

## **COUNCIL MEETING 14 OCTOBER 2003**

### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MRS. LEWIN – HARRIS – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

#### **Consultation on Corporate Priorities**

As I write this, the public consultation on our corporate priorities is nearly at an end and the response rate has been excellent. To date we have received over 1000 responses as compared with around 200 from a similar exercise last year carried out through the Deane Dispatch. The responses so far show a remarkable degree of consistency on the top two priorities on which we should focus next year: reducing traffic congestion and targeting anti-social behaviour. This consultation was carried out through the Somerset Influence Panel, with staff, on the website, and through various outlets such as sports centres, community centres, libraries etc. A special effort has been made to contact young people with a specially designed post card and again the feedback has been very encouraging. The full results of the consultation will be analysed and fed back to the Review Board and to members of the public in the December edition of Deane Dispatch.

#### **Crime and Disorder Issues**

I spent a Friday evening out with the police in Taunton and Wellington last month, and have already written about this in the Weekly Bulletin. Suffice it to say here that I was shocked by the violence that I witnessed and the experience has certainly influenced my thinking. I am not prepared to accept that it is the “norm” for street fighting to take place in Taunton on weekend evenings, and will be working through the Crime and Disorder Partnership to see what measures it may be possible to take to tackle this issue.

The Community Leadership Review Panel has recommended that proposals for a relocatable CCTV camera be taken forward and a bid to the Crime and Disorder Partnership for capital funding for this project is being prepared. Work on a protocol to determine the priorities for use of the camera is ongoing, and there is also a need to work with the County Council so that some of their structures can be used to mount a camera.

#### **Community Planning**

I attended a seminar at Wiltshire County Council a couple of weeks ago, and listened to a presentation by the Leader of Kent County Council. I quote his words:

“It must be recognised that of all the world’s major democracies, the United Kingdom government exacts the greatest degree of control over local government. Government has increasingly sought to drive up standards through an array of new legislation, regulations, guidelines, inspection regimes, financial bidding systems and central

specifications. This burden of bureaucracy and central control has sapped the initiative and enterprise of local councils and of those who work at the forefront of delivering public services”.

There was a similar theme to a presentation given by a representative of Somerset County Council’s Community Planning team at a meeting of Communities First in Rural Somerset in Bridgwater just a few days ago. The speaker described how a simple idea of finding out what people want and then working out how to deliver it (i.e. community planning) has been swamped by the massive change that has come about in the way the public sector is organised and the growing number of Non Departmental Public Bodies that we have to deal with. There is Government pressure for greater consistency and conformity that can lead to a tension between local and national targets. We have a complicated system of bidding for a plethora of initiatives and an increasing burden of inspection that has to be paid for. A multitude of strategies and partnerships often lead to confused priorities and get in the way of delivery.

The point was made that we have more information that we have ever had before and technically better means of engaging with the public, but the over-complicated structures make it difficult for the voluntary and community sector to participate and voter apathy is increasing.

Nonetheless this Council must strive to find a way through this maze and develop community strategies that have real meaning to local people. I do thank the members of the Community Planning team who are working on these. Current focus is on the Wellington area Community Plan and the Consultation Draft of the Blackdown Hills Community Strategy was brought to the last meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership.

We need to find ways to make the Local Strategic Partnership work more effectively. This means addressing the issue of funding. I am concerned that at the moment the Local Strategic Partnership is seen as Taunton Deane Borough Council’s project and we need to find ways of giving our partners more ownership. I believe this will make the partnership more effective. A review of membership is taking place with the aim of clarifying the relationship with other partners and partnerships and I want to encourage others to have more input into the agendas for the meetings and would like to hold some meetings at a venue other than the Deane House.

**Joanna Lewin-Harris**