

# Council Meeting – 20 March 2019

## Report of Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington - Community Leadership

*THINK DIFFERENTLY, DO DIFFERENTLY ~ The strategic vision for Taunton Deane's more disadvantaged areas is that residents lives will improve significantly and that these priority areas will look better, feel safer and in the future place a more proportionate demand on public services. These services are already being delivered differently in our disadvantaged urban areas through co-ordinated, frontline, problem-solving, multi-agency one teams providing early help working closely together in the area they serve. Rural parishes with more scattered communities are being helped to access services through community centres and local village agents who identify, signpost and support isolated residents to get the help they need. Urban priority areas need excellent education and health facilities within them if we are to build independence, resilience and raise aspirations in individuals, families and communities, to sustain improvements and reduce the need and costs of interventions in the future.*

Having nearly completed two terms of office as part of the administration, I thought I would reflect on some of what has been achieved over the last four years.

### 1. Community Leadership

- 1.1 What stands out in particular is that much of what we do in the community is increasingly achieved through working together in partnerships with others. Working in partnership is leading to long term efficiencies, simpler internal arrangements, aligned strategies, a focus on what we all want to achieve, some shared budgets, and much better outcomes.
- 1.2 The longest standing partnerships are probably those with the voluntary sector which are well established and highly valued, from the smallest friends group to the larger Citizens Advice Taunton, Community Council for Somerset, Somerset Community Foundation and Engage, and many clubs, community centres and others in-between. We have been able to retain all important core funding, establish more service agreements, protect small grants during challenging financial times, set up a local lottery with over eighty registered good causes - all of which have enabled those organisations to continue to deliver so much to so many.
- 1.3 Support through grant aid comes from across the Council. It helps grow both small and larger businesses; helps establish and equip local sports clubs and leisure activities; improves village halls and local play areas; supports the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; helps protect universal advisory services such as Citizens Advice Taunton and Engage; retains vital community centres and supports the activities they run; helps fund group projects; supports community safety through our CCTV cameras and occasional Town Wardens schemes; funds equipment, projects and youth activities in the Unparished Area; and the same to benefit our tenants.
- 1.4 The support grant from Government to Local Authorities has all but disappeared and we have made challenging but necessary changes in the Council so as to continue to afford to deliver desirable as well as essential services. To achieve this we have had to think differently about how we do things and importantly plan and decide to make these changes. Other Government funding opportunities have

been grasped although timescales are often tight but joint applications with partners have secured millions of Pounds of inward investment for wider Taunton.

- 1.5 Taunton Deane Borough Council has not only shared officers with neighbouring West Somerset for four years (One Team Two Councils) but very soon will become a new district Council spread across a much wider and diverse area, although still with a population below that of South Somerset.
- 1.6 The Council is already part of several successful partnerships with other authorities including the Somerset Waste Partnership, South West Private Sector Housing Partnership, Building Control, Shape Mendip Legal Services and more. We have needed to be both responsive and innovative in forming new partnerships and strengthening others, to work more efficiently and be more effective. This is admirable and all Members and officers should be proud of what has been collectively achieved and what is coming to fruition following all the planning over the last four years.
- 1.7 We embraced the concept of 'One Team' for our shared management with West Somerset Council, and our shared lead with Avon and Somerset Police for innovative, co-ordinated, multi-agency, frontline working focused on our more disadvantaged areas which is now established across Somerset. Both attracted funding from the Government in recognition of their aims and objectives and the forerunner of the latter, the Halcon One Team has won several awards and received national attention.
- 1.8 We have seen improved outcomes from collaborative working particularly on the front-line where a problem-solving approach translates into more settled, better supported tenants and residents. This has more recently been extended to Taunton Town Centre where problems with rough sleeping and begging were increasing. In order to understand better and share the responsibility, the agencies came together and drew up a detailed plan which has again attracted funding from Government to implement this. The Homelessness Reduction Plan has already reduced our rough sleeping by half and is providing essential support to resettle a few with local connections into permanent housing. Some have lived on the streets for years and adjusting takes time. Patience and compassion are essential ingredients and the team meets daily for updates.
- 1.9 As a low wage economy with high house prices, there are too few affordable rents, so we are building more Council houses by redeveloping areas and diversifying our housing stock to suit more people. Local tenants help design and plan this new housing and have first refusal to move back in. We have new schemes in West Bagborough, Normandy Drive, Bacon Drive and Creechbarrow Road in Taunton, and Rockwell Green near Wellington. Plans are underway for further schemes in Oake, Laxton Road in East Taunton and a large area in Priorswood, North Taunton where non-traditional houses built of concrete are degrading and will soon be entirely refurbished or replaced.
- 1.10 The Council finally decided upon the refurbishment of The Deane House as modern, well-placed, office space to share with others which now hosts the new Police Station. The new working environment is really very good indeed and has helped staff adjust as jobs change with a new way of working starting to establish under the transformation programme. Investing in these changes and somewhat

reluctantly acknowledging that forming a new Council with our neighbour West Somerset had to be, has meant the new Council will have a balanced budget for several years, enabling it to face the future with minimum impact on services, and more opportunities to invest in our larger combined area.

- 1.11 Throughout all of this, it is the teamwork we have between Members and officers translating ideas into reality, which stands out for me, brokered with patience and professionalism by staff throughout. I would argue that as a team we have achieved a lot over the past four years during financially testing times.
- 1.12 High level strategic partnerships across Somerset are now closely aligned and very much agree on a preventative agenda. The opportunities then are there to work more effectively and pool budgets to achieve better outcomes. The Portfolio Holder represents Taunton Deane on the Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel, the Safer Somerset Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board. More recently as Vice-Chair of the Somerset West Early Help Advisory Board, the Portfolio Holder sits on the Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board and continues to advocate for vital funding for early help.
- 1.13 In the Borough, the Taunton Deane Strategic Partnership (TDSP) supported the development of the One Teams (focused on three urban areas) and the rural Village Agents (responsible for clusters of parishes). The Village Agents are employed by the Community Council for Somerset and supported by the Council to signpost and support vulnerable residents in scattered rural communities. This simple but effective model has developed to include Community Agents working with Adult Social Care and Carers Agents undertaking this role for the County Council.
- 1.14 Parish Councils are the lowest tier of local government and the Unparished Area of Taunton when it is part of the new Council may soon ask to be parished after proper consultation with residents, with a Town Council and one new Parish Council. There is a lot of support amongst current Councillors for this to happen. In the interim the Mayoralty of Taunton (though not Taunton Deane) is likely to be preserved under a Charter with new Ward Councillors as trustees and the Chair as Mayor.
- 1.15 We are five years on from when the then Chief Executive asked Portfolio Holders what they would like to achieve in the next quadrennium. My list was rather short and comprised of just two things although they encompass a lot - (1) One Teams working in all our disadvantaged areas; and (2) Village Agents covering all the rural parishes of Taunton Deane. We have achieved this and rather more and I would like to thank all Members, partners and officers for working hard with others to turn these into a reality.
- 1.16 Particular thanks go to our Housing and Community Services, Avon and Somerset Police and Council Leader Councillor John Williams who trusted me to get on with things. It has been a privilege to serve on the Borough Council for the last eight years with such good support during one of the most challenging periods in local authority history.

I am taking this opportunity to step back from the Council after eight years of giving it most of my time. My family is growing with two small grandchildren next door and another on the way and I would like to be more involved at home on the farm again.

Councillor Jane Warmington