service areas to concentrate on the core job. The main testing phases for SAP are now complete and we are about to enter

User Acceptance Testing (UAT), awareness training and system specific training over the next two months.

- 5.3 The delay in the plans to implement SAP CRM have meant that we are still unable to fully merge the Taunton Deane team with the Somerset County Council team and provide a full multifunctional service as planned but it is hoped that we will start to see this happen once SAP CRM is fully embedded in the service. Discussions continue with our telephony provider MacFarlane to ensure that the new software we are using is fit for purpose and enables us to develop the service.
- 5.4 Service delivery continues to be excellent and we have seen a decrease in the number of calls into the service year on year as customers have their issues dealt with professionally and without delay.

Statistical Information:-

MONTH	July	Aug	Sep Up to 24.09
CALLS OFFERED	14677	12773	11792
ABANDONED % [Target less than 5%]	3.7	3.3	2.7
G.O.S.% [Target 80%]	84.57	87.76	89.16
% ANSWERED AT 1ST P.O.C.	91.9	93.4	96.9

- 5.5 A total of 10,701 people have been helped at The Deane House Main and Planning Receptions and 2,899 people visited Wellington Community Office. We have dealt with 843 Web and Email enquiries during this time.
- 5.6 Automated customer survey tools for customers within the Somerset County Council Environment Department continue to be trialled with discussions taking place on how we can deliver the same service for Taunton Deane. In addition, work has begun to investigate other initiatives to improve service to customers (e.g., feasibility of providing an automated 24hour payment line). Once these initiatives are fully identified and researched they will be presented to the Taunton Deane Client Team for further discussion.
- 5.7 **Future Activities**
- Complete trial of automated customer satisfaction survey and determine way forward;
 - Participate in UAT phase for SAP CRM;
 - Train all staff in SAP CRM; and
 - Implement SAP CRM – Date to be determined.

6. Performance and Client Team

- 6.1 The team has continued to be heavily involved in working with Southwest One and the Core Council to resolve the issues resulting from the implementation of the SAP Back Office system in April.
- 6.2 Much progress has been made in this regard. The technical problems relating to making payments to suppliers, issuing invoices and posting payments to accounts have now been largely fixed. Issues remain however around our ability to accurately monitor budgets, which are now being addressed as a priority.
- 6.3 The next key stage with SAP is to build staff confidence and expertise in using the system. With this in mind we are currently in the process of identifying outstanding training needs. Visits will also be made to every team over the next three weeks by senior staff within Taunton Deane and Southwest One to explain to them the importance of their now using the system. These sessions will also offer them the opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns they have about the system.
- 6.4 The remaining elements of the SAP system are scheduled to go-live in November (Customer Relationship Management and the new website) and January (Health and Safety, Learning Solution, e-recruitment and expenses). Key lessons have been learnt by both Taunton Deane and Southwest One from the first phase of SAP. This has resulted in an improved testing and training programme for phase 2, which is currently underway.
- 6.5 On the Corporate Performance side of things the team have identified the steps required to improve the Corporate Performance Framework. These new processes have been agreed by the Executive and work has started to improve the new regime. The intention is to have the new mechanism fully implemented by April 2010.
- 6.6 A Corporate Action Plan is being agreed with the Corporate Governance Committee which will detail and group all the corporate improvements identified in Audit reports and from our own processes.
- 6.7 With regard to the Comprehensive Area Assessment, the Auditors have undertaken their work in respect of the Use of Resources and Managing Performance assessments. These will both determine our organisational score, which together with the Area Assessment will be publicly available on 10 December 2009. Members will be aware that the Organisational Assessment is now a much harder test and it would be unrealistic to expect the authority to be a 'top performer'.

Councillor Nicola Wilson

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Alan Wedderkopp – Community Leadership

1. Somerset Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)

- 1.1 The Somerset West Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership met at the end of June and discussed the possibility of moving towards a formally merged partnership. It was felt that the timing was not right at this stage with uncertainty over whether a larger, county wide group, might be created. It was agreed to continue to work in an informally merged manner at this stage.
- 1.2 Delivery plans for priority areas were outlined as well as discussion on how spending will be allocated. In Taunton Deane, investment is in several areas, including the Energize project for young people and CCTV.
- 1.3 The Paintball project has unfortunately not run this summer, but discussions are underway with current and previous partners, as well as a new partner so that the project will run in an enhanced way from April 2010.

2. Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

- 2.1 Penny James was elected Chairman of the LSP at its recent meeting on 8 September 2009. Penny's nomination was unopposed. Penny's Vice-Chairman will be Andrew Hinchcliffe from the Children and Young People (CYP) service at Somerset County Council.
- 2.2 The LSP is reshaping its Action Plan (the delivery plan for the Sustainable Community Strategy) to bring it in line with the Local Area Agreement. A revised Action Plan will be ready during early 2010. This will use current performance data to help highlight areas of strength and weakness. Areas of weakness will be the focus of direct action through the establishment of working groups that will be charged with coordinating partner activity and driving outcomes.
- 2.3 The LSP has a small amount of money that it can invest in helping to deliver priority outcomes for the local community. For this financial year (2009/2010) the LSP will be using its money to help tackle both urban deprivation and rural issues. A draft Investment Plan is in preparation. This will be submitted to the Somerset Strategic Partnership in November 2009, in order to release match-funding from the County Council.
- 2.4 Community Partnerships were established during 2008 and are meetings that allow the local community to meet a range of public sector partners in order to discuss and address local concerns. They are important in order to involve the public with local service delivery. Community Partnerships were suspended during early 2009, whilst a review was undertaken to establish how

they can become more effective at engaging the general public. It is now likely that they will be resurrected to link in to local PACT meetings (Partnerships and Communities Together) that have been organised and championed by the Police. Discussions continue between the Police, the Borough Council and other partners in order to resolve issues such as the number, location and frequency of such meetings. It is hoped that these matters will be resolved by the end of the year.

3. Wessex Water

3.1 From the Chairman of Wessex Water (WW) Customer Liaison Panel (CLP) Lesley Bennett:-

“WW’s CLP is made up of members independently nominated from Local Authorities in the Wessex Water Area. It also has representatives from Chambers of Commerce, the CAB’s, NFU and CLA and the Voluntary Sector.

Extract of letter to OFWAT:-

“--- I have asked our members for their views on the Draft Determination and have consolidated their responses into this letter in formal response from the Wessex Water CLP.

We recognise that OFWAT is keen to keep water bills as low as possible for the benefit of customers. However, as customers, we recognise that water has not only an economic, but also a social and environmental impact on our lives. While water is significantly more important in our lives than any of the other utilities, its daily use is also at the lowest cost.

We understand that a small shift in prices represents a large movement of money and is, rightly, rigorously monitored by OFWAT. But a small change in our water bills does not have a major significance in our lives. For this reason we query the need to move the annual bills up and down over the next five years, we would prefer stable prices with consistent improvements in service and improved social and environmental impacts.

The Panel has always agreed that it supports metering on change of occupancy together with the growth of smart metering and the opportunity that gives to create fairer tariffs. We know that metering makes people more conscious of their water use and therefore makes better use of the water available; we also know that smart meters and innovative tariffs will allow those who can afford it to use more water without the rest of us having to subsidise excessive use. We are disappointed that OFWAT is not supporting these proposals.

The CLP has always asked WW to make every effort to reduce its use of Carbon. We have encouraged the company to explore initiatives to develop renewable energy both through the use of its processes but also through the use of its land. While the CLP has urged the company to adopt higher targets it seems OFWAT wants to reduce these ambitions. This seems to us to be out of touch with what customers want.

Finally we are concerned that the Price Determination suggests cut backs in the amount of money to be spent on capital maintenance. Being a largely rural area there are huge networks of pipes and we are told that at the current rate of maintenance water pipes are supposed to last 230 years and the sewerage network 500 years. This cannot be realistic and suggests that serviceability will be jeopardised if maintenance is not improved.”

4. The Civic Society and the “Living Streets” Agenda.

- 4.1 Living Streets, celebrating its 80th birthday this year, is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.
- 4.2 We have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our 80 year history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30mph speed limits. Since then our ambition has grown. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk, and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.
- 4.3 Living Streets’ Fitter for Walking campaign is part of a portfolio of projects being delivered by a Consortium of the leading walking, cycling and health organisations and funded through the Big Lottery Fund's Wellbeing Programme. The Programme provides funding to support the development of healthier lifestyles and to improve well-being. It is delivering a portfolio of projects that will enable two million people nationwide to become more physically active by walking or cycling as part of their daily lives by 2012.

Councillor Alan Wedderkopp

Council Meeting – 6 October 2009

Report of Councillor Alan Paul - Communications

1. Weekly Bulletin

- 1.1 Many thanks go to the officers and Members who have contributed stories, reports, awareness raising articles and even cartoons to widen the appeal and interest in this publication.
- 1.2 I have asked managers of Taunton Deane services and some of our partner organisations to think 'Weekly Bulletin' when they are preparing information about innovations in their service area or simply about things that we do for the public which do not have a high enough profile. In this way, I hope we can make Councillors, officers and interested members of the public more ware of what is happening at Taunton Deane without generating too much extra work.
- 1.3 I hope that if we can make the 'Weekly Bulletin' of more general interest, it could be made available to a wider public either electronically or by paper copies.

2. Green Initiatives

- 2.1 We hope to co-ordinate a raft of 'Green' initiatives into a major awareness raising drive, through the Deane Dispatch and any other means we can develop. These include :-

Fuel Poverty and Warm Streets

We need to build on the Service Level Agreement already in place between the Council and the Centre for Sustainable Energy to disseminate more widely information on the correct steps to take to conserve energy, reduce costs and combat fuel poverty. There is plenty of information on grants, leaflets are being made widely available, but we do not currently reach sufficiently into deprived areas and the rural areas where fuel poverty is most prevalent. The answers are there if we can encourage people to ask the questions.

Volunteers from the **Transition Town** movement are involved in this process and we need to work with them to communicate wider awareness of how individual choices in life-style can affect global issues like Climate Change.

As we work on the future of Taunton Deane as a medium for the **Green Knowledge Economy**, with the impetus of Professor Mark Hepworth's report, it is clear that communication and marketing are essential for success. This has to be a long-term development, but we have to start communicating the vision now.

3. Public Relations

- 3.1 Two issues generated considerable media interest over the summer – High Court proceedings in relation to Oxen Lane, North Curry, and the funding of The Brewhouse.
- 3.2 Thanks to invaluable help provided by other Officers and Members, we were able to meet all the deadlines and requests.
- 3.3 The summer saw publicity about seasonal activities, including Britain in Bloom, Tourism, Taunton Flower Show and leisure activities. The media were particularly interested in the visit by the Mayor of Taunton, Massachusetts, Charles Crowley.
- 3.4 He kindly gave interviews to a number of radio stations and spent time talking to the media at Taunton Flower Show when he visited along with the Mayor and Mayoress of Taunton Deane.
- 3.5 Deane Dispatch continues to appear monthly in the Somerset County Gazette – recent editions included a feature on a community resource centre, the roll-out of Sort It Plus plastic bottle and cardboard collections and some facts and figures about the Council and its services.
- 3.6 Future themes will include the promotion of energy advice, some of the community work being carried out in East Taunton and the emerging Core Strategy.
- 3.7 Internally, the second issue of “Footprint”, the newsletter giving information on what the Council is doing to reduce its carbon footprint, is due to be published shortly while work is also under way on the second issue of the newsletter “Involve”, based around the Local Development Framework.

Councillor Alan Paul