

Council Meeting – 30 July 2019

Report of Councillor Benet Allen – Deputy Leader of the Council & Communications and Culture

Section 1 – Introduction & Communications

- 1.1 My first few weeks have been about getting to know the ropes. Apart from an initial meeting with the Head of Function to agree the means and style of Council communication, this role has had an emphasis on getting the Council's message across using print, broadcast and social media. Key stories have included:
- 1.2 West Somerset Railway - 40th anniversary, financial disclosures and board changes at the Railway, and the announcement of a trial shuttle service between Taunton and Bishops Lydeard. At the time of writing, this long-awaited service is due to start on 27 July.
- 1.3 Cricket World Cup - spoke to ITV News about the benefits of this tournament coming to Taunton, while Council staff handled other aspects of public relations.
- 1.4 Armed Forces Day - spoke at a flag ceremony in Williton, well-attended by local veterans and current armed forces members.
- 1.5 Blenheim Gardens, Minehead - a franchise has been awarded for a mobile catering unit, as a temporary solution while the cafe awaits a survey with a view to renovation.
- 1.6 We continue to run a proactive and reactive media service for the local press and broadcast media. The Leader has featured on BBC Somerset and Tone FM laying out the new administration's vision, alongside regular quotes in the County Gazette and Somerset Live. A total of 45 proactive press releases have been issued since May 1st. There are continued high-levels of media interest in the new administration and the communications team respond to requests for interviews, statements or statistics and information on a daily basis. There will be a media event at Laxton Road to promote the Council's housing ambitions. Social Media campaigns around Firepool, independent shopping, seagull proof bags and Somerset's Parks have contributed to a significant uplift in social media engagement:
- 1.7 Facebook statistics below:

9 July - 15 July

Last 7 days ▼

Post reach

29.4k

▲ 124%

Post engagements

6,073

▲ 490%

New Page likes

112

▲ 76

Events

- 1.8 The ICC and the ECB praised our hosting of the Cricket World Cup and the success of our Fanzone. The Visit Taunton video was most watched on the CWC Facebook page and Taunton won “Best CWC Venue” in an ECB poll with 53% of the vote.
- 1.9 Live in Somerset is organised in conjunction with SWT and saw more than 25,000 people enjoy concerts in Vivary Park. Many town centre businesses took advantage of these events and stayed open later or offered special menus and discounts.

Engagement

- 1.10 To assist with the Garden Town plan we have advertised for an internal secondment to run and measure local stakeholder engagement campaigns. This will focus initially on Firepool and Coal Orchard.

Website

- 1.11 The website continues to add content to help with Customer “channel shift”. A major campaign targeting all residents to encourage sign up to an “SWT My Account” will begin in September.

Structure

- 1.12 Due to the departure of two members of staff from the Communications and Engagement function I will be working with the Head of Function to take the opportunity to look at the current skill-set and ensure it is matched to SWT objectives and priorities.

Section 2 - Culture

- 2.1 At a meeting with Brewhouse Theatre, the Leader explained that we could not promise the multi-million rebuilding programme they would like. However, both the future of the theatre and the wider redevelopment of Taunton’s riverside are uppermost in our minds; development plans for Coal Orchard

have been unveiled and those for Firepool will undoubtedly include space for cultural activity. 'Culture' will not be bunkered solely on the South Bank, or even just in Taunton.

- 2.2** The first meeting of the Cultural Forum is due on 24 July. In the run-up to this, I spoke at a meeting of the Taunton Theatre Association, welcoming the launch of TYCA - Taunton Youth Community Arts festival. I encouraged them to spread their wings beyond the county town to reach such places as Minehead, Watchet, Wellington and Williton. I am myself encouraged by Bridgwater Civic Society to extend the reach, relevance and depth of 'culture', both to reach a bigger audience and to help establish the Somerset West and Taunton area on a bigger stage.

Councillor Benet Allen