

Council Meeting – 12 April 2016

Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council

1. Devolution

- 1.1 This is a very hot topic nationally at present and in conjunction with all of the Somerset and Devon Authorities, we are part of a joint bid to Government for the Devolution of powers and funds as part of a “Combined Authority”. Our Local Enterprise Partnership, Heart of the South West is also an integral part of this partnership.
- 1.2 Taunton Deane Borough Council have been active participants in the preparation of the Devolution Prospectus which has been prepared and submitted to Government for their consideration. The prospectus as submitted was approved by Full Council 23 February 2016.
- 1.3 We need a ‘devolution revolution’ but it is critical we deliver for our respective communities to improve the lives of people in Somerset and Devon.
- 1.4 The prospectus has been submitted to Government after being separately endorsed by every local authority in the two counties. The changes proposed would result in higher productivity, better-paid jobs, improved road, rail and broadband links and more homes for the region’s growing population.
- 1.5. There would be radical reforms to integrate health and social care to allow the ageing population to be better looked after, tailored support for growing businesses and the creation of a centre of excellence for skills development.
- 1.6 The submission of the bid follows months of concentrated work by all organisations involved across Somerset and Devon. These are the two Unitaries, 13 District Councils, Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks, three local NHS organisations and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.
- 1.7 It was unanimously agreed more powers and finance were wanted and to be devolved from Westminster to the region so we are in control to work towards closing the productivity gap that exists so allowing local people to benefit from economic growth.
- 1.8 Our Devolution Prospectus has been accepted by Government and we await advice when negotiations can commence.
- 1.9 Currently productivity in the South West is running at less than 80 per cent of the national average. The promise is that if local councils have greater freedom to act, by 2030 they will help deliver:
 - A £4 billion uplift to the economy (per annum);

- 163,000 new jobs;
- 179,000 more homes;
- Higher wage levels which are above the national average;
- Apprenticeship starts up by 400%;
- Every young person in education, employment or training;
- A better qualified workforce;
- Faster, more reliable rail services with greater capacity;
- Faster road journeys with less congestion;
- 100% superfast broadband coverage; and
- A UK centre of excellence for skills development

2. Shared Services and Management with West Somerset Council (WSC)

- 2.1 Following the approval to proceed with preparation of the various business cases at Full Council recently I am pleased to say that work is underway with a view to these being reported back to Members for consideration in June or July 2016.
- 2.2 I welcome this opportunity to take stock and review the different ways forward and that WSC were equally fully behind this. Once the business cases for the three proposals have been prepared then it is for Members to decide the best way forward.
- 2.3 For the avoidance of doubt adequate resources and funds are available to both Councils to prepare the various business cases as already budgeted. Hopefully this allays some Members concerns that there may be cross subsidisation of costs.
- 2.4 Equally I stress, no decisions as to the best way forward were made, and it was only a decision to explore which of the three options proposed offered the best way forward, as noted above, it will then be for Members to decide.

3. Proposed Firepool Development

- 3.1 This is engendering some good debate which I am pleased to see but one thing is certain we need to develop this site sooner rather than later. It is a strategically located central site adjacent the railway station and I believe in an extremely sustainable location. In addition it is a brownfield site which combined with the East Goods Yard will deliver in the order of 800 dwellings when completed.

- 3.2 Add to this that it will still provide substantial employment space, provide necessary retail space to protect us from “out of town” applications for retail and develop further the “in town” leisure and recreation activities whilst tidying up an eyesore that has existed for many years!
- 3.3 There have been some representations against the scheme recently but prior to that the overwhelming majority of representations have been positive and welcoming the refreshed proposals. Why have we had a “rethink”? Simply because the original concept as a strategic employment site, although perfectly sound at the time, failed through lack of demand caused by the worst peace time recession in living memory. We are now emerging from that recession and have amended our proposals to what is commercially desirable and most important, deemed viable to deliver.
- 3.4 Coupled with the delivery of new development on Firepool is the completion of the Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) which truly opens the site for business and the planned redevelopment of Taunton Railway Station. This latter development is a huge vote of confidence for our own plans as they have near £10 million earmarked for a station upgrade, multi-storey car park and bus interchange, all to deal with a projected 40% growth in rail passengers through Taunton station by 2020. That is enormous growth that will obviously feed into the proposed development on Firepool.
- 3.5 Based on this I do hope that Members can be supportive of the development or we risk the ire of our community if it takes yet longer to develop an already derelict site that will deteriorate even further. A salutary reminder for those that call for it to remain solely an employment led development, we all had high hopes for just such a development back in 2008 but then recession hit and demand evaporated, not just for us but all towns and cities in the area. We still have substantial employment opportunity on the site but it is not employment led, a mixed development to provide for diverse uses.

4. Broadband Provision

- 4.1 The Superfast Extension programme is currently in the procurement phase. Each District Council is finalising its commitment to the project which will enable the Invitation to tender to be issued by Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS). The procurement and appointment of a contractor will move forwards over the next 4 -6 months. The aim is to get the phase 2 completed by the end of 2017 which is in fact the original target date. If successfully delivered it will be on time and a minimum of 95% coverage at Superfast speed, is the aim of this programme.
- 4.2 In terms of phase 1, rollout is due for completion by the end of 2016 and the target is for 90% coverage. CDS are presently working with BT to establish the likely outcome.

- 4.3 CDS are introducing a voucher scheme which will be opening soon. This is for individual householders/businesses to apply for up to a £500 voucher as a contribution towards securing a better service. This can be spent with any provider that can deliver a better service than currently being received. It is not limited to BT or via landlines, and a wireless system can be commissioned if it performs better. There is £2 million to spend so do encourage your users that are presently in “not spots” to apply soonest. Remember the allocation is for the whole of the CDS area so the likelihood is that demand will be great.

5. Road Works, Taunton

- 5.1 Work on the NIDR is continuing and at long last we have been notified of the programme of works to remove the existing Kingston Loop Bridge across Station Road. The planned re-construction of the Station Road Bridge, is to close Station Road from Monday, 23 May to Thursday, 26 May, working hours 06.30 to 23.30 each day and Friday is a reserve date if works do not go as planned. This will be a major milestone passed and when rebuilt and replaced around August 2016 will denote significant progress towards the opening of this all important link road and access to Firepool.
- 5.2 Although the closure of the road for one week as planned will not be welcomed - as it will cause huge disruption and congestion across the town - what does have to be welcomed is that once reinstated it will form a critical stage in the opening of the new road.
- 5.3 Planned for shortly after removal of the old bridge are major works the other end of town at the top of East Reach. Apparently the traffic lights are in danger of imminent failure and are not working to full efficiency as they should. Therefore, major works are planned to renew lights and controls whilst revising the junction layout to improve flow for users.
- 5.4 Whilst this work is being carried out the whole of East Street will be closed to through traffic which will be of great concern to many but at least this has been planned and advance notice given for works that are necessary and unavoidable. Better to have a planned closure to allow a full upgrade of the junction than unplanned closures causing inconvenience through failure of the existing equipment.
- 5.5 It will be difficult for road users while both these schemes are being carried out but hopefully with planning and patience it will minimise disruption and we reap the benefits of improvements for years to come.

6. Deane DLO Relocation

- 6.1 I am pleased to say that work has commenced on the new Deane DLO premises at Junction 26 and Summerfield, the developers, are confident all

can be finished to ensure occupation before the end of 2016 so vacation of the present site at Toneway by 31 December 2016 is assured.

- 6.2 This ensures we are clear for Helston Motors to redevelop the site and integrate their three motor agencies on the one site so the development and continuing business provides economic benefit for Taunton Deane.

7. The Deane House Relocation Project

- 7.1 As circulated to all Members in February an update was provided, which in essence stated that we are taking a pause in our plans to relocate to County Hall as the plans have changed considerably since the original decision to relocate was taken. We are now evaluating our options as we have various alternatives including reviewing remaining at The Deane House in co-occupation with others. This process is continuing and will be reported back to Members when conclusions have been reached with the options open to us.
- 7.2 This is a major decision and one that we must ensure is right for our community, staff and Members.

8. Halcon One Team Award

- 8.1 Finally, may I offer my sincerest congratulations to the whole of the One Team for the fantastic achievement of securing Silver in the public sector's annual efficiency awards. I am aware that this is as a result of tremendous team work which has been duly recognised because of the improvements on the front line. This makes for savings for all agencies involved but also provides tangible improvements for the communities being helped. That ultimately is the test that it is better for the community we serve and it is good this has been recognised by the award from this national prestigious body.

Well done to all.

Councillor John Williams

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Report of Councillor Roger Habgood – Planning Policy and Transportation

1. Planning Policy

Site Allocation and Development Plan (SADMP)

- 1.1 The Inspector's examination continues. Hearings conclude on Tuesday, 5 April 2016.
- 1.2 Hearings were held between Wednesday, 30 March and Tuesday 5 April 2016. A series of Main Modifications have been identified to date that will be necessary for the Plan to be found sound and capable of adoption. There may well be other changes identified by the Inspector in the coming weeks.
- 1.3 Substantive changes to the Plan will be subject to a six week consultation after which point the Inspector will draft his final report which will take into account comments received on the Proposed Changes. It is anticipated that consultation on modifications may start towards the end of April / early May and that the final Inspector's Report will be received by the end of June with the Plan hopefully being adopted thereafter.

2. Core Strategy Review

- 2.1 The Core Strategy Review has begun with the commissioning of an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment which is part of the evidence base required to inform the Plan.

3. Regulation 123 Review

- 3.1 The proposed introduction of additional Community Infrastructure Levy Policies and amendments to the current Regulation 123 list will be presented to the Community Scrutiny Committee for comment on 5 April 2016 with a report also being submitted to Full Council for consideration.

4. Neighbourhood Planning

- 4.1 The Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Neighbourhood Plan is the first in the Borough to go to referendum following successful independent examination.
- 4.2 The referendum is scheduled for 5 May 2016, where all those eligible to vote in the Parish of Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone will be able to have their say on the Plan.

- 4.3 Creech St Michael Parish Council have applied for their Parish to be designated as a Neighbourhood Plan Area. Consultation on the area is open until 6 May 2016 - details on Councils website.

5. Custom/Self-Build Register

- 5.1 The Council will be updating its register of those interested in Custom/Self-Build. Taunton Deane is required to keep a register of persons and associations in the area interested in such projects.
- 5.2 The Register is used to help identify demand and inform future policy work across departments. Applications to register will be accepted from May to mid-June. Further details will be made available on the Councils website in due course.

6. Technical Consultation on implementation of Planning Changes

- 6.1 The proposed response to the Department of Communities and Local Government is also being presented for Scrutiny on 5 April 2016.
- 6.2 The response covers the following areas:-
- Changes to Fees;
 - Permission in principle;
 - Brownfield register;
 - Small sites register;
 - Neighbourhood Planning;
 - Local Plans;
 - Expanding the planning performance regime;
 - Testing completion in the processing of planning applications;
 - Information about financial benefits;
 - Section 106 Agreement dispute resolution;
 - Permitted development rights for state funded schools; and
 - Changes to statutory consultation on planning applications.

7. Quarterly Policy Update

- 7.1 Officers are working on a short electronic newsletter to inform Members of the public and organisations about the development of the Council's Planning Policy and its evidence base. It is hoped that the quarterly circular will help people understand the role of Planning Policy, learn about the different types of evidence base behind it, and provide advanced notice of engagement/consultation.

8. Major Applications

Local Development Order (LDO)

- 8.1 Work on an LDO for the Junction 25 employment site will progress in the coming months

Staplegrove

- 8.2 The second application is expected to arrive during the week commencing 4 April 2016 and will progress through validation and, as always intended, will be heard with the first application at the same Planning Committee meeting.

Regeneration - Firepool

- 8.3 The Saville's Retail Report commissioned by the Council has been received and has subsequently been sent to St Modwens for consideration.
- 8.4 A Planning Committee date for this application has not yet been set.

Transportation - Twenty Year Infrastructure

- 8.5 Transport Policy Development discussions with the Highways Authority (Somerset County Council) and other partners continues. Progress is being made and a paper is anticipated to be brought to Members in June 2016.

Transportation - Variable Message Signing (VMS)

- 8.6 A scrutiny report is scheduled for May which will include the Parking Strategy and Fixed Sign review.

9. Parking

- 9.1 The new Off-Street Parking Order introducing a variation to parking charges and the requirement for Blue Badge Holder to pay was brought into effect on the 4 April 2016.
- 9.2 Shopmobility have moved to Level 2 of the Orchard Multi-storey Car Park and are now contained in one building.
- 9.3 The re-surfacing of Level 1 above the Orchard Shopping Centre has been completed and is now re-opened.
- 9.4 The refurbishment of the Orchard Multi-storey Car Park is continuing in "Stair Area 3.

Councillor Roger Habgood

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Report of Councillor Mrs Catherine Herbert - Sports, Parks and Leisure

1. Community Leisure and Play

Bandstand Concerts

- 1.1 We are fully booked up for the Sunday concerts this year with 12 concerts between 8 May and 4 September 2016. Again I invite any school, college or other youth group who would like to use the bandstand to hold a musical or artistic event the opportunity to do so for free. The schools and groups who have done this on the last 2 years have really enjoyed the experience! Just make contact with Debbie Arscott to organise the time and date.

Blackbrook Pool

- 1.2 The project continues on schedule. I hope those who attended the site visits found it interesting. Due to the large number of trades now on site there will not be any more visits until the project is complete. We are working with Tone to organise the details for an official opening and a goodbye for St James Street pool.

2. Parks and Open Spaces

Vivary Cafe

- 2.1 Following advertising the opportunity, three parties were interested in running a café from the building near the miniature railway and playground. A preferred bidder has been selected and negotiations are being worked on at present.

Hanging basket deals for town centre traders

- 2.2 Following last Council we have worked up an offer to traders to encourage them to order hanging baskets from us, with a discount if they order by a certain date. As part of this we have also built in an offer to order a shop front Christmas tree now for an excellent price.

Grass Cutting

- 2.3 We have just received confirmation that Somerset County Council will be continuing with their verge cutting at 2 per year, so along with our renewed commitment that means there will 7 cuts again this year.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

Tone continues to develop and support a number of community outreach programmes:

Health Development

Quit and Get Fit

- 3.1 A Quit and Get Fit project is being run at Wellsprings Leisure Centre in partnership with NHS Smoking Cessation. There are currently eight people on the programme and one of Tone's Fitness Instructors is supporting this by leading a one hour exercise class for those on the scheme. There are plans to replicate this at Wellington Sports Centre.

Health Walks

- 3.2 Health Walks were held between January and March, with the following participation: Taunton - 696 walkers, with 16 new walkers; Wellington - 789 walkers, with 17 new walkers; Creech and Ruishton - 23 walkers, with two new walkers.

FANS (Free Access for National Sportspeople)

- 3.3 12 talented sportspeople have been members of the FANS Scheme in Taunton Deane this quarter, getting free swimming and free access to the gym.
- 3.4 Greenwich Leisure Limited's (GLL) Sport Foundation grant applications were opened on 20 December, 2015 and closed on 20 February, 2016. Talented sportspeople from Taunton Deane were able to apply and successful applicants will be notified by GLL in April.

Active Lifestyles

- 3.5 Knightstone Creating Active Communities Projects are being held as follows:- Walking Football at Wellington Sports Centre; Beginners' Circuit Classes at St. John's School, Wellington; Beginners' Ladies' Running Group at Priorswood; and Boot Camp sessions at Lyngford Park.
- 3.6 Community transport is provided on Wednesdays to transport older adults from sheltered housing in Bishops Hull to Taunton Pool for Over 50s swimming sessions; currently five people attending.

Sportivate

- 3.7 14 students (aged between 16 and 18 years) from Taunton Academy are engaged in Tone's "Gym for £1" project, which runs for eight weeks. Five of the students have been given a free one month's voucher for good attendance.

This Girl Can

- 3.8 This Girl Can fitness classes will commence in April 2016 for 14-18 year old girls; this will link in with Taunton Academy students.

Project Wellington

- 3.9 Tone supported half-term activities for families/children's centre families in Wellington; 130 people attended.

One Team Family Swim Vouchers

- 3.10 Taunton Deane Borough Council is providing a £4,000 grant for One Team families to have free swimming (this will include families from Halcon, North Taunton and Wellington). The vouchers will be launched in July 2016, following the opening of the new Blackbrook Pool and in time for the summer holidays.

Facility News

Wellsprings Leisure Centre

- 3.11 Vibe Youth Nights continue to run on Friday evenings between 6 pm and 8 pm. Parkour is still a massive hit and the girls enjoy the street dance. The plan is to start a number of outdoor activities (weather permitting), with a key focus on rounders and tennis. The average number attending in March was 80, with a 50/50 gender split.

Taunton Tennis Centre

- 3.12 Taunton Tennis Club will be the venue for the Davis Cup Tour during the Somerset County Championships on Friday, 26 August 2016 between 10 am and 1 pm. During the event the club will be open to the public for a chance to see the iconic trophy. Visitors will be given the opportunity to have a go, take part in Mini Tennis, Cardio Tennis and Touch Tennis and have fun in the Children's Zone.
- 3.13 Glenn Clarke (Taunton Apprentice) has been accepted as one of the Davis Cup Legacy Coaches who will be delivering free tennis courses in 2016.

Vivary Golf Course

- 3.14 The golf course had been recovering well after the flooding and bad weather since December. Unfortunately the recent storm closed the course again at the end of March, but it was re-opened on 1 April 2016. This is one of the worst years on record for closure at Vivary.
- 3.15 The High Ropes are still receiving excellent feedback from customers and it was nice to see the facility come alive again over the Easter period.

Blackbrook Pavilion

3.16 The Fitness Wellness Studio has a new flooring area with functional equipment which has enabled more interactive members' sessions to be held, with kettlebells plyometric boxes and slam ball classes. These new additions to the centre have been greatly received by all members within the gym.

Sport Relief

3.17 On Thursday, 10 March 2016, 13 staff, including two Tone members, embarked on a 60 mile charity ride for Sport Relief across the Somerset Levels, starting and finishing at Blackbrook Pavilion; £1,942 was raised in sponsorship.

3.18 Taunton Tennis Club raised £300 after completing a 'tennisathlon' from 8 am to 6 pm on Friday, 18 March 2016.

3.19 Blackbrook also held a Sport Relief Mile which saw 140 runners (ranging from children to grandparents) all participating in the fun filled morning of 1, 3 and 6 mile runs.

3.20 Taunton Pool held a swimathon during the evenings of 18 and 19 March and 60 swimmers took part in the event.

Councillor Catherine Herbert

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Report of Councillor Richard Parrish – Corporate Resources

1. Corporate Strategy and Performance

- 1.1 The draft Internal Audit Plan has been agreed with South West Audit Partnership and was reviewed and approved by the Corporate Governance Committee on 21 March 2016.
- 1.2 We are in the process of replacing the Strategy and Performance Officer, Hannah Stevenson, who left our employ at the end of March. We are likely to be without anyone in place throughout April due to notice periods required of a replacement.
- 1.3 Preparation is underway for Quarter 4 outturn performance reporting. Performance data is now being correlated.
- 1.4 Actions are being identified that will support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy aims during 2016/2017. These will be captured in a 2016/2017 Corporate Plan and reported on in due course.
- 1.5 A revised (and more focused) suite of corporate performance measures have been identified and discussions with individual Portfolio Holders are being undertaken by Assistant Directors to agree targets for 2016/2017.

2. Facilities Management

- 2.1 The team are continuing to provide the day-to-day facilities and business support service. There are no specific issues to report.

3. HR and Organisational Development

- 3.1 Terms and Conditions Review – work is continuing to implement elements of the review.
- 3.2 Absence – we continue to support Managers to manage absence within their services but the number of employees on long-term absence has had a significant impact on absence levels (as previously reported and discussed) which are expected to exceed the target of 8.2 days per employee in 2015/2016. 70% of the workforce is currently aged 41 or above and reasons for absence include age related ailments and personal stress. The term personal stress is not to be confused with work related stress.
- 3.3 Organisational Development – 44 master classes and face to face workshops

have been held during the year and feedback from employees has been positive.

- 3.4 The Institute of Learning and Management (ILM) 3 and ILM 5 management development courses will finish next month and we continue to add new content to our E-Learning library.

4. ICT and Information

- 4.1 The team continue to be heavily involved in supporting the ICT elements of the Southwest One (SWO) Succession Project. In particular this involves preparing for the return of the ICT Service and the migration away from the SAP systems.
- 4.2 The formation of a SWO Steering Group as agreed by Council is well underway and the inaugural meeting is to take place in April 2016 on a date to be agreed.
- 4.3 The team are also supporting the ICT elements of the Deane DLO relocation project which is progressing satisfactorily.
- 4.4 The new Intranet Project is progressing well. Elements are already live and the completion of the move to the new platform should be done by the end of this month.
- 4.5 We have achieved Public Service Network compliance for 2016/2017 in relation to our Information Security Standards.
- 4.6 Additionally, the team remain heavily involved in developing the ICT Strategy and Implementation Plan to support the forthcoming Transformation Programme.

5. Joint Management and Shared Services Project and Transformation Project Management

- 5.1 The Mandate Report has now been agreed by both Councils and so the team are gearing up to undertake the work to model the options and produce the business case for the Council's consideration.
- 5.2 As part of this work we are in the process of completing the Customer Access Strategy and will be undertaking detailed work in a number of services to model the impact of the implementation of the Customer Access Strategy.
- 5.3 The Building Control Partnership has now been signed-off and will go live this month.

6. Southwest One (SWO)

- 6.1 Discussions and negotiations with SWO are progressing well. Much detailed information has been provided. We are currently undertaking due diligence on this in order to understand in detail the costs of repatriating services. This exercise needs to be completed before we will be in a position to finalise any deal with SWO.
- 6.2 At the time of writing discussions are continuing with Somerset County Council regarding the potential for continuing shared services in some areas (Customer Contact and HR Admin and Payroll).
- 6.3 We are continuing with work to replace the SAP systems and intend to commence procurement in April 2016

7. Democratic Services

- 7.1 In order to enhance the efficient running of the support service, there have been some minor changes made to job descriptions to more clearly align the roles that support the Mayor, Leader, Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive.
- 7.2 Elections - The Halcon by-election is to be held on 14 April, 2016, followed by the Police and Crime Commissioner elections on 5 May, 2016 (with a Neighbourhood Planning Referendum in Bishops Lydeard on the same day) and the EU referendum on 23 June 2016 – so a busy time ahead! Thankfully a new two day a week post will be joining the Elections Team in April which will be a great help.
- 7.3 In terms of the Electoral Review of Taunton Deane, a report is elsewhere on the agenda with a recommendation in relation to the size of the Council going forward for submission to the Boundary Commission. The process is open to anyone to make submissions. The Commission will reach a view on the Council's size on 21 June, 2016 following which there will be another public consultation process on the warding pattern. The Council's proposed response to this phase will also be co-ordinated by the Constitutional Sub-Committee.

8. Law and Governance SHAPE Partnership Service

- 8.1 Generally the partnership seems to be working well. The latest figures for the use of this service are set out below. Report on Instructions Received from Taunton Deane:-

Category	Sub-Category	No. of Referrals
		TDBC
Commercial, Contracts and	• Advice – existing contracts	2
	• Drafting and negotiation of new	

Procurement	contracts	4
Employment		
Enforcement/	• Planning enforcement	1
Prosecutions	• Statutory and other nuisance	1
	• Housing	1
Governance	• Constitution	1
	• Corporate/Policy advice	5
Housing	• General advice on all aspects of housing including policy and tenancy agreements	8
	• Homelessness	1
Information and Complaints	• Legal advice on FOIA, DPA SAR and EIR requests and policies	
	• Corporate complaints and Ombudsman investigations	1
Licensing	• Advice	1
	• Attendance at licensing committee and sub-committees	2
Litigation	• Trespass	3
	• Debt recovery	5
	• Housing/property repossessions & advice	5
Planning	• Advice on town and country planning matters	5
	• Section 106 Planning Obligations, Enforcement Notices and Stop Notices	12

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation Areas (Order and enforcement) plus Article 4 Directions • Public Inquiries and Appeals • Tree Preservation Orders • Lawful Development Certificates (CLUEDs and CLOPUDs) 	1 4
Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property law advice • Right to buy • Sales • Leases • Agreements • Licences 	17 12 1 1 2 2

Instructions received from TDBC	98
Total	117

8.2 Roy Pinney is leaving for a new job with the Environment Agency in June 2016 and will be a big pair of shoes to be filled. Mendip District Council is in the process of making arrangements to cover for his departure. I should like to place on record, on behalf of the Council, my appreciation for his sound advice and guidance in his role as Solicitor to the Council and to wish him every success for the future.

9. Customer Contact Service Report

9.1 Highlight Report

- KPIs achieved – No fails for 2015-2016;
- SPIs achieved – No fails for 2015-2016;
- Client CSAT results – 75% of client responses rated our services as good or very good – Only four responses;
- 96% of external customers rated the service they received to be good or very good;
- 98% contacts received resolved at 1st Point of Contact;
- Year 2016 to date only one complaint received;
- Business Controls – continued SWO compliance;

- Preparation for 2016 Customer Contact Association Version 6; and
 - Working with Client Team on SWO End of Contract planning
- 9.2 The service has continued to perform exceptionally well in line with its contractual performance indicators with no failures since the last update, and consistently exceeding targets.
- 9.3 Although formally no arrangements yet in place, Customer Contact is assisting Taunton Deane in their SWO succession planning. Further updates to be provided as progress made during the year.
- 9.4 Global Standard Accreditation for 2015/2017. The CCA Global Standard is a set of key principles, which have been defined and agreed by industry experts and stakeholders. It was first adopted in 2001 by leading brands across the country and has been designed to increase the reliability and effectiveness of the customer contact operation. It has been created by combining the experience of interested parties such as customer service directors, regulatory bodies and other appropriate partners. On-going review and assessment of the criteria and key principles has ensured that the framework maintains credibility across the customer contact sector, and is reflective of today's current customer service operating models. We first achieved accreditation to the standard in 2012 and have maintained it ever since.

10. Revenues and Benefits Service

- 10.1 Annual billing has been carried out with 52,052 Council Tax and 4,258 Business Rates bills hitting the mats during the week of 14 March 2016. Benefit notifications have accompanied the Council Tax bill, thereby reducing customer enquiries as well as saving on postage costs.
- 10.2 At 23 March 2016, the Revenues Team had recovered £55.7 million in Council Tax, with collection at 97.65%, meaning that we need to collect a further £100,000 by the end of the financial year to meet our in-year target of 97.8%. Current Business Rates collection at 97.66%, means we are likely to just miss our annual in-year target of 98.4%.
- 10.3 At the end of February, the average time for the Benefits Team to work out a new claim and changes in circumstances for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support was 8 days. It looks likely we will have distributed the entirety of the funding of £118,000 provided by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for Discretionary Housing Payments by 31 March 2016.
- 10.4 We have refreshed our Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and Strategy in recognition of procedural and legislative changes and to reflect current best practice. Our revised policy now provides guidance on the options available to deal with people committing Council Tax fraud as well as those who negligently make incorrect statements, or fail to notify a change affecting their entitlement to a Council Tax discount, exemption or reduction.

11. Finance and Procurement

- 11.1 We continue to monitor the delivery of the Procurement Transformation Project and day-to-day procurement service by SWO.
- 11.2 Latest information, as at February 2016, reports that £2,600,000 savings have been delivered to the Council through the signed-off procurement related initiatives. A further £900,000 of savings are scheduled to be delivered by the end of 2017.
- 11.3 The Strategic Procurement Service continues to review the 'pipeline' of further possible initiatives for Taunton Deane to provide a clearer forecast of likely savings at the end of the current SWO contract in 2017.
- 11.4 At the Full Council meeting in February 2016 the Council's budgets, Council Tax and Housing Rents were approved and this saw the culmination of a significant piece of work for the service and has been an achievement for all involved in the process.
- 11.5 Alongside the preparation of next year's budget, the service has also been supporting managers to pull together the latest forecasts for the current financial year.
- 11.6 Our forecasts at Quarter 3 suggest we are heading for a net underspend of approximately £83,000 on the General Fund and in respect of the Housing Revenue Account there is a projected overspend of £72,000. Both of these variances remain within 1% of the respective approved budgets. Our total capital programme spending remains on track.
- 11.7 Details of the financial position were reported to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2016 and as an information report to Executive Members in March. The high risk areas are being carefully monitored in the final weeks of the year to ensure forecasts remain reliable.
- 11.8 Turning attention to the preparation of the Statement of Accounts for the current year, work is well underway within the team to complete this major piece of work. The "interim audit" work has been successfully completed on 19 February 2016 and as a result of this work no major issues are being reported by the external auditor.
- 11.9 Year-end processes will continue, with a thorough work programme scheduled in the coming weeks and months to produce the outturn reports and annual Statement of Accounts which must be completed by the end of June 2016. The Finance Team have planned and are working towards closing the Statement of Accounts by mid-June this year in preparation for the fact that the statutory deadline is to be brought forward to the end of May from 2017/2018 onwards.

Councillor Richard Parrish

Council Meeting – 12 April 2016

Report of Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington - Community Leadership

The strategic vision for Taunton Deane's most 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 will be delivered in urban areas through integrated, frontline, problem-solving, multiagency teams of individuals, already working in the areas, providing early help and based together. Rural parishes with more scattered communities will be helped to access services through community centres and local village agents identifying, signposting and supporting isolated residents to get the help they need. Urban priority areas need excellent education and health facilities on the doorstep which are then accessible to all, if we are to build independence, resilience and raise aspirations in individual people, families and communities, to sustain improvements and continue to reduce the need for and costs of intervention in the future.

1. One Teams

- 1.1 Here at Taunton Deane Borough Council we have been working with partners to support our most vulnerable communities. Most of this work has been focused at Halcon, Priorswood and Wellington through the One Team initiative. This work is progressing well and is generally well supported.
- 1.2 The One Team process is simple in theory but much more complex in practice. Much has been achieved over the last three years with a shared vision, leadership, hard work, determination and the support of many, which reassuringly continues to grow.
- 1.3 Several other areas in Somerset now have fledgling One Teams and a virtual One Team pilot is about to get underway in Mendip. Initial funding for these is coming from the Police and Crime Commissioner supported by the Safer Somerset Partnership, the District Councils and Avon and Somerset Police.
- 1.4 In April 2013 the Council restructured its Housing Management function to complement and harness the collective energy of the local community, statutory and voluntary partners under the Halcon One Team initiative. We worked closely with the Police and other partners to find a new way of working to improve service delivery to families and individuals living in this community. This is beginning to break the cycle of deprivation by taking a long term, holistic view by thinking and doing things differently, supporting them to be more independent and self-sufficient.
- 1.5 We were delighted to secure a National iESE silver award celebrating public sector innovation and transformation, on behalf of our three One Teams for the tremendous work they do.

2. Rural Reach

- 2.1 For some time we have been aware of the need to rethink how we may support our rural communities, particularly individuals and families who may be vulnerable, isolated and perhaps lonely. Village Agents are a great help, and thankfully their

network is expanding and providing support to more residents in our scattered rural communities.

- 2.2 In October 2015, we undertook a consultation of partners within the Taunton Deane Strategic Partnership (TDSP) and the focus of the consultation was rural deprivation. The responses generated a number of themes specific to supporting families and communities. These were consistent with other recent rural consultations undertaken by Somerset Advice Network and in the production of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Rurality theme.
- 2.3 Rural areas are expansive with relatively few people living in them which makes providing any sort of service expensive and inefficient. So people tend to be more self-sufficient because they need to be and they rather just get on and do things. There are fewer useful things about such as people, housing, jobs, transport, shops, pubs, vicars, surgeries, phone aeriels and broadband. There is generally a lot less to do so rural pastimes are often very different to the town's.
- 2.4 People tend to set useful things, such as Wiveliscombe's vibrant Community Office, North Curry's Community Coffee Shop and Blackdown Hills Support Group. People share things such as community transport and they make their own entertainment because otherwise there is not very much to do. Rural areas can make you independent but as you get older this can become a problem when you cannot quite manage as you used to.
- 2.5 If you have broadband then much more information is available but connecting can be difficult and the subsequent service very slow. This also hampers rural businesses especially those outside villages. For example most returns farmers have to make now have to be submitted on line.
- 2.6 Parish Councils are widening their view and considering what they can do to support local initiatives and keep particular valued services going by registering community assets, retaining public loos, employing lengthsman, paying for grass cuts and producing Neighbourhood Plans. Local precepts have increased to pay for these but local people benefit and do not seem to mind.
- 2.7 Smaller parishes support each other or link with a larger one and a good example of this is Wiveliscombe and the 10 Parishes (and more) it supports through a thriving Community Office and strong local leadership. A recent invitation to senior officers and Executive Members to visit from its two Ward Councillors, provided insight into what works well, the other opportunities being considered.
- 2.8 What's going on can be relevant and shared between both urban and rural areas. The Wellington Community Worksheet was shared with Wiveliscombe. We would like to thank Councillors Steve Ross and Eddie Gains for our visit and officers have requested a second meeting.
- 2.9 Key agencies plan to get together for half day workshop to discuss what else might be done in rural areas and agree some actions between them to improve access to services in rural communities.

3. Let's Make Loneliness History

- 3.1 Sharing good practice and good ideas is important. Following a successful event in West Somerset last year, we are repeating the 'Lets Make Loneliness History event' in Wellington on Friday, 3 June 2016 at St John the Baptist Church, High Street, Wellington at 9 am. Speakers will give short talks on interesting projects during the morning and there will be lots of stands to have a look at.

4. Taunton Welcomes Refugees

- 4.1 We are pleased that after four months of working with this wonderful local community group who have quietly got on and organised support to complement what the local authorities are doing, we have our first few Syrian refugee families settling down in Somerset. Most have been displaced for a few years in camps near the border of their country which must have been difficult to bear with so much having been destroyed.
- 4.2 In Taunton Deane over thirty volunteers with various skills have completed half a days training so as to be ready to offer direct support to families. Volunteers have helped prepare the private homes for the first two families and met the first at the airport after their arrival from the Middle East. They are accompanying the family around to familiarise them with the area, their new home and other things they need to know. They are also making themselves available after-hours and at weekends in case of any problems. There are several Arabic speakers amongst the volunteers.
- 4.3 Community group lead Chris Waddilove has written that "as a result of our really positive and harmonious collaboration with Members and officers of Somerset and Taunton Deane Councils, who have been so heartened and reassured by the level of community support [that you have] shown, [I am sure that] there will be more families arriving in Taunton. You have already achieved so much but this is a crisis that is going to continue for years, [I'm afraid], and [your] practical help is going to be required."
- 4.4 The Government have now sensibly relented and have agreed to accept unaccompanied young people with families in the United Kingdom from Calais and other camps in Europe, which will reunite them with their families here.

Councillor Jane Warmington

Council Meeting - 12 April 2016

Report of Councillor Terry Beale – Housing Services

1. Creechbarrow Road, Taunton

- 1.1 A further eight homes were handed over on 23 March 2016 (total completions 2015/2016 for Taunton Deane were 12). Four more homes were handed over last week (5 April 2016). The remaining homes will be handed over during 2016 and discussions are still on continuing with Galliford Try regarding progress on site.
- 1.2 Work has started on the construction of Moorland House (previously called The Hub).

2. Weavers Arms, Wellington

- 2.1 Vacant possession of the site has now been achieved. A “meet the contractor” day has been arranged with WRW Construction on the 12 April 2016 to provide an opportunity for local residents to find out more about the forthcoming development. Build contracts are being signed and works should begin on site during April 2016.

3. Scooter Storage

- 3.1 During 2016 12 scooter stores were delivered across a range of schemes with more installations in the pipeline.
- 3.2 Kilkenny Court residents will have further consultations shortly regarding the proposed scooter store installation on site.

4. Car Parking

- 4.1 A planning application for the proposed additional parking at Bulford, Wellington has been submitted and a resident update is being arranged. Parking solutions are also being investigated at Polkesfield, Stoke St Gregory.

5. Right to Buy Social Mobility

- 5.1 Six families have benefited from the Right to Buy Social Mobility Grant successfully secured from the Department of Communities and Local Government in April 2016.
- 5.2 There was a tight timescale to introduce the homeownership cash incentive scheme

as the whole process needed to be complete by 31 March 2016. This has enabled the six families to enter into private home-ownership and release six council homes to those in housing need. The families have been delighted with the opportunity to be able to achieve their aspiration of home ownership, which without this grant would have been either unachievable or taken many more years of saving.

6. Affordable Housing Delivery

- 6.1 At the time of writing the Year End total will exceed the annual target of 200 homes with a strong affordable housing pipeline continuing to come forward. In addition to the Council's start on site for the 26 homes at the Weavers Arms Site, Rockwell Green, Knightstone are anticipating starting on site shortly at Parmin Close, Taunton to deliver 66 homes for extra care and 12 homes for people with learning difficulties.
- 6.2 Stonewater have started on site at the Craftex site on Priory Bridge Road, Taunton to deliver nine affordable homes adjacent to their existing 16 unit Abbey House scheme. All these schemes are 100% affordable housing and would not have come forward without the assistance of Taunton Deane Borough Council.
- 6.3 Housing Enabling are preparing for the 11th Affordable Housing Open Day to be hosted at Somerset County Cricket Ground on Wednesday, 8 June 2016 between 3pm – 7pm – all are welcome. This is a one stop shop to find out more about affordable housing opportunities in Taunton Deane.

7. Insulation and Energy

- 7.1 External Wall Insulation (EWI) – The EWI installation programme is now complete with 48 Cornish units receiving EWI. A further programme may be considered later in the year dependent on resources and outcomes of the HRA Business Plan Review.
- 7.2 Photovoltaic (PV) – In total 248 properties were installed with solar PV with a continuing management and maintenance contract in place through Low Carbon Exchange. The final two properties could not be identified within the contract period owing to limited suitable properties and tenant refusals.

8. Rent Arrears

- 8.1 Last April a target was set for tenant rent arrears for the fiscal year 2015/2016 at £360,000. The collection of arrears can be very difficult and challenging and needs to balance the requirement to obtain the payments with the social and economic realities of people being evicted and made homeless.
- 8.2 Having regards to both the needs and the difficulties, Managers and officers set themselves up a 'stretch target' of £345,000 for the fiscal year 2015/2016. All three One Teams have worked tremendously hard and I am delighted to report that their hard work has paid off!
- 8.3 The year end figures are not yet available but to the 11 March 2016 the figure stood at £325,476.55.
- 8.4 My congratulations to all the teams and indeed everyone involved. Once again the

value of the One Team vision is being demonstrated!

9. Welfare Reform Visits

9.1 The number of tenants affected this month are 330, however this is subject to change on a daily basis due to tenants moving in and out of employment.

9.2 The breakdown of tenants that have now downsized are:-

- 2 Direct Match approved and completed;
- 49 Successful moves on Choice Based Letting (CBL) completed;
- 1 Successful bids pending a move on CBL;
- 0 Mutual Exchange's being processed;
- 24 Mutual Exchanges Completed; and
- 1 Moved to private sector

10. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

10.1 All affected tenants are being offered advice on DHP's and assistance to help them complete the application form. Since the start of this financial year 71 DHP's have been awarded to Taunton Deane's tenants.

11. Universal Credit

11.1 To date Taunton Deane has very few tenants who have submitted a claim and officers have been working closely with these tenants as the level of help and support needed is substantial and needs to be tailored to each of their personal circumstances.

11.2 The roll out of Universal Credit will accelerate as time advances and there will be significant challenges for this Authority which will need to be met.

12. Pathway for Adults P4A

12.1 We continue to work closely with the Taunton Association for the Homeless and partners to find solutions to the cuts from Somerset County Council and to ensure that we are able to provide sufficient levels of service for vulnerable adults at risk of homelessness in Taunton Deane.

13. Housing Revenue Account

13.1 The Business Plan continues to be developed despite challenges from policy and budgetary constraints. Further clarification from the Government is needed before

the final plan can be formalised however the current progress has been extremely good and my thanks to all for the extremely hard work currently being undertaken.

14. Pre-Void inspections and Tenancy Enforcement

- 14.1 This is an extremely important area of work and I am pleased to report that significant progress is being made. The number of inspections has increased and the ability to look at tenant enforcement has proved to be very successful not only in fiscal terms but also letting people know that these matters will be progressed.

Councillor Terry Beale

Council Meeting – 12 April 2016

Report of Councillor Patrick Berry – Environmental Services

1. Environmental Health / Licensing

Environmental Health

- 1.1 A new Guidance Pack for Event Organisers is now available for all event organisers planning to hold events in the Taunton Deane area. The pack contains information and advice on what documents are required and links to application forms to use council owned land. A pdf version is available on the Taunton Deane website.
- 1.2 The team is currently on target to complete all statutory routine food hygiene inspections for the year. This is statutory work reported to the Food Standards Agency on an annual basis. Food Hygiene Inspections are carried out by highly trained and competent officers who have experience in providing advice on food safety to food businesses from your local Indian or Chinese takeaway to food manufacturers such as dairies and specialist cheesemakers.
- 1.3 The team has carried out 274 routine inspections including 56 visits to new food premises during the 2015/2016 year. The officers have completed 57 revisits, two advisory visits and a total of 12 reassessments for the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme in the Taunton Deane Borough Council area. In addition to this they have carried out five food sampling visits, four partial food hygiene inspections and processed 222 food questionnaires at low risk food businesses.
- 1.4 The routine visits are undertaken at intervals set out by the Food Standards Agency and according to the risk rating of the premises. We provide a 'scores on the doors' assessment as a result of the conditions we find at the time of the inspection. The information gathered at the inspection includes the type of food that is handled or produced, the number of people served and the standards of hygiene and structure found at the time of the inspection.
- 1.5 The Environmental Health Team have received a total of 270 service requests (complaints) since 1 January 2016 in Taunton Deane. These include the investigation of the following issues:- complaints regarding contamination of foodstuffs, noise from barking dogs, excessive bonfires, overgrown gardens and rat sightings. The team also investigate complaints regarding drainage, smoke and odour and also respond to the Planning Department regarding planning applications and queries relating to contaminated land and air quality.
- 1.6 Air Quality: New technical guidance is available for local authorities to use

when drafting the Council's Annual Status Reports on air quality, this will be put into effect by June 2016. The Council will be required to set out any measures they are taking to reduce small particulate matter emissions in our areas e.g. the scrutiny applied to large biomass boilers.

- 1.7 Officers have completed 20 inspections across premises in the district that require an environmental permit. Premises such as petrol filling stations, dry cleaners and waste operations may require a permit. There are charges associated with these permits.
- 1.8 It should also be noted that on 6 April 2016 it became mandatory for all dogs to be micro-chipped. The dogs trust is micro-chipping for free and theirs is a useful website to visit <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/helpadvice/microchipping/microchipping-faq-page>

Licensing

- 1.9 Performance: For Quarter 4 (January to March) of 2015/2016, the service has determined 91% of applications within a 14 day timescale. Whilst not quite the full 95%, it is still a massive achievement for the team, considering the performance fell as low as 60% for Quarter 2. The figures for the year are Quarter 1: 75%, Quarter 2: 60%, Quarter 3: 71%, and Quarter 4: 91%.
- 1.10 Backlog: At the beginning of Autumn 2015, there were some 259 incomplete applications in an isolated backlog. This was reduced to 100 by January 2016 and is now currently 18 with work continuing to reduce this to zero by the end of April.
- 1.11 Taxi Forum: In the past few months the Taxi and Private Hire Trade Forum has been reinvigorated and since the turn of the year, officers are progressing a number of projects such as a geographical knowledge test for new drivers, introduction of a practical driving test and guide for drivers on how to identify and report child sex exploitation.

2. Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP)

- 2.1 The Cashless Trial at Chard Recycle Centre, in which a no cash, card only trial was put into effect, was very successful. It will now be rolled out at Priorswood Recycle Centre on 3 May 2016. If that goes well it will be rolled out at all SWP Recycle Centres later in the year.
- 2.2 With effect from Monday, 4 April 2016 the SWP Recycle Centres will be charging for asbestos and plasterboard disposal. The charges for these are £12 per sheet (or equivalent) of asbestos containing materials and £4 per sheet of plasterboard or plaster with payment by debit or credit card. Asbestos must be sealed in thick plastic before taking to a recycling site. More advice on handling these materials is available on the SWP website.

- 2.3 The range of waste services provided by SWP were promoted on BBC Radio Somerset on Monday, 22 February 2016. Pre-recorded features were slotted in throughout the day and included interviews with collection crews on the Breakfast Show, an audio tour with Steve Read at the anaerobic digestion plant at Walpole mid-morning and a look at the work of the Taunton Recycling Centre, including the Reuse Shop, on the Drive-time show. Thanks go to both Viridor and Kier for their assistance.
- 2.4 The author of this report attended a conference/workshop hosted by SWP titled 'Somerset Waste Action Conference'. As well as the provision of the background on the amounts of waste recycled and not recycled, there were some very interesting talks from local community groups including:-
- Turning Waste into art with Scrapstore;
 - Furniture Reuse with Sedgemoor Furniture Store;
 - Sharing repair skills with the Tiverton Repair Café;
 - Making better compost with Carymore Environmental Trust;
 - Using cloth nappies instead of disposables by Somerset and West Somerset Cloth Nappy Library;
 - Reducing the wastage of food (the cost of unused and wasted food to the average family is £700 per annum) and that is just in the home!
 - Recycling with Green Wedmore;
 - Diverting surplus food to the community by FareShare and Surplus Supper Club. This was about the food wasted by supermarkets.
 - A full list of contacts is available with the author.

3. Deane DLO

Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning

- 3.1 The preparation of all tender documents for this work for a possible combined contract (West Somerset and Taunton Deane) is almost complete. The target dates for this exercise are:-
- Issue Tender documents to bidders – mid April;
 - Bids returned by end of May;
 - Detailed evaluation complete and preferred bidder identified and, subject to final decisions by Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils, award by late July with a start date of 1 October 2016.

Relocation of Deane DLO

- 3.2.1 During the preparation for the DLO move to its new base in Wellington, the current site is being cleared. Among other things, there are a number of used but not unusable litter bins. Unless any local use can be found they will be disposed of through Ebay.

4. Crematorium

- 4.1 The copper sheathed roof inspection was completed and a section of copper has been replaced. The previously recorded leaks have stopped.
- 4.2 The brickwork repairs to the No 1 Cremator have been completed. The amount of repair work necessary was slightly less than anticipated.
- 4.3 The staff numbers at the Crematorium are being reviewed as for most of the time the staffing is considered to be at “bare minimum” and during busy periods or at times of sickness or annual leave there is the potential to severely affect essential operational delivery.

Councillor Patrick Berry

Council Meeting – 12 April 2016

Report of Councillor Mark Edwards - Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism and Communications

The first part of this report presents a review of the Economic Development Team's work in 2015/2016, outlining the main services provided and some of the main achievements, and it outlines plans for the forthcoming year, as identified in the emerging Service Plan.

The service covers the following key areas of work for the Council:-

1. Creating, commissioning and supporting Local Business Networks;
2. Supporting inward investment and investor fulfilment;
3. Improving employment opportunities and enhancing the skills of the workforce;
4. Supporting place based regeneration projects and initiatives; and
5. Marketing the areas as business and lifestyle destinations with links to Tourism and Culture.

1. Creating, Commissioning and Supporting Local Business Networks

- 1.1 In December 2015 the first Taunton Deane Business Conference was held very successfully at the County Ground. This year's event had Connectivity as a theme, and it presented speakers on Taunton's current and planned connectivity across road, rail, internet and town centre. 130 delegates attended from local businesses and partner organisations, and we were extremely pleased to welcome Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills as the keynote speaker.
- 1.2 The conference formed a central plank of the team's ambition to work closer with our larger and higher profile businesses. During the year we introduced an Account Management programme for Taunton Deane's top 50 employers. Through an annual visit, the annual conference, marketing and other support initiatives during the year, it is my intention to strengthen the links that the Council has with our main employers so that we can continue to meet their needs and enable their investment.
- 1.3 The team has commissioned or given financial support to a strong programme of learning and networking events for small businesses over the past year, including a series of social media workshops, which were attended by 40 businesses, and new business start-up workshops, which were attended by a further 39 businesses. The latter covered self-employment, finance, marketing and online trading. In addition Cornerstone Mentoring, which

delivers mentoring support to small businesses across the County is currently helping businesses in Taunton Deane.

- 1.4 The Taunton Deane Business Initiative was established by the Council in Spring 2015, and 80 applicants submitted entries for the two award categories. The scheme has been redesigned and renamed as the Taunton Deane Business Awards in 2016, and is currently open for applications to the seven categories. The awards will be presented to the seven winners at a prestigious dinner next month.
- 1.5 During the year officers continued to provide small grants for start-ups and rural businesses, and this year the Council supported eight such businesses. The team also worked with many other businesses to provide advice on subjects such as vacant property, development, funding, business support, and other Council services.
- 1.6 Various publications were produced and distributed during the year with the intention of promoting the services available from the Council to support business investment and growth. These included:-
 - Taunton investment flyer;
 - Taunton Deane Business Directory, produced at no cost to the Council;
 - Pocket Guide to services available from Taunton Deane;
 - Guide to funding within the Wiveliscombe and 10 Parishes Area; and
 - Map of Independent retailers in Taunton Town Centre.
- 1.7 The Council provided funding to the Creative Innovation Centre (CICCIC) in Taunton to support the establishment of the centre and to enhance the services available to creative and cultural businesses in Taunton Deane. Over the course of the year CICCIC directly supported 65 small businesses and many more within the sector through workshops, forums and clubs.
- 1.8 Over the forthcoming year the team plans to continue to support local businesses, prioritising those that will deliver investment, job creation and service provision in our rural communities. The team will work with partner agencies and businesses to develop facilities that will stimulate innovation, particularly amongst digital and creative businesses, working towards developing bespoke facilities and space. We will also support the County Council in the development of new enterprise space in Wiveliscombe.
- 1.9 The roll out of the Government's new Business Growth Hub service commenced in March, providing impartial business support and advice to small and medium sized enterprises along the lines of the former Business Link service. The team will ensure that Taunton businesses are aware of the service through enhanced promotional workshops and events.

2. Supporting Inward Investment and Investor Fulfilment

- 2.1 During 2015/2016 the Economic Development Team continued to market the

Taunton Deane as an investment location through its own services and through Into Somerset:-

www.taunton.uk.com is the Council's own investment website, presenting the advantages of investing in Taunton Deane and the support available from the Council and its partners. It is backed up by a proactive fulfilment service offered by the team, providing support and advice to find premises, labour, funding and to overcome the other challenges involved in investing.

- 2.2 **Into Somerset.** During 2015 Somerset County Council took on the delivery of the Into Somerset inward investment service, supported by each of the Districts in the County. The website at www.intosomerset.co.uk has been refreshed and a protocol has been established to clarify the distinction of promotional and fulfilment roles between the County and each District Council. The service complements and enhances the Council's own investment activities and, in due course, should lead to new enquiries.
- 2.3 Over the course of the year the team worked with 71 potential investors, both local and inward investors.
- 2.4 Following a positive review of the Council's Growth programme by the Local Government Association last summer the Council was advised to put more focus on its investment support activities. We were invited to bid for funding for a specialist advisor to advise the team on its inward investment strategy. That advisor has been appointed, at no cost to the Council, and he will start to work with officers during April.

3. Improving Employment Opportunities and Enhancing the Skills of the Workforce

- 3.1 The Economic Development Team's work in this area is through its extensive liaison with employers and investors, encouraging new start-up businesses, stimulating demand for employees and enabling the recruitment of local people. The team maintains regular liaison with Job Centre Plus and Somerset College to enable those agencies to better target their services to the needs of employers, and has facilitated job shops and recruitment events for new employers.

4. Supporting Place Based Regeneration Projects and Initiatives

- 4.1 **Firepool** - The marketing and drafting of a commercially viable scheme for Firepool progressed significantly during 2015/2016. Following public consultation in Autumn 2015 a scheme has been submitted for outline planning consent for a mixed use development including a supermarket, retail, residential, hotel and leisure uses.
- 4.2 **Coal Orchard** - In April 2015 MACE were appointed to progress a design brief for this key town centre site, which presents an opportunity to improve

the link between Firepool and Somerset Square with the main part of the town centre. Consultation was carried over the summer, amongst businesses and local stakeholders, and recommendations were agreed by the Executive in October 2015. Officers are currently working on an outline planning application for a mixed use regeneration scheme.

4.3 Market House

- (a) The refurbishment and disposal of the Market House progressed extremely well during 2015/2016, improving this important property asset in the heart of the town. The restaurant chain Wildwood opened in the summer, and has been well received by visitors and other businesses in the town, driving up the quality of food in the town and enhancing the evening economy. Similarly the Taunton Visitor Centre was relocated in August 2015 – see below. Discussions are continuing with other tenants in the property.
- (b) The area outside the Market House on Fore Street has been ‘de-cluttered’, with benches and other street furniture removed (mostly relocated to elsewhere in the town) to create a new town centre soft square. This space is appreciated by the public and has been used to good effect by event organisers, such as Somerfest and was used in November for the final stage of Day 3 of BBC’s Children in Need Rickshaw Challenge.

4.4 Town Centre WiFi - An invitation to tender was issued in December 2015 for the contract to install the WiFi scheme in Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe Centres. The selection process is continuing and officers aim to engage a contractor early in the new financial year. This will enable rollout in the Summer 2016.

5. Marketing the Areas as Business and Lifestyle Destinations with Links to Tourism and Culture

5.1 Taunton Visitor Centre - The former Tourist Information Centre in the Library relocated in July 2015 to the Market House and became the Taunton Visitor Centre. Since opening in the western wing of the building, over 47,825 visitors have come through the centre doors. Feedback has been very positive and our contractors SWH Build have been nominated for a Considerate Constructor Award for the project. The Visitor Centre Team continue to innovate and develop their service. This includes the recent addition of a promotional rolling screen in the office.

5.2 Town Centre Rotunda, promotional lamp-post and Castle Bow banner site

- (a) Administered by the Visitor Centre Team we offer the opportunity to rent space to promote events and businesses in 5 rotunda units located in:-
- Fore Street (outside of the Visitor Centre);
 - North Street (outside Lloyds Bank);

- North Street (outside Monsoon);
 - Coal Orchard Car Park; and
 - Goodland Gardens.
- (b) We have repaired the wires to the Castle Bow banner site and have now taken over the administration of this space from Somerset County Council Highways.
- (c) During 2016 we will be seeking advertising consent for the hanging basket brackets in the town centre and will be seeking space for the remaining rotunda unit, plus seeking further at height banner sites in the town centre.

5.3 Town Centre Marketing Contract - During the year, the Marketing and Visitor Centre Manager has been working with Destination CMS to promote the town centre through social media and our destination website. The company organised several successful marketing campaigns promoting Somerfest, Christmas, Valentines and Easter, backed-up with support from our retail community and event organisers. In 2016, we intend to bring this service in-house which will enable the Marketing Team to spend even more time engaging with town-centre businesses to enhance this promotional service.

5.4 Social Media and e-newsletters

- (a) Our Marketing and Visitor Centre Teams actively use various social media channels to promote the area, events, news and business stories to local residents, visitors and the business community, as of the 1 April:-

@moreTaunton on Facebook has 4,436 likes;
 @moreTaunton on Instagram has 524 followers;
 @moreTaunton on Twitter has 4,911 followers; and
 @TauntonBusiness on Twitter has 1,846 followers.

- (b) Monthly e-newsletters and e-shots are circulated on business stories and events taking place in the area.

5.5 Visit Somerset and South West Tourism Growth Fund

- (a) The team gave active support to the trade-led Visit Somerset with the aim of enhancing its ability to draw visitors and tourists to Taunton Deane.
- (b) This includes commissioning a portal from the popular county destination website, www.visitsomerset.co.uk/taunton, this website has had 331,338 unique page views during the year.
- (c) Since January, we have represented the County on the South West Tourism Growth Fund, which has given us an opportunity to promote the district, County and region to journalists, travel-trade buyers, international language schools and consumers. This has included attendance at Travel Shows in Belgium, Germany, Ireland and Netherlands and networking events in

Torquay and London. During February we hosted five international travel-trade buyers who toured Taunton Deane and West Somerset.

1.7 Promotional Literature - Amongst current leaflets produced by the team are:-

- Circular walking leaflets from Taunton Town Centre;
- Inspected Accommodation lists for Taunton Deane;
- Taunton Heritage Trail;
- Town Centre Map;
- Welcome to Taunton leaflet; and
- Welcome to Wiveliscombe leaflet.

1.8 Cultural Events in Taunton

- (a) The Taunton Events Group continue to flourish as a co-ordinating forum for the organisers, funders and enablers of larger events in Taunton. Now comprising 40 members the group meets quarterly to review and plan future festivals and events, and to coordinate the marketing of the events programme. The Economic Development Team is currently inviting applications to the Council's new Arts and Events Grant, which incorporates the former Arts Development Grant with the funding previously given to event organisers.
- (b) 2015/2016 saw some excellent events in the Borough, raising our good reputation as a destination for visitors looking for family-friendly, creative arts and culture. I would particularly point to Taunton Live 2015 as a first class collaboration between the Taunton Association of Performing Arts and Go Create, giving Taunton a week of varied entertainment of international standards. Go Create will be raising the bar this year with another packed programme during July in open spaces across the town centre, and I am pleased that the Council will support the festival financially.
- (c) FUSE Performance also deserves high praise for Somerfest in June. Delivered with various partners and funded by the Council, the event provided a day-long celebration of Taunton's arts and culture, involving hundreds of young people and local community arts organisations. This year's event will be extended into the evening of 21 June 2016, encouraging visitors to stay on in the town centre to enjoy our burgeoning evening economy.
- (d) This summer will see a busy schedule of events across the town, including within our open spaces. I am particularly keen to welcome Somerset Rocks to Vivary Park in August with its three international rock and pop artists. Also within Vivary Park I am looking forward to the Somerset CAMRA Real Ale festival in September, which has relocated to Taunton from Minehead and will hopefully become an annual fixture.
- (e) The three towns of the Borough each saw successful Christmas festivities and lighting displays, each funded in a large part by this Council. In Taunton our investment in festive lights was enhanced by a programme of events

delivered through the second half of November and December. The lights switch-on event itself was again supported by an enormous street market and I would congratulate TIME4 as well as the numerous other organisations involved, in pulling off a successful visitor event.

- (f) The Brewhouse Theatre continues to grow from strength to strength since its reopening in 2014. Having recruited a Chief Executive last summer the Taunton Theatre Association is building up its complement of professional staff to continue to grow the quality of the offer and the regional reputation of the theatre.
- (g) This year the Council awarded grants to Hestercombe House and to Arts Taunton. The former contributed towards the installation of a new gallery in the house and was a strong gesture of support towards Hestercombe's ambitious plans to invest heavily in the future of the historic house. Two grants were awarded to Arts Taunton during the year - the first to support the marketing of the partnership and the progression of key, early projects, and the second to fund a feasibility study into the multi-purpose venue proposed by the partnership. The consultant that produced the study is currently consulting with stakeholders on the findings, and when completed, it will be shared with other interested parties.

6. Asset Management Service General Fund Activities

6.1 During recent months the following projects are particularly worthy of mention:-

- Blackbrook Leisure Centre – Asset Management supporting the Pools Project at Project Board level.
- Former Mike Chedzoy premises off Greenbrook Terrace, Taunton – Council approval in place for sale, preferred bidder and Shape Partnership progressing the conveyancing. Purchaser given access under licence for unobtrusive site survey works.
- Community Asset Transfer Policy – Community consultation on this draft Policy now complete, some amendments made as a consequence. Ready for adoption this evening at Full Council.
- Blackdown Business Park, Wellington – A significant number of vacant units which Greenslade Taylor Hunt, Chartered Surveyors and the Council are jointly marketing.
- Former Park Keepers Cottage, 277 Cheddon Road, Taunton – Declared surplus and works now progressing in respect of disposal of open space and registration of land to enable the site to then be marketed. A report will be taken forward with recommendations of which offer to accept.
- Land at Frobisher Way – Exploring developing this site and retaining the asset or sale of asset.

- Continuing Asset Management support through dedicated Asset Projects Surveyor towards the Firepool Redevelopment Scheme. Positive progress has been made in respect of due diligence and general land assembly.
- Asset Strategy Surveyor post dedicated to Taunton Deane General Fund work has been vacant since January. New agency appointment made and takes up appointment on 4 April 2016.
- Statutory Compliance – Asset Management are leading on collating key statutory compliance data from other sources across the Council to demonstrate compliance and if non-compliance is identified, capturing and prioritising works. This project sits alongside similar work taking place across the Housing Revenue Account.

7. Communications

- 7.1 With elections at local, regional and national level on the horizon, the communications team is working closely with Electoral Services, particularly on the “register to vote” message.
- 7.2 While the by-election in Halcon and the Police and Crime Commissioner Election on 5 May 2016 are tried and tested events, we also have two referendums – the Bishops Lydeard Neighbourhood Plan and the EU Referendum in June. The level of media interest in the EU poll is likely to be extremely high!
- 7.3 Working with partners is increasingly important – Taunton Deane will be represented at a communications seminar on devolution on 13 April 2016, hosted by Somerset County Council, with some excellent speakers due to present.
- 7.4 We are working with other authorities on a number of projects including the proposed flood alleviation scheme, highways improvements, the relocation of Deane DLO and the new swimming pool at Blackbrook.
- 7.5 Deane Dispatch continues to be published regularly, giving the Council the opportunity to publicise initiatives from the current Boundary Commission Review to the popular ‘Clean for the Queen’ that saw real community support.
- 7.6 The Council also contributes a monthly Business Column to the County Gazette, another valuable opportunity to highlight some of the economic development work that is continuing.
- 7.7 Social media continues to provide a way of communicating quickly and easily with the public and our partners and our following continues to increase – now standing at around 2,200. This is in line with expectations.

Councillor Mark Edwards

