

COUNCIL MEETING 22 JULY 2003

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

May 1st 2003 and it was all change, it was with great pleasure that I was elected councillor for Fairwater and great pride that I was given the portfolio for housing. The next four years will be challenging however my overriding priority is, and always will be, the welfare of the people of Taunton Deane.

Already within my short term in office a number of decisions have been made, the most significant being authorisation to complete the refurbishment of the Priorswood Place complex in North Taunton. Good work and considerable monies had already been spent on refurbishing the front of the building however in order to complete the refurbishment of this significant local asset, authorisation was given to complete the refurbishment to the roof and rear of the building together with enhanced security.

On a smaller scale but no less significant was the decision to grant a three year rent free period to the Link Centre at Halcon in East Taunton. The Link centre provides an extremely useful amenity to the local community and is run on an entirely voluntary basis, my thanks go out to Steve and Sandy and all the other volunteers for their continued effort at "The Link"

Naturally other decisions have also been made but the two examples above represent some of the good points however there are some less enjoyable aspects including dealing with neighbour disputes and evictions, but its all part of the job.

Looking forward, I have highlighted three core values that I will be promoting for the people of Taunton Deane:

1. The provision of affordable homes
2. Enabling the elderly to remain in their own homes
3. Pursue right to buy

Naturally these core values are not to the exclusion of all others but I believe that they represent a common sense approach to supporting the welfare of the people of Taunton Deane through the promotion of choice and security of tenure.

In addition to delivery of the core values there are a number of Government initiatives that will have to be worked through with Officers, the Tenants Forum and the Housing Review Panel during future months. These include:

Housing Stock – Decent Homes

TDBC is required to complete a robust stock option appraisal by July 2005. We are required to demonstrate how we will bring all dwellings up to the decent homes standard. 924 houses currently fail the standard and others will fall into this category over time. Work is about to be commissioned to complete our appraisal by December 2003. Taunton Deane is in a good position as we have already completed the pre-requisites (housing needs survey, Council stock condition survey and private stock condition survey).

Housing Stock – Stock Options

TDBC has a stock of approximately 6500 council houses. As with many other stock holding councils, the role of TDBC as landlord is under review and therefore a number of options are under review e.g. Housing Association, arms length company, PFI etc.

The stock option appraisal is a major task due for completion by April 2004.

Greg Garner