

Council Meeting – 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council

1. M5 Motorway Tragedy

- 1.1 Being the first scheduled Full Council meeting since that fateful day at the beginning of November, I take this opportunity to reaffirm this Council's sadness and sincere regrets for all those directly involved or suffering through the loss of loved ones in this dreadful and tragic accident. Our sincere thanks must also go to the emergency services for all their hard work and fortitude in the face of such destruction and suffering.
- 1.2 Our thoughts and condolences go out to all those involved.

2. Budget Setting

- 2.1 The Council's finances and budget setting has to be the most crucial issue facing us at present. We all received the large file of suggested savings and have worked through these including other savings from changes in the Deane DLO, Core Council Review and fees and charges. Also with the use of grant funding we have managed to reduce the budget gap from £2,062,000 to £699,000. This still leaves us with a long way to go!
- 2.2 At £699,000 as noted above, we have to give officers a clear steer as to how we are willing to proceed and close this gap. I have no illusions. This will be a difficult process as we are experiencing cuts in our income that we have never contemplated previously.
- 2.3 In response to this we have to collectively work together to reduce expenditure that hopefully minimises the impact on front line services. We must also look for ways of increasing income but this has to be done in a way that does not create price resistance thus deter use. This would not be good for us or the local economy.
- 2.4 I look forward to all Members contributing to this process and there will be the usual budget pack produced pre-Christmas to assist. However, any ideas that Members have will be welcomed at any time.

3. Regeneration of Taunton

- 3.1 Viridor Building : As will have been witnessed, the steel frame was erected very quickly, now the time consuming part comes of constructing floors and walls, installing services and finishes but the good news is that the building works are on programme with anticipated completion during March 2012.

- 3.2 Public park works adjacent the Viridor building : Works are planned to start soon and be complete also by March 2012 so coinciding with the building's completion.
- 3.3 Goodland Gardens : This is progressing well and slightly ahead of programme at present. Completion is due early February 2012.
- 3.4 Castle Green is now under way and reported as on programme. The contractors are reporting very few problems with managing access to the area and warning and information signage is in place. We are still trying to accommodate water mains replacement concurrent with 'our' works but Wessex Water must be in and out by the end of January for this to be possible. Hard paving is programmed to start next February so all preparation works will be carried out prior to then and hence the need for Wessex Water to conclude the replacement of their main services.
- 3.5 Third bridge at Longrun Meadows : This is still delayed by issues between the land owner and Environment Agency. A meeting is being arranged with all parties to try and resolve this ongoing issue so that Longrun Meadows is properly served by the number of bridges intended.
- 3.6 High Street Refurbishment : I attended a presentation which was a progress report on the works to date both physical and design stage. I was truly impressed by the large number of attendees, demonstrating the interest these proposals are generating and for the self evident enthusiasm of the Architects, designers and not least the volunteers.

The film maker was fantastic in capturing the great elements existing in the street and how these should be retained and enhanced in conjunction with the proposed new works. Well done to all involved. I would also be failing if I did not mention the enthusiasm of so many members of our community who took the trouble to participate in the community engagement day. They left so many colourful and interesting ideas of what they wanted to see from a refurbished and renewed High Street. The walls of the room we were in for the presentation were decked with the work of so many people and the film had captured the enthusiasm of the many young people participating.

We have put in a bid for £250,000 in grant aid to fund the first implementation stage of this project. We should hear the outcome of the bid before Christmas, and if successful work will commence in January. Congratulations to our officers for their quick response and hard work in seizing the opportunity when it arose.

- 3.7 East Goods Yard Housing Development : The blocks of 108 flats are proceeding well and on schedule for completion by next March - a welcome addition to the number of affordable houses being constructed to meet what appears an almost insatiable demand. In addition to this development, Crest Nicholson have now lodged a planning applications for 240 houses and apartments on a major portion of the remaining site. If granted, this will provide much needed housing on a site that has been lying derelict for decades.

3.8 Northern Inner Distributor Road : Planning for this road is proceeding well and it is still hoped that work can commence in March/April at the start of the new financial year. Compulsory Purchase Orders will have to be pursued to answer some objections to the scheme and arrangements for this are well in hand. This new length of road is absolutely critical to improve Taunton's infrastructure and provide access to the Firepool site and the East Goods Yard and does need constructing in a timely manner to avoid constraints on development of the sites around.

4. Broadband Issues

4.1 The good news is that installation by BT in Taunton has commenced and will be ongoing from late November for completion by March 2012. This delivers "fibre to the cabinet" and they will be planning and working on "fibre to the premises" for certain properties thereafter. The fibre to the cabinet next generation access product delivers a superfast broadband service and fibre to the premises even higher speeds. We can look forward to fibre to the cabinet delivering up to 40 Mbs and BT advise this is increasing to up to 80 Mbs soon.

4.2 BDUK Broadband Initiative : This is a Somerset and Devon County Council bid for Government funding to invest in rural broadband in which they have successfully secured a £32,000,000 award. They are on track to seek competitive tenders in 2012 with work on the ground starting in 2013 and projected completion in 2015. The aim is to cover 100% of the County with at least 2 Mbs and 85% of the area receiving "superfast". This major upgrade for our rural areas is to be welcomed and it can only be good for our future economic development.

5. Future Initiatives

5.1 Promotion of Firepool Site : Now having commenced the first major building on the Firepool site a concerted effort is under way to promote the location to other businesses through our partners, St Modwen and the Project Taunton Team. This is resulting in a number of possibilities and our energies and resources are directed at securing confirmed deals.

5.2 With the creation of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) there are opportunities to bid for funds that promote the creation of jobs and improve the economy. We are working closely with the LEP representatives to identify suitable investment that would attract these funds. In some instances this means working closely with Somerset County Council to agree and identify projects that are jointly supported as being absolutely essential to promote housing or economic growth in the area. Junction 25 of the M5 and the A358 upgrade immediately spring to mind and we do need to work with County to ensure this is listed as a priority for them as the Highway Authority.

5.3 We are also working very closely with the owners of the Orchard Centre as regards the potential redevelopment of the area of land and buildings to Mary Street, Taunton. This is looking positive and has exciting potential that could

deliver 250,000 sq ft of new retail space for Taunton and most importantly, support our aim to reinvigorate the High Street by substantially increasing footfall for the retail businesses.

6. My thanks to you all

- 6.1 Being the pre-Christmas meeting may I wish you all my sincere and best wishes for the festive season and a happy and healthy New Year. We are experiencing the most difficult of times with reductions in funding services and can I offer my thanks to all officers at Taunton Deane for the committed and professional manner with which the necessary changes have and are being dealt. This to me is the true mark of professionalism that maintains delivery of duties as required in the face of adversity.

In this I include Members, who within and without the Council apply themselves to important community issues, my sincere thanks to you all for the commitment and dedication shown.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

Councillor John Williams

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Report of Councillor Mark Edwards - Planning, Transportation and Communications

1. Localism Act

- 1.1 The Localism Act 2011 received Royal Assent on 15 November 2011, with the Government indicating that the majority of its provisions will be in force by April 2012.
- 1.2 The Act is a significant milestone in the Government's localism agenda, which is designed in part to shift power and the decision-making process on a range of matters from Whitehall to the local planning authorities .
- 1.3 In a planning context, the Act now puts on a statutory footing a number of previously well publicised changes such as the Community Infrastructure Levy which is presently going through the consultation process, the Planning Framework which is presently being reviewed after the consultations with details expected in the New Year and in addition the Regional Strategies are now officially abolished under the Act.
- 1.4 Neighbourhood Plans are part of the push towards local involvement in planning decision making. Section 116 of the Act provides the power for local communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. These have to be in accordance with local planning polices and there is clearly an issue surrounding resource and funding but central funding is initially available and we should have an indication soon.
- 1.5 Pre-determination is one area of the act which needs careful consideration as to its impact as it will effectively allow members of the Planning Committee to take part in discussions and presumably express views for or against development prior to the formal debate at the Planning Committee itself.
- 1.6 This is likely to be controversial given that pre-determination and bias has long been a feature of many judicial review actions where Members appear to approach the decision making process with a 'closed mind'. It will be interesting therefore to see whether the courts seek to impose limitations on the scope of this power; particularly where an application is controversial or raises matters of significant public interest. This is an area that needs discussing with the Chairman of Planning, the Council's Legal officer and others to assess how this progresses within the framework and the detail of the act.

2. Taunton Deane Core Strategy 2011-2028

- 2.1 Following publication of the Borough Council's Core Strategy Document in July, the Borough Council received around 550 responses from 109 individuals and organisations. These have now been assessed and submitted to the Secretary of State (Planning Inspectorate) together with proposed changes to the Plan arising from this phase of the Plan's preparation.
- 2.2 A number of key issues have been 'flagged' for likely consideration by the appointed Inspector, Mr John Mattocks, including the validity of strategic housing targets, phasing of development and the allocation of the proposed Urban Extension at Monkton Heathfield. It is anticipated that the Examination into the Core Strategy will be held in February 2012.
- 2.3 Copies of the Core Strategy and the 'Submission Report', detailing representations received on the Plan and suggested changes are available for inspection in The Deane House, public libraries and on line through following the weblink:- <http://consultldf.tauntondeane.gov.uk/portal> and also in the Members Room in The Deane House.

3. Highway Network: Winter Services 2011/2012

- 3.1 Somerset Highways has just issued a guide to winter services in Somerset. The County Council is responsible for maintenance on all highways in Somerset, excluding the trunk road network (M5, A303 and A36), which is the responsibility of the Highways Agency.
- 3.2 Winter maintenance is carried out in order to assist the safe movement of highway users in conditions of snow and ice. Resources are not available to treat all roads. However, a priority pre-salting network has been defined, based on traffic flows and strategic significance, as follows:-
 - Strategic and County Routes;
 - Freight Routes;
 - Links to Emergency Locations;
 - Links to Adjoining Counties;
 - Links to Major Settlements;
 - Links to settlements above 500 feet; and
 - Links to Urban/Rural Schools (Major)

4. The Public Art Panel

- 4.1 The Public Art Panel has been reconvened following the departure of the Community Arts Officer in April 2010 as part of the Core Council Review. The Panel has new membership and met in September and November 2011.
- 4.2 The Panel will act as an information and advice source, sounding board and public art ideas generator for Taunton Deane. It will be able to develop projects and initiatives and will advise other commissioners.
- 4.3 It will be pro-active and help instigate and comment on public art approaches, not just proposals and projects. It will have the capacity to bring together all the interested but disparate parties who may not usually have a forum in which to meet, for example Project Taunton, Taunton Deane (officers and elected Members), Somerset County Council, Civic Society, arts and educational organisations, community partnerships and others. It can act as a Champion and driver for quality public art and take an informed overview across Taunton, whilst also acting as a conduit and catalyst for shared resources and joint learning
- 4.4 As part of the resurrection of the group, new terms of reference have been agreed and the Panel will:-
- Provide advice on the implementation of the Public Art Code and River Routes Rail;
 - Review development proposals and discuss any pre-application negotiations in line with the recommendations of the Code;
 - Assess the public art plans required by developers on key schemes and check them against the Code;
 - Recommend schemes or designs to go to Design Review Panel;
 - Identify key issues relating to the strategic development and marketing of public art and its contribution to Taunton Deane;
 - Ensure feedback within the Council's own departments, external organisations and sectors regarding the opportunities for public art within and between local activities and their own developments;
 - Monitor progress of all public art plan activities through regular (minimum quarterly) meetings and reports;
 - As appropriate and/or required by other panels, assess and advise on public artwork proposals;
 - Review and advise on artist briefs and short listed artists;
 - Continue to update and refresh members' knowledge through 'Go and See', knowledge transfer and capacity building;
 - Seek to secure future resources in order to embed public art activity within Taunton Deane Borough Council and continue the operation of the Panel;
 - Undertake and audit and create a register of existing public art work;
 - When required provide advice on artistic and cultural value of existing public art collection;

- Provide advice on priorities for adoption and maintenance funding allocation;
- Provide advice on removal, relocation, sales or disposal of public art (de-accessioning);
- Provide advice on public art proposals from external groups or individuals; and
- Ensure that work is documented and available for general access.

5. County-wide Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) Project

- 5.1 Work has been continuing on this project since reports came before Scrutiny and Executive last October. There have been some difficulties resulting in the proposed implementation date being put back several times. The other four Districts are now signed up to the principle of the County Council extending CPE into their areas. Like ourselves, Mendip, Sedgemoor and West Somerset will purchase off-street enforcement in car parks from the County Council. This will be the reverse of the present situation here. South Somerset have chosen to continue enforcing in their car parks themselves.
- 5.2 The County Council is inviting tenders for the work, which will include initial call handling and appeal processing, this month. The programme calls for a Service Provider to be appointed by the end of February with the new arrangements starting in June 2012.

6. RingGO

- 6.1 RingGo is the most widely available phone parking service in the UK - offered in 160 towns and cities nationwide.
- 6.2 The company recently introduced a smartphone app and a comparison of data across the 64 local authorities that feature RingGo, shows quite substantial variations in the adoption and usage of the app as a method of paying to park by mobile phone. However Taunton Deane is amongst the top five in the Country.
- 6.3 RingGo is popular with motorists right across the district. More than 10,000 parking sessions each month are paid this way with hundreds of new users joining monthly.

7. Electric Charging points

- 7.1 Project Taunton funded two Electric Charging Points in the Park Ride and this is starting to prove to be a well used facility.

- 7.2 They have two further charging posts available and initial work is being progressed on getting the necessary survey work progressed to get them sited.
- 7.3 It is most likely we will be putting them in Canon Street Car Park near the public toilets and further information will be available shortly.

8. Communications

- 8.1 This has been a busy period for communications with plans for the Olympic Torch Relay progressing and some significant external stories which required immediate responses.
- 8.2 The terrible crash on the M5 Motorway led to a national focus on Taunton Deane Borough Council with contact from virtually every national news outlet as well as the regional and local media.
- 8.3 The pressure remained for most of the week, from the immediate aftermath of the crash to the vigil at Hankridge. The Leader of the Council and the Mayor were the main spokesmen for the Borough Council and their help was invaluable.
- 8.4 The closure of Castle Green Car Park also prompted a great deal of activity, culminating in a feature on parking and its availability in Deane Dispatch.
- 8.5 The Council is also leading on a campaign to save local BBC broadcasting on Medium Wave in the face of proposed cuts by the Corporation. We are working jointly with West Somerset.
- 8.6 In November I held a meeting with the BBC regarding the Torch Relay and their involvement. We have further meetings arranged but it seems likely that the BBC will be concentrating on Taunton's hosting of the Torch with recorded and live interviews.
- 8.7 Future work includes looking at the use of social media – principally Facebook and Twitter – and the potential of developing a smart-phone app which is already being progressed.
- 8.8 I wish to thank Debbie Rundle for the enormous effort and advice that she gave at the time of the M5 accident. She was diligent and highly professional in very challenging circumstances.

Councillor Mark Edwards

Council Meeting – 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington – Community Leadership

1. Police Reform

- 1.1 The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill has now become an Act. People will go to the polls on Thursday 15 November next year to vote for a Police and Crime Commissioner for Avon and Somerset. Final details of the process, election and panels have yet to be announced.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane will be asked to nominate a Councillor to sit on the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) one of ten local authority representatives from across the area plus two independent Members co-opted by the panel. There will be a requirement for political balance amongst elected Members.
- 1.3 Avon and Somerset Police Authority have established a Transition Board to oversee implementation of changes arising from the Act and to enable the smooth and effective transition to new arrangements.
- 1.4 A Members' Briefing is proposed before the election.
- 1.5 Please refer to www.aspola.org.uk/index.aspx?p=214 for more details.

2. Community Policing Awards

- 2.1 There is still time to send in nominations to the Avon and Somerset Police Authority where you feel Officers have served the community especially well. Forms are available either on line from www.communitypolicingawards.org.uk or by telephoning 01275 816386 or a form from the Authority's HQ at Portishead, BS20 8JJ.

3. Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board

- 3.1 Somerset County Council has set up the shadow Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) which had its inaugural meeting at the end of October.
- 3.2 Councillor Vivienne Stock-Williams is one of the two district council representatives on this (with Councillor Sylvia Seal of South Somerset District Council) which will lead into the fully constituted decision-making board by April 2013. Councillor Andrew Govier is attending

these meetings as an observer. An Executive Officer Group has been set up to support the interim board.

4. North Taunton and Taunton East

- 4.1 The Priority Areas Strategy continues to gather momentum. Work is well underway to develop the content of a draft Action Plan for both areas. The challenge is to develop one that meets the priorities identified by both the communities and partner agencies.
- 4.2 The Action Plan (draft) is likely to contain three elements:-
1. Strategic Projects (medium to long term);
 2. Thematic Projects (medium to long term); AND
 3. Quick Wins.
- 4.3 Strategic Projects include (among others): working with troubled/high contact families (Community Budgets bid into Government), smarter use of capital assets (Capital Asset Pathfinder) and the proposed regeneration of a part of Halcon (Halcon Regeneration Scheme).
- 4.4 Thematic Projects are those considered to be ongoing such as improved access to services and information, mentoring, volunteering, enterprise and development, community safety, money management and health. This range of projects will be led by various partners.
- 4.5 Quick Wins will include (among others) a coordinated approach to tackling litter and dog fouling (an issue that is high on the communities list of priorities).
- 4.6 The draft Action Plan will be considered initially by the following:-
- Taunton Deane Partnership (TDP) : 13 December 2011; and
 - The Community Scrutiny Committee : 10 January 2012.
- 4.7 Following Community Scrutiny, the final phase of consultation will be with the North Taunton and Halcon MAGs (Multi-Agency Groups), the North Taunton Partnership and Link Partnership, various other community groups, residents and key partners (public and voluntary sectors). Their feedback will be used to refine the Action Plan which will then be considered for approval during spring 2012 and subsequent implementation.

5. Rural Areas

- 5.1 Following preparation of benchmarking reports and initial consultation with Members (Community Scrutiny – August 2011) and the Parish and Town Councils (currently continuing), work on the Rural Priority Area is

now at a stage where priorities need to be identified. These will be a mix of thematic such as access to services (an important issue across the rural areas of Taunton Deane) and geographic focusing on particular settlements.

- 5.2 To help identify draft priorities, Somerset County Council and TDP are being consulted. There are number of strategic initiatives that need to be considered including the Somerset County Council Change Programme and Total Somerset (Improved Customer Access). It is important that the various rural initiatives are integrated to provide coordinated action from the partner agencies.
- 5.3 Members will be kept informed through the Community Scrutiny Committee (10 January 2012).

6. Somerset Business Against Crime partnership

- 6.1 This successful scheme (www.swbac.org.uk) covering the towns within the Somerset West Policing Area (parts of West Somerset, Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane) is being extended to include rural businesses.
- 6.2 The not-for-profit scheme provides a layer below that of the Police (and linked to them) where up to date information may be shared through a secure intranet.
- 6.3 The ability to access a photo gallery of known offenders, be notified of suspect behaviour in an area, read a weekly e-newsletter and share intelligence could be really useful and build up into a decent deterrent.
- 6.4 A Members' Briefing has been requested on this.

7. Green Deal

- 7.1 By next autumn the Government will have introduced the Green Deal.
- 7.2 Chris Huhne (MP and Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change) says the Government aims to see every domestic, community and commercial property insulated to high standards, stopping the enormous waste of energy and money currently lost through leaky roofs, walls and windows.
- 7.3 Householders and businesses will be able to access Green Deal Packages which will mean that the insulation work will be carried out at no upfront cost to them. The companies making the investments will recoup their expenditure over time through a charge on the energy bill, which will be substantially lower as a result.

- 7.4 There will be additional help for low-income groups and hard to treat homes such as those with solid rather than cavity walls. (Many older rural properties fall into the latter category).
- 7.5 The arrangement remains with the property not an individual and is not affected by a change in ownership or occupation.
- 7.6 Councillors and local authorities are seen as having a key role to play in encouraging their communities to take up and implement the Green Deal. It all depends on how involved the local council wants to be.
- 7.7 Either simple promotion ensuring local residents and businesses know about the opportunity and helping to steer them towards providers; or engaging in partnerships with national or local contractors to encourage take up more strongly; or becoming a local authority Green Deal provider, raising the finance and carrying out the work.
- 7.8 The list of eligible measures is likely to be long so that the needs of lots of different properties can be met.
- 7.9 For more information visit www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/what%20we%20do/supporting%20consumers/green_deal/1734-what-measures-does-the-green-deal-cover.pdf

8. Passivhaus/passive house

- 8.1 These are the most energy efficient houses built to a high design specification (certified) yet simple in construction resulting in extremely low energy bills and low maintenance.
- 8.2 Exeter City Council has just completed eighteen flats specifically intended to encourage existing tenants to downsize. These were visited by a group of Members and officers from Taunton Deane this autumn.
- 8.3 For more information visit www.passive-on.org/en/planning_package.php
- 8.4 A Members' Briefing has been arranged on this as there is a possible scheme in the pipeline.

Councillor Jane Warmington

Council Meeting - 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor Norman Cavill - Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism

1. Keeping Members informed

1.1 Taunton Deane Economy Bulletin

Quarterly Economic Bulletin produced in September. Now circulated to all Members and business contacts and put on Taunton Deane's website. Any feedback from Members on the usefulness of the Bulletin is welcome.

Monthly Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) Update circulated to Members, giving details of changes to claimant rates locally. In line with national trends the overall figure rose during the Autumn, though it tailed off in October thanks to seasonal recruitment.

1.2 Staffing Issues

The team now comprises 3.5 staff members. In anticipation of the Theme 5 Review the team is working closer with Project Taunton.

2. Theme 1 Stimulating Business Growth and Investment

2.1 Business Liaison

The Business Team has continued to undertake a proactive programme of visits to larger local businesses with the aim of assisting businesses to realise their growth and investment plans. During the year to date the team has visited around 30 businesses.

The following organisations have been met on a 1:1 basis during the past two months and currently being supported include:-

- APR Media, Wellington
- Somerset Tourism Association
- CMS Developments
- Pitman Training, Taunton
- Rumwell Hall, Bishop's Hull
- The Beehive Nursery, Bishop's Hull
- The HR Department, Taunton
- Performance Driven, Priorswood
- Taunton Town Football Club
- RiVO Partners, Taunton
- Boldscan, Wellington
- Traders in The Courtyard, Taunton

- Tacchi Morris Arts Centre, Taunton
- West Somerset Railway
- Mill Meadow, Kingston St Mary

2.2 Rural Post Offices

Work is continuing assisting these businesses. A web site is being worked on, which will link to the Council's web page. After this initial investment, the businesses will be able to enhance and update their own site (at their own expense).

The Council also supported a training event in November for rural Post Offices at Dillington House.

2.3 Business Events

Wellington Business Event

The local Chamber of Commerce decided not to progress the business event planned for 10 November 2011 at The Rugby Club. An alternative event is now planned for February 2012 to showcase Wellington businesses. Officers attended the Wellington Chamber AGM in November.

Tourism Event

Plans are in the pipeline for a Tourism event to be held in Taunton Deane in Spring 2012, organised by Taunton Deane Borough Council. The team is currently looking for a suitable venue.

2.4 Support for Rural Business Projects

We have been assisting South West Internet to enable them to continue the provision of Broadband services to their customers in Taunton Deane. SWI provide wireless broadband services to many rural locations presently not serviced by BT. It is also unlikely that alternative services will be available in the short term of the broadband speed that SWI can provide.

LARC: Levels and Moors and Western areas LARC open for new applications for business projects; Blackdown Hills fully committed. Hoped there will be a successor to the LARC programme in 2014... no details known yet

Making the Links- £1,000 funding offered to a rural business mentor scheme in the Western part of the Borough.

2.5 Stimulating Enterprise amongst Young People

The Council has contracted once again with BIS – Business Initiative in Schools – to offer learning and support to young people in Taunton schools to create new businesses. Members will recall that last year the initiative gave Taunton the accolade of being the Regional Winner of the UK Enterprising Town competition.

3. Theme 2 Ensuring a Skilled and Entrepreneurial workforce

3.1 Job Clubs for long term unemployed people

The Somerset Charity, ViSTA, has been appointed by the team to enhance Taunton Deane's three Job Clubs in Halcon, Priorswood, and Wellington. ViSTA has significant expertise in providing learning and development to charities and community organizations and is experienced in delivering Community Learning and Job Clubs. The Taunton Deane project, titled 'Breakthrough' aims to

- Support people who want to work to get into work; and
- Encourage employers to provide breakthrough opportunities for unemployed people.

People living in Taunton Deane who are looking for work or a career change will have access to the project, with support available via the Job clubs or Individual support or coaching sessions. The Breakthrough team will give one to one support with job search including:-

- CV Writing;
- Job searching;
- Job applications;
- Interview techniques and practice; and
- Meeting employers.

3.2 Client Based Approach to Construction Skills

Having agreed to take on Approved Client status in securing apprenticeships and other learning opportunities in major construction projects, officers are working with Somerset County Council to progress the programme.

4. Theme 3 Creating an Attractive Business Environment

4.1 Business Case Studies

In October the team produced the Taunton Deane Business Case Studies,

focusing on successful local businesses in the food and drink sector. As a result of the publicity one of the businesses included, Sheppy's Cider, will be featured in one of the regional newspapers. The Case Studies are produced bi-monthly, each one focussing on a different business sector, and highlighting the Taunton Deane's success in hosting growing, dynamic and innovative businesses.

4.2 Taunton Town Centre Company and BID Programme

The first Christmas shopping day culminated with aerial displays including the Marines and finishing with the switching on of the Christmas lights and a fireworks display. This event was a great success, a family event which increased the footfall in the town. The Orchard Shopping Centre recorded one of its highest footfall days and a smiling manager reported that customers were not only walking though, but also carrying shopping bags.

Matt has been working with Project Taunton and TTCCo on new signage and information points, which should be installed by the end of March.

The Council, at Member and officer level through the Economic Development Team, is an active member of the Town Centre Company, working closely on specific events (such as the Tour of Britain and the Olympic Torch Relay) as well as coordinating the provision of town centre services.

Planning and preparations are currently underway for the BID ballot to enable a second BID term from September 2012. An extensive consultation project is currently underway to inform a Draft BID Business Plan, which will be issued later this month, prior to its adoption in the New Year. Working with the Council's Elections Team, the company is planning to hold the BID ballot in March or April.

4.3 Events Toolkit

The team is currently progressing a project to assist in the coordination and marketing of cultural events in Taunton. The toolkit will contain all of the information an event organiser will need to hold a successful event in Taunton Deane. The toolkit will be presented on both a website and a leaflet. The other main function of the website will be an events calendar, coordinating all of the events taking place in Taunton Deane.

5. Taunton Tourism Information, Ticket and Travel Centre (TIC)

5.1 Visitor numbers and spend

Continuing the trend of previous months, TIC visitor numbers have been holding up but there has been a decrease in customer spend especially with large value sales such as hotel and theatre packages.

The change in Library opening hours in October (the library now closes on a Monday) has not had a significant impact on visitors or customer spend in the TIC, indeed some Monday's are now busier than before the change took place.

The Cards for Good Causes Charity Christmas Shop is now in full swing and will remain open at the TIC until 23 December 2011. In addition to the cards from 25 national charities, cards are also on sale for League of Friends Musgrove Park Hospital, St Margaret's Hospice and Taunton Women's Aid.

5.2 Promotional activities

Bakers Dolphin hosted a coffee morning at the TIC to launch their new Summer holiday brochure.

The National Trust has a representative from the Somerset Countryside section in the office each week promoting the Trust and the sale of membership.

Taunton Deane Nurseries are promoting and selling Christmas plants and holly wreaths in the TIC, with next season's plants due on sale in the spring 2012.

Meetings have been held with the Somerset Tourism Association and Tacchi Morris Arts Centre to discuss further ways we could work together, raising collective profiles and increasing business.

5.3 New activities planned

The TIC team will be working with colleagues in Economic Development and Taunton Town Centre Company on various initiatives to promote the area during 2012.

The TIC lead will continue working with the Somerset Tourism Association to improve the information held on the area on the official Somerset Tourism website www.visitsomerset.co.uk.

The TIC team will also be working with other TIC's in the South West to share best practice and increase income streams in the centre.

I would like to take the opportunity of wishing you all a Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Councillor Norman Cavill

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Report of Councillor Ken Hayward – Environmental Services and Climate Change

1. Waste Management

- 1.1 On the morning of the recent industrial action, May Gurney reported that all trucks were deployed as normal. So as far as I am aware, there was no disruption to this particular public service on the day. The workforce was not balloted but there was a question of potential disruption at shared depots in Bridgwater and Yeovil. This was not an issue on the morning. Similarly, the Recycling Centres were unaffected.
- 1.2 As time goes by and as landfill levies increase, so it becomes more and more important that the Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) looks for viable alternatives to taking our residual wastes (i.e. those that are not recyclable) to landfill.
- 1.3 One such alternative is that of incineration. Such technology has of course been around for a very long time. But in more recent years, rather than simply allowing the heat to go up the chimney, the energy is now harnessed and converted to electricity. The so-called “Energy From Waste” (EFW) plants.
- 1.4 Taunton based Viridor has secured planning permission (after initial rejection) to build and operate such a facility at Severn Road, Avonmouth, which will be able to separate large volumes of recyclable material and also process up to 350,000 tonnes of residual waste a year. Some of which, it is hoped, will be streamed from Somerset). The company still needs to obtain a permit from the Environment Agency to operate the plant but has begun clearing the site ahead of construction early next year.
- 1.5 Councillor Alan Wedderkopp and I accepted an invitation from Viridor to join others from the SWP on a visit to their Lakeside EFW facility near Slough. The plant uses a mass-burn process to generate high temperatures that are then used to produce high pressure steam. The steam in turn drives a turbine to produce electricity. Residues and flue gases are carefully treated to minimise the release of environmental pollutants.
- 1.6 The impressive plant has the capacity to consume 410,000 tonnes of household and municipal waste per year and export at least 34 Mega Watts per hour onto the National Grid system. This process diverts over 95% of waste from landfill. The facility has also been designed so that off-site district heating (Combined Heat and Power) can be provided to local consumers in the future.

2. Environmental Health Teams

- 2.1 Charlotte Dale and two other officers are heavily involved in the investigations

into the tragic M5 accident on the evening of the 4 November 2011, and will be for some months to come.

- 2.2 Through the resultant temporary redeployment within the Section, the Food, Health and Safety team is at half strength, which makes achieving any statutory targets very difficult. This in turn will have a big impact on our ongoing food inspection programme. So I have carefully considered Charlotte's recommendation and I am sure that Members will understand my decision to employ a contractor to help by carrying out some inspections.

Environmental Health Gas Safe Checks

- 2.3 Since the initial pilot project in May 2011, the Council's Environmental Health Team continue to carry out checks on catering and food businesses across the Borough to ensure that gas appliances are safe to use.
- 2.4 To date 15 businesses have been found to be using gas equipment that is faulty. Following routine food and health and safety inspections, officers have issued 13 Prohibition Notices to immediately prevent the use of appliances due to them presenting an imminent risk to health. Also 31 Improvement Notices have been served on business where there was no evidence of the safe installation or maintenance or where defects in gas appliances have been identified.
- 2.5 Furthermore, the Council is currently progressing enforcement action against a business where the issued Prohibition Notice was ignored by the owner of the business who continued to use the appliance thereby compromising the safety of himself, his employees and his customers.
- 2.6 In this challenging economic climate, the emphasis of the checks continues to be support and advice from the officers to ensure businesses are aware of the requirement to maintain their appliances and find a gas safe registered fitter. However, if dangerous appliances are found then officers will be requiring action to be taken to make the equipment safe.
- 2.7 Environmental Health will be sending out letters within the next couple of weeks to all relevant food businesses to highlight the requirement that they should ensure that all their gas appliances are installed and maintained in a safe manner. This will hopefully raise awareness and ensure that gas appliances are checked and certificated by a commercial gas engineer prior to officer inspections.

3. Climate Change / Carbon Management

- 3.1 I reported at the last Full Council meeting that we were assessing the merits of installing solar PV panels on the roof of Taunton Swimming Pool. Initial thoughts centred on an installation of 36kW providing an 11.59% pa return on an installation investment of around £100,000. I reported that to maximise on the Government's Feed In Tariff the installation would have to be up and running by the end of March 2012.

- 3.2 Members will be aware that at the end of October the Government published a consultation document that proposes to reduce the generation tariff for an installation of this size from 32.9p to 15.2p. Further, that the changes come into effect for all installations registered after midnight on 11 December 2011. A previously tight, now impossible, timetable. Suppliers have reduced prices by up to 20%, which helps. But they are too busy fulfilling orders to install before 12 December to be progressing new work just at the moment. Once this deadline has passed, we can look again at the options open to us.
- 3.3 The cost and risks for our proposed installation of solar PV on Council Houses lies with the supplier, with Taunton Deane gaining some income. Early market testing is suggesting that an income stream is likely to be still on offer to the Council albeit lower than previously. Again, once the 12 December deadline has passed, we will continue our market testing over the coming weeks, and will hopefully have a clearer idea then on how we may progress.

4. Crematorium

- 4.1 In praise of the Wesley System - a letter: *"My Mum recently died, and we held the service at the Crematorium. My daughter lives in New Zealand and we were able to link to her so that she could see the service live. What a wonderful system this is. My sister and I would like to thank you for offering this facility, which enabled Louise to feel part of the service; it must be a great comfort to a lot of people."*
- 4.2 As previously reported, the programme to install three new cremators and mercury filtration equipment remains on schedule with installation beginning early in 2012.

All that remains is for me to wish everyone a well earned rest over the Christmas period. A time to recharge batteries - ready for the extremely challenging times ahead of us!

Councillor Ken Hayward

Council Meeting - 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor Mrs Catherine Herbert – Sport, Parks and Leisure

1. Parks

- 1.1 The Mayor and Deputy Mayor were both kind enough to carry out the raising of the Green Flags recently, and for once we did not get too wet or snowed upon!
- 1.2 Water features in the parks have been switched off for the winter to protect their pumps and pipes from the cold weather. We are talking with the manufacturer of the water pump at the Vivary Play area to ensure it is fit for purpose as we have had so many breakages in its short life already. We hope that once remedied this will stop the issues we have had this year.
- 1.3 Longrun Meadows – A new footpath has been installed.

2. Community Leisure and Play

Community Leisure

- 2.1 The Christmas edition of The Deano has is being produced ready to send every primary school aged child in Taunton Deane, plus libraries and sports centres. A copy will also be published on the Council web site.
- 2.2 The Friends of Vivary Park, assisted by Taunton Deane will hold the annual Carols Around the Bandstand in the Park on Sunday, 18 December 2011.

Capital Grant Schemes

2.3 Grants to Clubs and Community Halls:-

- Stoke St Mary Village Hall has successfully completed refurbishment works;
- Bishops Lydeard Village Hall is nearing completion of their new kitchen;
- Ash Priors Village Hall has completed their car park;
- Fitzhead Tithe Barn has completed works on the roof; and
- West Bagborough and Langford Budville continue to make progress with their schemes.

2.4 Parish Play Area Grant Scheme:-

- West Buckland – the new slide has been installed; and
- Otterford – works have been completed but are under discussion between the Parish Council and the Parks Department.

Play

- 2.5 A roundabout and climbing wall have been ordered for French Weir Park using developer contributions for the site. The choice of play equipment was made after consultation by the Friends of French Weir Park with children attending their annual family fun day. The equipment is expected to be installed in January.
- 2.6 After a request by local users of Gill Crescent Play Area, Taunton two pieces of under 5's equipment has been installed at the play area. This equipment had been removed under refurbishment schemes elsewhere in Taunton Deane and held in the Depot store. The cost of installation will be met from the Council's Capital Play Equipment Replacement Budget.
- 2.7 Pleased to say the Adsa Green scheme is well underway due to the good weather. We are working with the Police to put in a number of activities once it opens.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Community, Sports and Health Development

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

Health Development

- 3.2 Older People
- 3.2.1 The Development Team have completed Functional Testing and Postural Stability classes at Lodge Close Sheltered Housing Scheme in Wellington for patients referred through the Falls Service.
- 3.2.2 Twelve participants joined in a Seated Football Session held at Priorswood's Older People's Club.
- 3.3 Weight Management
- 3.3.1 Tone submitted a bid for the NHS Community Pounds Project and was successful in winning funding for Priorswood Community Group. This initiative commenced in October and will run for six months at St. James Street Baths.

3.3.2 During October Tone launched the Go Fat Go Weight Management Programme for National Health Service staff at Musgrove Park Hospital. Due to popular demand an additional course has now been scheduled.

3.4 Walking for Health in Taunton and Wellington

3.4.1 Tone's team of volunteers expanded in October when ten people successfully completed the one day training course to become Volunteer Walk Leaders for Tone's Walking for Health Schemes. Over 80% of the individuals started volunteering immediately afterwards on the existing schemes in Taunton and Wellington, which continue to grow in popularity with in excess of 150 participations per week.

3.5 Physical Activity to Promote Mental Health

3.5.1 Tone supported the national Time to Change campaign (Let's End Mental Health Discrimination) on 10 October 2011 at Wellsprings Leisure Centre. An afternoon of activities was provided free of charge thanks to funding from NHS Somerset and included short taster sessions of Boxercise and Hot Cycling. Free seven day passes were given out to all attendees.

Facility News

3.6 Taunton Pool

3.6.1 Refurbishment work was undertaken during October and November in all three of the changing rooms at Taunton Swimming Pool. All the existing lockers were removed and replaced with new units. The changing room ceiling was also decorated, giving the changing facilities a fresh and clean feeling.

3.6.2 Procurement of a new lift has commenced with Southwest One.

3.7 Wellington Sports Centre

3.7.1 Wellington has formed a partnership with the Wellington Badminton Network due for launch in 2012. The next stage to this partnership will see a number of leagues established at the centre. Also Wellington is now part of the Children's Centre Advisory Board to promote more activities throughout the centre.

3.8 Wellsprings Leisure Centre

3.8.1 Wellsprings has been working with the Sports Development Organisation 'Sported'. The team have decided to nominate Wellsprings as the centre for volleyball in and around Taunton. Their aim is to move the junior operations to Wellsprings, linking it to the same night as the adult session. This would also act as a pathway of progression for junior development.

3.8.2 Taunton Academy - Phase One plans have been presented to Tone, other partners and the community of North Taunton. Tone are working with the

Academy to ensure the new campus best serves the students' and the community's needs.

3.8.3 Spray Tanning - At the beginning of November sunless tanning was introduced at Wellsprings Leisure Centre. The VersaSpa tanning booth gives customers an even, flawless tan in a matter of minutes in complete privacy, eliminating the feeling of intimidation that some customers may feel when being sprayed by somebody.

3.9 Blackbrook Pavilion

3.9.1 Two new exercise classes are being introduced into the Health and Fitness programme - Skiptrix began in September and Boxercise classes will take place from January 2012.

3.9.2 Blackbrook has started to use a new computer programme, Course Pro, which is already widely used for Swimskool at sites with swimming pools. At Blackbrook it is being utilised for tennis courses.

3.9.3 The Taunton 10k took place at the end of September; another successful year with 650 runners participating.

3.10 Taunton Tennis Centre

3.10.1 A number of tennis coaches are playing an integral role in delivering an outreach tennis programme to the children of St. George's School. This after school club programme will also act as a pathway to Tone's main tennis programme.

4. Swimming Pool Project

4.1 A project plan is currently being drawn up and we hope to bring an update on this to Members very shortly.

Merry Christmas to you and all your families.

Councillor Catherine Herbert.

Council Meeting – 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins – Housing Services

1. Empty Homes and New Homes Bonus

- 1.1 The 5 – 9 December 2011 was National Empty Homes week and the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) marked this by staging pop-up exhibitions in the area. As this goes to press, the Empty Homes Officer, Nick Jobson, who is based at Sedgemoor District Council, will be in Reception at The Deane House with the Exhibition.
- 1.2 A press release was issued to mark this detailing the successes of the Partnership this year with nearly 200 properties brought back into use, some 50 being in Taunton Deane.
- 1.3 Apart from the obvious benefit of providing additional homes, this brings in more New Homes Bonus: the provisional figure for Taunton Deane is 65% higher in Year 2 than Year 1, with credit being given for 45 net additional Empty Homes brought back into use which has contributed significantly to the improvement.
- 1.4 Our performance was the highest improvement in Somerset, with additional credit of £350 per unit on Affordable Homes and caravan Pitches totalling 238.

2. Landlords' Forum and the Landlord Accreditation Scheme

- 2.1 Before this meeting, I hope to have attended the Landlords' Forum event which the SWPSHP is hosting at the County Cricket Ground this evening.
- 2.2 There will be presentations and stalls providing information on various topics, including Empty Homes, benefit changes and energy efficiency, as well as the Landlord Accreditation scheme which our partners operate and we hope to introduce in Taunton Deane, subject to Budget setting as some capital funding would be needed.

3. HRA 30 Year Business Plan and Self-Financing

- 3.1 The Plan is still being developed, version five having been brought to Executive on 7 December 2011 with a number of recommendations,

including four strategic objectives for Housing, which are broadly in line with the Council's Corporate Aims.

- 3.2 Self-financing will go ahead as the Localism Bill has now been enacted. The final settlement figure has not been received at the time of writing, but the latest provisional figure was better than expected.

4. Estates Team and Anti-social Behaviour (ASB)

- 4.1 We continue to receive regular monthly updates on ASB at Housing Briefings which is attended by the Chairmen of the Tenant Services Management Board and the Tenants' Forum.
- 4.2 We have sent a response to the Government consultation on the new mandatory power of possession, which could help speed up evictions for Anti-Social Behaviour as once a conviction had been obtained, a Possession Order could be applied for and the court would be obliged to grant it.

5. Solar Panel Project

- 5.1 Unfortunately the project to lease roofspace on suitable Council Houses to generate electricity for the Feed-in Tariff had a setback when the Government brought forward the deadline for reducing the tariff. This does, however, mean that we no longer have such a tight deadline to work to and can wait to see how the market develops.

6. Annual Servicing and Maintenance Contract

- 6.1 Expressions of interest were received from 14 companies and those shortlisted are being visited. The deadline for tender submissions is now 6 January 2012, after which interviews will be held.

7. Halcon Regeneration Project

Since my last report to Council, the decision to move on to the next stage of this Project was recommended by the Community Scrutiny Committee and taken by the Executive and then called in. Community Scrutiny considered the call-in and recommended no further action, so the decision stands.

There is no further update at the time of writing.

8. Affordable Homes

- 8.1 There were 58 completions confirmed to the end of September and around 40 expected in the last two months. The total completions in the pipeline, if achieved, could exceed our target of 200, with 95 due at Canalside, Firepool Lock in March 2012.
- 8.2 Lesley Webb-Crookes arranged for some tenants of Victoria Gate, Taunton to visit the nearly completed development by Knightstone at Wordsworth Drive, as these are similar apartments and I accompanied them.
- 8.3 The tenants were much impressed with the standard of finish and particularly the layout and facilities provided in those for disabled use, including a sink which could be raised and lowered.
- 8.3 I have agreed to the revision of the existing Affordable Housing Partnership with Housing Associations, through a formal tendering process.

May I take this opportunity to wish a Happy Christmas and New Year to my fellow Councillors, Officers and our Tenants.

Councillor Mrs Jean Adkins

Council Meeting - 13 December 2011

Report of Councillor Mrs Vivienne Stock-Williams, Corporate Resources

1. Customer Contact Centre

Customer Service

- 1.1 Southwest One (SW1) Customer Contact Centre continued to provide very good service for Taunton Deane in September and October. Performance was, however, hindered by a number of factors, both ICT and staffing related, which caused the service to miss one of their Key Performance Indicators – Abandonment Rate. Customer satisfaction continues to remain high with levels for the year to date running at 98.8%.

Staff Development

- 1.2 All members of the Customer Contact Team are in the process of attending a two-day specifically designed “Delivering Customer Excellence” course.
- 1.3 Due to the nature of the Contact Centre work and the need to cover the service adequately, the course which started in September runs mid-week and will continue until the end of February 2012 to ensure all team members have been included. Annual refreshers will then be held to ensure skills development.
- 1.4 In addition, the team is about to embark on an innovative “buddying” programme for new starters, whereby trained advisers will be guiding them through their early months with the team.

Service Delivery

- 1.5 Service delivery is provided in the following management information:-

Statistical Information:

Service Line	Reporting Authority	KPI No	Performance Measure	Frequency of Reporting	2011/2012 Target	Sep-11	Oct-11
Customer Contact	TDBC	1	% of calls answered in 20 secs	Monthly	80%	80%	80%
Customer Contact	TDBC	2	% of calls resolved at first point of contact	Monthly	91%	96%	95%
Customer Contact	TDBC	3	% of external customers rating the Customer Contact service as Very Good/Good	Annually (monitored quarterly)	73.5%	98.8%	
Customer Contact	TDBC	4	Abandoned call rate - less than 5%	Monthly	<5%	5.88%	4.80%

- 1.6 A total of 6,279 enquiries have been dealt with at The Deane House Main, Housing and Planning Receptions over the past two months. In addition, there have been over 3,500 requests for signposting and visitors for meetings. 4,089 people visited Wellington Community Office – 2,401 to make enquiries including TIC and 1,688 to make a payment through the kiosk. Staff have dealt with 674 letter and email enquiries during this time.
- 1.7 There were no complaints about the service during September and one formal compliment (other than comments left on customer satisfaction survey forms). The system operates approximately one month in arrears and therefore final October information is not yet available.
- 1.8 The service has an agreed Business Plan with the Authority and is continuing to work with ICT to determine how the delivery requirements for the years ahead will be achieved – including self serve, automation for payments and switchboard plus enhanced reporting and quality monitoring. It is expected that new systems will be implemented during Quarter 3 of next year following work on the Somerset County Council switch equipment, although preparatory work with the preferred supplier and ICT has already started.

Christmas Opening

- 1.9 As in previous years since the service became part of Southwest One, Customer Contact staff will be providing a telephone service between Christmas and New Year.
- 1.10 The Centre will, therefore, be open from 8-6pm on Wednesday 28, Thursday 29 and Friday 30 December. In addition, the service remains open until 6pm on Friday 22ⁿ December (the remainder of the Authority closes at 1pm). This is a reduced service based on the fact that back offices will be closed, but it gives customers the ability to continue to receive an excellent transactional and information service over the holiday week.
- 1.11 For the first time, the opening of Wellington Community Office between Christmas and New Year is being trialled. Thus, the customers of Wellington and the surrounding area will also be provided with a face to face service during this period.

2. Legal and Democratic Services

The Localism Act 2011

- 2.1 The big news is that the Localism Act was given Royal Assent on 15 November 2011. We have not yet, however, had any commencement orders to bring the Act into force. It is understood that part of the Act will be brought into force in January 2012, with the bulk of it coming into force in April 2012.
- 2.2 Unfortunately, little has been forthcoming in the way of consultation or draft regulations. It is anticipated that the draft regulations will not be sighted until about six weeks before they need to be brought into force. Officers will be going through the Act to give Members an update during the coming months.

- 2.3 Last minute changes have been made to the Standards regime which will have implications for the Authority. A clearer picture will emerge once those draft regulations are received, so there will be pressure put on officers to get things in place at the due time.

Theme 5 and the Review of Legal and Democratic Services

- 2.4 The report of the Legal and Democratic Services Manager on Theme 5 and the review of Legal and Democratic Services went to Corporate Scrutiny on 24 November 2011 and Members gave their views.
- 2.5 The consultation period on these proposed changes will run until the 11 January 2012. The report will then be presented to Executive on the 9 February 2012 with a final decision being made at Full Council on the 22 February 2012.

Youth Liaison Group

- 2.6 The Legal and Democratic Services Manager has been undertaking a review of the Youth Liaison Group following a request to look at its viability and whether it should be formalised. Feedback has now been received from the relevant agencies and a report will be presented to Community Scrutiny shortly.

Remembrance Sunday

- 2.7 The Mayor and Mayoress again led the commemoration of the fallen from previous wars on Armistice Day and on Remembrance Sunday, both in Taunton and in Wellington. All these events seemed to attract even more people than in previous years.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee

- 2.8 A second meeting was held on Monday, 28 November 2011, to discuss plans for events to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in early June next year.
- 2.9 The meeting heard details of a variety of ideas proposed by representatives from throughout Taunton Deane which, when finalised, will be given publicity through the Council's website and possibly by way of a souvenir brochure.

3. Performance and Client Team

Client Team

- 3.1 The Client Team has continued to monitor closely the performance of the SW1 and Tone Leisure partnerships.
- 3.2 No significant issues have been reported in relation to Tone Leisure. A new-style performance update report for Tone Leisure went to the Community Scrutiny Committee on 29 November 2011. This contained more detailed performance information than in previous reports.

- 3.3 Generally the SW1 services are working well and key performance indicators (KPI's) are being met. However, there have been issues in relation to the ICT service and in areas of the Finance service. The Team is working with SW1 to implement action plans to deliver improvements in these services.

Corporate Performance

- 3.4 The Quarter 2 Corporate Performance and Budget monitoring report is currently working its way through the CMT, Scrutiny and Executive cycle.
- 3.5 The report indicates that the Authority is achieving the majority of its objectives with only a few areas being of significant concern (planning performance – speed of processing 'Major' applications; health and safety inspections; car parking (off street) income; building control income).
- 3.6 The Annual Report for 2010/2011 has also now been published on the Taunton Deane website. We have recently received the Annual Audit Letter from the Audit Commission. This paints a generally good picture and will be taken to the Corporate Governance Committee in December.
- 3.7 Any new actions identified by the Audit Commission will be added to our Corporate Governance Action Plan (to be reported to the Corporate Governance Committee on 12 December). Corporate Risk Management is on track and the next 6-monthly review of the Corporate Risk Register will take place in February and reported to the Corporate Governance Committee in March 2012.

Retained Finance and Corporate Insurance

- 3.8 The Retained Finance Officer continues to provide support to the S151 Officer, the Budget Review Programme, day-to-day management of the retained finance functions and to the Client Team in monitoring the SW1 Finance Service. In addition, work has been undertaken in progressing the treasury management borrowing requirements for the forthcoming Housing Revenue Account reform.
- 3.9 A revised Capital Strategy has been drafted for approval by Members and will go to the Corporate Scrutiny and Executive meetings in November and December 2011. The Fees and Charges report 2012/2013 has been prepared and is currently with Members for consideration and agreement. A report regarding our level of reserves will be going to Members in December.
- 3.10 The Corporate Insurance Officer commenced maternity leave in early July 2011. Cover for the insurance function is being provided by the Insurance Team at Somerset County Council. To date this arrangement is working well.

Retained HR

- 3.11 The Retained HR Manager continues to fulfil the Head of HR Role for the Authority, providing strategic advice for the Authority and Southwest One HR service as required. This role also includes assisting the Client Team in monitoring the delivery of the HR service by Southwest One.

- 3.12 Recently, the focus has been on managing the staffing implications of the budget savings programme, specifically in managing the relationship with Unison, redundancy implications and changes to HR policies. In addition, significant liaison with Unison and planning was required in relation to the public sector strike on 30 November 2011.

4. Revenues and Benefits

Customer Service Award

- 4.1 In October the Revenues and Benefits Service was awarded the prestigious Customer Service Excellence Award in recognition of its high standard of customer service and its commitment to continuous improvement. Customer Service Excellence is the Government's national standard for excellence in customer service. The assessment is undertaken by an independent organisation and approved by the Cabinet Office in Whitehall.
- 4.2 The Customer Service Excellence Award recognises services that put customers at the heart of their services and that focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. The Revenues and Benefits Service achieved full compliance across 59 of the elements required for the Award and three areas were scored as "compliance plus" demonstrating exceptional behaviour or practice. The award lasts for three years with an annual compliance review.

Performance

- 4.3 Processing performance for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit remains steady with the average time from date of receipt to final calculation on new claims and changes of circumstances at 10 calendar days. Council Tax and Business Rate recovery is on track to meet in-year collection performance targets.
- 4.4 In the last two months, there have been several Government consultation exercises on proposals to localise Council Tax Benefit, reform Council Tax discounts and exemptions, amend funding arrangements through changes to Business Rates retention and reform staffing arrangements on investigating benefit fraud.
- 4.5 Members have received information on these proposals through briefings and information provided through the Scrutiny Committees. The next few years will see substantial changes in local taxation and benefits and the service recognises it is imperative Members are kept up to date with information as it becomes available.

5. Southwest One (SW1)

Procurement Savings Progress

- 5.1 The procurement savings project continues to be an area of concern because the savings delivered to date are behind the original forecast. Clearly this is

due in part to the current economic climate and the fact that we are simply spending less.

- 5.2 The Strategic Procurement Service has produced a revised forecast. This revised forecast indicates that, based on current spend, we should be able to achieve savings totalling £6.8m over the lifetime of the project. Whilst this is significantly lower than the £10m originally forecast, this will still allow us to repay the amounts we have borrowed to fund the SW1 transformation projects and leave a surplus.
- 5.3 However, it is now clear that repayment of the amount borrowed will be delayed by two years or so. A report exploring the options available for repaying the borrowings, with a recommended solution, will go before the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in December 2011. Additionally, a detailed progress update report regarding the Procurement Project will be taken to the December Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

SAP Re-launch and Patching

- 5.4 All the business critical elements of SAP have been launched and have been in use for some time. In conjunction with our SW1 partners, we continue to work together to introduce changes, fixes and enhancements to SAP to improve the end user experience.
- 5.5 A list of such items is being tracked weekly by a cross-authority Change Board. The Board is working hard to ensure SAP is made as user friendly as possible and delivers the anticipated benefits to all partners.
- 5.6 At Taunton Deane one particular area of focus is on launching the staff performance appraisal (PREDS) module. Two defects were uncovered during testing, but these have now been fixed. We will shortly start to pilot this module with a view to launching early in the New Year. Progress reports are being made to the Change Members Steering Group.

Councillor Vivienne Stock-Williams