

Council Meeting – 2 October 2018

Report of Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington - Community Leadership

THINK DIFFERENTLY DO DIFFERENTLY ~ 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 are already being delivered differently in our urban priority areas through co-ordinated, frontline, problem-solving, multi-agency one teams working closely to provide early help alongside community centres in the localities they serve. Rural parishes with more scattered communities are being helped to access services through village agents who identify, signpost and support isolated residents to get the help they need and link into established local facilities and community transport. 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 cost of interventions in the future.

1. Update on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in Taunton

- 1.1 Taunton Deane Borough Council is working with partners including the Police, ARC (formerly Taunton Association for the Homeless), Open Door, Somerset County Council (SCC) and other support agencies to ensure that appropriate and necessary steps are being taken with every individual rough sleeper prioritising those who are causing anti-social behavior.
- 1.2 We have seen a 60% increase in the approaches to the Taunton Deane Housing Options Team following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act earlier this year. Current figures show 514 cases since April 2018 (which equates to just under three people a day) who are concerned they may become homeless; are sofa surfing; staying with friends or who are already sleeping rough.
- 1.3 The time taken to process each enquiry or referral has doubled in order to interview each person, complete a personal housing plan and investigate each case properly. Unsurprisingly this is having an impact on the workload of the Housing Options Team. This increase in workload is not restricted to Local Authorities in Somerset but is having an impact across the country.
- 1.4 Although rough sleeping has risen in the town particularly during the summer period, this is now reducing with the introduction of the Rough Sleeper Reduction Plan drawn up between the various agencies involved. They have met weekly since March as the Rough Sleeper One Team to think this through and to react to problems more quickly.
- 1.5 The Plan is being supported by Taunton Deane with two successful bids for additional funding from Central Government totalling £440,000 in order to deliver rough sleeping initiatives between now and March 2020. Working with partners such as ARC, the Police and Open Door, this is being delivered through an enhanced frontline rough sleeper town centre team.
- 1.6 This includes funding a full time Rough Sleeper Coordinator for eighteen months to manage four interventions:-

- i. Additional Street Outreach Workers who specialise in substance misuse and mental health;
 - ii. Nine new beds spaces and fast access to support to prevent people starting to sleep on the streets;
 - iii. A Reconnections Officer to intervene quickly with those coming from outside of Taunton and support them to return to their local area; AND
 - iv. A flexible budget to pay for personalised accommodation and support packages for people identified by the Rough Sleeper One Team.
- 1.7 This provides a better opportunity for us and our partners to help rough sleepers off the streets; prevent those in danger of becoming homeless ending up on the streets; and improves our ability to address problems which inevitably arise out of more people sleeping rough.
- 1.8 The Rough Sleepers One Team continues to meet weekly and has been successful in working with a number of entrenched rough sleepers by offering accommodation and essential support necessary to help people settle into this. It is this enhanced tailored support we need to help someone to turn their life around.
- 1.9 Begging is being challenged in the town centre by the Streetwise Coordinator and the Police. However this is challenging as beggars often move on and then resurface at a later time. Taunton Deane and the Police are continuing to work closely together to reduce the impact this is having in the town centre.
- 1.10 To discourage begging we are still asking members of the public NOT to give to those begging on our streets but instead to contribute to the Diverted Giving Scheme (collection boxes in Taunton Visitor Centre, Open Door and some town centre businesses or on line at www.mydonate.bt.com - search for Taunton Open Door).
- 1.11 The Diverted Giving scheme is an important part of One Team working in the town centre and gives people who want to help those living on the streets a chance to make a difference rather than inadvertently feeding harmful addictions. Instead donations can be used to provide food, clothing and washing facilities for people who are sleeping rough provided by the charity Open Door in Mount Street, Taunton.
- 1.12 There is no easy way to resolve the issues of rough sleeping, but the steps we are taking as a multi-agency town centre team working both proactively and reactively, identify and address the issues of rough sleeping, begging and anti-social behaviour and are starting to make a difference. The additional funding will go a long way to help us achieve this and is a welcome boost to our efforts and recognition that we are committed to addressing this issue with others in Taunton.

2. Changes in Taunton Deane

- 2.1 In order to function well, be reliable, affordable and efficacious in the future, there is a need for Local Authorities to reinvent themselves as modern providers of essential and other desirable local services. In Taunton Deane this is across a wide

area with roughly half the population living outside our towns in small villages, tiny hamlets and open countryside.

- 2.2 This process of Transformation for the Council has been under consideration for four years; been planned over the last two years; and we are now in the middle of the six month period of changeover for our staff in order for this to become a reality.
- 2.3 Alongside this has been the decision to create one new Council out of two very rural Councils who have already shared One Team of officers between them for the last four years. Not an easy decision for most of us but necessary and pragmatic to be a viable entity in the future which will serve about a quarter of the area of Somerset but whose combined residents still number fewer than in South Somerset district.
- 2.4 Fewer staff and fewer Councillors will form part of a simpler structure which has also meant a rethink of where (as well as how) we work. A requirement for less space has given us the opportunity to share our building with others (and provide a rental income from the let space); update it to be thermally efficient (lowering and sharing the running costs) and provide a far better working environment. There has been some criticism of the extensive refurbishment of The Deane House but it makes good sense in both in the short and the long term.

3. Welcome to staff who will be joining the new Council

- 3.1 Well done to those staff who have been successful in the first phase of recruitment and have been appointed to the new Council structure.
- 3.2 It will be up to Members and staff alike to help shape how we work better together to provide really good services for our residents and adjust to a new and very different way of working.
- 3.3 I have confidence that we have the skills to do this by focusing on outcomes, supporting each other throughout and that our newly appointed staff will play a big part in achieving this both through the extensive experience they bring with them and their positive approach to doing things differently.
- 3.4 It is going to be different for Councillors too to support and adjust to a different way of working. Although with up-to-date bespoke IT, locality working and a simpler more effective internal structure, it should actually be easier once everyone gets used to it.
- 3.5 Next May brings a new much bigger Council area and a challenge for a third fewer Councillors who will need to get to know a bigger chunk of Somerset and what is happening in it. Reassuringly, this is something many staff have already achieved by working across the two different Council areas over the last four years.
- 3.6 For those who hope to be elected again, many Councillors will be standing in a wider less familiar area and we will have to work harder to achieve this.
- 3.7 I firmly believe we are doing the right thing in modernising the Council. We must be sustainable and as self-sufficient as we can be in the future, to keep delivering the necessary and desirable services our communities value and rely on.

4. Thank you to staff who are leaving Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils

- 4.1 I also wanted to thank staff who are leaving the Council - for their service to Taunton Deane and the community we serve across the Borough and wish them good luck for the future.
- 4.2 I am aware that not all staff have chosen to leave which is an uncomfortable place to be in at best and pretty awful for those who hoped to be part of the new Council's future. Although there has been disruption and ongoing angst for staff at the moment, I believe we are doing the right thing in modernising the Council.
- 4.3 There will be disappointment too for some Councillors standing across a wider less familiar area who hope to be elected again but will not necessarily be successful.
- 4.4 I think we have tried to be realistic and brave in how we set about modernising in order to make the necessary changes to work differently. Unfortunately there is not room for all of us in the new Council and for those who wanted to be part of it and will not be, I am sorry.

Councillor Jane Warmington