

COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003.

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HALL - RESOURCES

1 E-GOVERNMENT

We have submitted our IEG 3 report to Government, which shows we are on target to meet Government objectives, if funding, is maintained.

In July District Audit undertook a review of our progress towards the 2005 E Government target. They reported as follows “ The results of our questionnaire show that Taunton Deane has made good progress on e-government. Its comparative position against other authorities on all of the areas reviewed shows it to be in a strong position”

2 MEMBERS SERVICES

Since May there has been a considerable increase in the number of serving Councillors in full time employment or who have other major commitments. It has become clear that we need to look afresh at how they can be best assisted to meet the requirements of being Councillors. The Resources Review Panel will be considering a report at its meeting in November, which will look at ways in which Councillors with these competing demands can be better supported.

By the date of this meeting the Independent Members Allowance Panel will have held its first meeting to consider its recommendations for members allowances for 2004/5. For the first time the Panel will be making recommendations in respect of Parish Council Allowances

3 FINANCIAL SERVICES

The Financial Services Unit have been liaising with our external auditors over the closure of the Council’s accounts for 2002/3 and have started work in earnest on the 2004/5-budget process. This has entailed meeting all managers within the Council and pulling together preliminary indications on future spending requirements. In addition we have hosted a visit from HM Customs and Excise following a recent VAT inspection

4 REVENUE SERVICES

The in year collection rates for Council Tax and NNDR, both of which are BVPIs, remained ahead of target at the end of the second quarter. This indicates we should achieve top quartile performance this year.

We are continuing to make inroads into the level of previous years arrears. I have decided not to fill the post of the in-house bailiff, who, at his own request, transferred to other work within the Council. His work will be contracted to our external bailiff who makes no charge to the Council for collection.

The IT Development Plan for Revenues providing a number of enhancements will be finalised during October. These enhancements to be introduced over the next two years will, improve collection rates, improve take up of direct debit and enable us to introduce the significant legislative changes coming into force over that period

5 INFORMATION SYSTEMS

The new Taunton Deane web site was successfully launched over the weekend 4/5th October. It provides improved use ability and accessibility to service information.

Changes to Housing Benefit regulations, commencing in October were implemented correctly on to the Benefits systems.

Major works have been completed in the machine room including air conditioning, power supply and accommodation changes to provide for the Somerset Direct Hardware

6 BENEFITS

The Benefit unit continues to perform in the top quartile for both new and renewal claims and improvements in performance have been made in adjusting benefit following a change in customer circumstances.

However absence through long term sickness and maternity leave is beginning to take their toll and achievement of local targets looks less certain.

Take up of benefit by those legitimately entitled to it has been greatly assisted by our new Welfare visiting officer.

7 FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS

In Quarter 2, the Investigation Team successfully prosecuted several claimants, including two persons whose combined fraud totalled nearly £30,000. Details of these fraud cases may be found on the Web Site.

Inspection of the Benefit Fraud unit is part of CPA and preparations are well underway in anticipation of this.

8 SOMERSET DIRECT

The Executive has had an initial presentation of proposals for a remodelled Reception area. The plans look very exciting and are currently being worked on to bring them to a position where they can be recommended to Full Council.

Work is also in progress in creating electronic data banks for the system. A Customer Service Manager is due to appointed shortly. Full scale planning for rehearsals is now taking place to get the service live by the target date of 1st April.

Terry Hall

