

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Council to be held in The John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 29 September 2015 at 18:30.

Agenda

The meeting will be preceded by a Prayer to be offered by the Mayor's Chaplain.

- 1 Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8 September 2015 (attached).
- 2 To report any apologies for absence.
- 3 To receive any communications.
- 4 Declaration of Interests
To receive declarations of Disposable Pecuniary Interests or personal or prejudicial interests, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. The usual declarations made at meetings of Full Council are shown on the attachment.
- 5 To receive questions from Taunton Deane Electors under Standing Order 15.
- 6 To receive any petitions or deputations from Taunton Deane Electors under Standing Orders 16 and 17.
- 7 Taunton Deane open its arms to refugees - To consider the attached Motion proposed by Councillor Simon Coles and seconded by Councillor Federica Smith.

An assessment of the implications for the Council should the Motion be carried is also attached for the information of Members.

- 8 Report of the Joint Independent Members' Remuneration Panel (attached).
- 9 Part I - To deal with written questions to the Executive.
- 10 Part II - To receive reports from the following Members of the Executive:-
 - (a) Councillor John Williams - Leader of the Council;
 - (b) Councillor Jane Warmington - Community Leadership;
 - (c) Councillor Terry Beale - Housing Services;
 - (d) Councillor Patrick Berry - Environmental Services and Climate Change;
 - (e) Councillor Mark Edwards - Business Development, Asset Management and Communications;

- (f) Councillor Roger Habgood - Planning Policy and Transportation;
- (g) Councillor Catherine Herbert - Sports, Parks and Leisure; and
- (h) Councillor Richard Parrish - Corporate Resources.

Bruce Lang
Assistant Chief Executive

17 August 2016

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions.

There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions.

Speaking under “Public Question Time” is limited to 4 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chairman will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate.

Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chairman will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

This is more usual at meetings of the Council’s Planning Committee and details of the “rules” which apply at these meetings can be found in the leaflet “Having Your Say on Planning Applications”. A copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Reception Desk at The Deane House or by contacting the telephone number or e-mail address below.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

Full Council, Executive, Committees and Task and Finish Review agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: www.tauntondeane.gov.uk



Lift access to the John Meikle Room and the other Committee Rooms on the first floor of The Deane House, is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are also available off the landing directly outside the Committee Rooms.



An induction loop operates to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Corporate Support Unit on 01823 356414 or email r.bryant@tauntondeane.gov.uk

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Council Members:-

Councillor V Stock-Williams (Chairman and Mayor of Taunton Deane)
Councillor H Prior-Sankey (Deputy Mayor)
Councillor J Adkins
Councillor M Adkins
Councillor T Aldridge
Councillor C Appleby
Councillor T Beale
Councillor P Berry
Councillor J Blatchford
Councillor R Bowrah, BEM
Councillor W Brown
Councillor N Cavill
Councillor S Coles
Councillor W Coombes
Councillor D Cossey
Councillor T Davies
Councillor D Durdan
Councillor K Durdan
Councillor C Edwards
Councillor M Edwards
Councillor H Farbahi
Councillor M Floyd
Councillor J Gage
Councillor E Gaines
Councillor A Govier
Councillor A Gunner
Councillor R Habgood
Councillor T Hall
Councillor C Herbert
Councillor C Hill
Councillor M Hill
Councillor J Horsley
Councillor J Hunt
Councillor G James
Councillor R Lees
Councillor S Lees
Councillor L Lisgo, MBE
Councillor S Martin-Scott
Councillor I Morrell
Councillor S Nicholls
Councillor R Parrish
Councillor J Reed
Councillor S Ross
Councillor R Ryan
Councillor Miss F Smith
Councillor F Smith
Councillor P Stone
Councillor A Sully
Councillor N Townsend

Councillor C Tucker
Councillor J Warmington
Councillor P Watson
Councillor D Webber
Councillor D Wedderkopp
Councillor J Williams - Leader of the Council
Councillor G Wren

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 8 September 2015 at 6 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams)
 Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Aldridge, Appleby, Berry,
 Mrs Blatchford, Brown, Coles, Cossey, Mrs Edwards, M Edwards,
 Farbahi, Gage, Govier, Habgood, Hall, C Hill, Hunt, James, R Lees,
 Ms Lisgo, Morrell, Nicholls, Parrish, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ross,
 Miss Smith, Mrs Smith, Stone, Sully, Townsend, Mrs Warmington,
 Watson, Ms Webber, Williams and Wren

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 14 July 2015, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Beale, Bowrah, Cavill, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan, Miss Durdan, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Mrs Herbert, Horsley, Mrs Lees, Martin-Scott, Ryan, Mrs Tucker and Wedderkopp.

3. Communications

Councillor Coles reported that Mr Jim Warren, the partner of Councillor Mrs Floyd, had recently passed away. He felt sure the Council would want to join with him to express condolences to Mrs Floyd for her sad loss. This was agreed.

4. Declaration of Interests

Councillors M Adkins, Coles, A Govier, Hunt and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a Director of Tone FM. Councillor Wren declared a personal interest as Clerk to Milverton Parish Council. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land in Taunton Deane.

5. Public Question Time

Dr Peter Ravenscroft referred to the recent Syrian refugee deaths which had galvanised the Government into action. This had resulted in the Prime Minister initiating a national effort to do more and the Chancellor stating that

funding from the International Aid Budget would be made available to Councils to meet the cost of housing refugees.

The current situation was a crisis but also an opportunity to demonstrate that we were a humanitarian society. Many of the refugees were educated and cultural people who would contribute to our economy if given the chance and, when it was safe to do so, would return to Syria with a positive attitude towards the United Kingdom.

He went on to say how disappointed that discussion of a Motion titled 'Taunton Deane opens its arm to refugees' had been delayed until the end of the month.

Dr Ravenscroft asked whether in view of the national exposure now being given to this issue, the urgency and seriousness of the crisis and the promised Government funding, the Council would demonstrate leadership and hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss the matter.

In response the Leader of the Council, Councillor Williams, stated that there was no need for an extra meeting to state the Council's position. He invited Councillor Mrs Warmington to provide further information.

Councillor Mrs Warmington said that no one could fail to be moved by the plight of so many desperate people fleeing their homes and making the treacherous journey across land and sea to start a new life for their families in a new country somewhere free from war and terror.

Here at Taunton Deane Borough Council, we fully appreciated that there would be many who needed our help and our response to the crisis would form part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) coordinated National Action Plan. The Chief Executives of the LGA were currently in discussion with Central Government about what the role and responsibilities of Local Councils would be and how any support we gave would be funded.

This would not be the first time that Local Government had risen to such a challenge, as it had offered support in the past to refugees from Uganda, Kosovo and the victims of numerous other conflicts.

We would need to house, clothe, feed, teach and welcome these desperate and frightened people into our communities. Once Taunton Deane knew exactly what we needed to do, we could begin to co-ordinate our response with other partners which was key to delivering this effectively and would welcome offers of help. We would work closely with local Parish Councils and other agencies to ensure any refugees who came to Taunton Deane received the support they so badly needed.

Councillor Mrs Warmington went on to say that this was going to be a real challenge and our help would be needed in many forms. However, she knew she could rely on the support of all fellow Councillors and officers to do what was required. These were difficult times and we all needed to do all we could to help our fellow human beings who were far worse off than ourselves, fleeing persecution and often in fear of their lives.

5. **The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and Flood Action Plan**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the latest situation relating to the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and the Flood Action Plan.

Following the flooding across a wide area of Somerset in the winter of 2013/2014, the Government had requested the Somerset partners to develop a Flood Action Plan and, at a later date, to form the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA).

The Government had now conducted a review of the options for continuing funding of the SRA and had asked Somerset partners to respond to them on which was the preferred option.

The Levels and Moors 20 Year Flood Action Plan (2014), developed at the Government's request and signed off by the Secretary of State in March 2014, had included a proposal to create a SRA to:-

- Provide a renewed, co-ordinated and joined-up approach to addressing flooding and resilience issues.
- Develop new approaches to the management of the drained areas and the wider catchment, and
- Enhance local leadership.

Many of the other actions within the Flood Action Plan had been completed and a review of the plan was currently underway. The plan had short and long term actions, and the review was looking at what had been achieved so far, which of the long term options identified in the plan should still be pursued and what other actions were necessary to ensure there was a sustainable plan for the future.

Some of the highlights of the delivery of the Flood Action Plan were set out in the report under the following headings:-

- Dredging and River Management;
- Land Management;
- Urban Run-Off;
- Resilient Infrastructure;
- Building Local Resilience; and
- Business Case and Delivery of Long Term Solutions

Reported that with regard to the SRA, a key change from the early days of the Flood Action Plan was that the SRA's remit included the whole of Somerset, not just the flooded areas of the Levels and Moors. This was to ensure that all

areas had the potential to benefit from the joint working and any funding available for flood alleviation measures.

A further change was the 'hierarchy' of the SRA and the Flood Action Plan where the work of the Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan was still carried forward but done so now as part of the SRA programme.

Noted that the existing flood management responsibilities, accountabilities and funding would continue unchanged for the SRA partners. It also did not diminish the responsibilities of riparian owners.

Since January 2015 the SRA had developed:-

A **Common Works Programme** for Somerset, to plan, deliver and share information about all Flood Risk Management work in the County. This was core work for all partners but brought together and co-ordinated where possible and efficiencies developed for joint delivery; and

A new **Enhanced Maintenance Programme** for 2015/2016 using interim funding had also been produced and this undertook a range of prioritised new flood risk management activity across all districts in Somerset, including maintaining the 2014 dredge on the Rivers Parrett and Tone.

Further reported that the SRA had been set up with interim funding for 2015/2016 from a mixture of central Government and local partners. A major area of work this year had been developing options for long-term funding, carried out through a Strategic Funding Review with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The optimum outcome for Taunton Deane would have been to set up the SRA with all funding from the Government. However, this had not been accepted and was consequently not an option given to us as part of the Strategic Funding Review.

The review did not recommend a particular option and there was no presumption that any of the following four options would be taken forward:-
The Taunton Deane

1. **Creating a new precepting body.** This required primary legislation but gave the ability for all households in Somerset to play a part in the raising of funds. Monies raised would be transparent and ring-fenced for the SRA and its work. This option would take several years to deliver but gave long term sustainability and did not impact on existing Council budgets and hence their services. The six Somerset local authority partners had indicated that this was the only acceptable funding solution.
2. **Creating a new levying authority.** Primary legislation was still needed and the levy could be on both the County and the District Councils. Any additional levy charge on Taunton Deane and West Somerset would limit the ability to raise Council Tax for our other

services within the current 2% referendum threshold and hence put an increased risk on budget setting over future years. This option was not recommended.

3. **Raising funds through Council Tax.** If agreed this could be implemented by April 2016. It was suggested that the County Council should be within this funding mechanism, however this would have an impact of between £106,000 on Taunton Deane and £38,000 on West Somerset by increasing Council Tax within the 2% threshold. Although this was a quick option to implement, the funding was not ring-fenced and would be subject to annual re-negotiation which gave no sustainability to the SRA. This option was also not recommended.
4. **Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) extend boundaries or increase levy.** Currently the Drainage Boards levied £20,738 on Taunton Deane and £2,739 on West Somerset which was equivalent to £0.21 per household across Taunton Deane and £0.06 across West Somerset. Levies and rates were approved by the IDB Board each year and it could increase the levy if they showed that their expenses had increased. If the IDB extended their area to Flood Zone 2, they could raise a total of £580,000 from the Somerset partners. However, this would not be sufficient for the enhanced work programme of the IDB in future years. This would not give the SRA any ability to raise, hold or spend funds and would limit the role for the Districts and County Council. Although the IDB had already voted to support this option and wished to push for primary legislation to cover the whole of Somerset, this option was not recommended.

The current position for Taunton Deane was that having looked carefully at the funding options review and heard the views of local stakeholders, the Council's preferred option was still to set up the SRA as a separate precepting body.

The IDBs would continue to set budgets for their work programmes as at present, but any additional levy would, in future, be placed on the SRA. Existing sources of capital funding for flood risk management would need to continue to be available to the individual partner organisations.

The comments of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee which had met on 13 August 2015 were reported for the information of Members. The Committee had agreed to recommend the creation of a separate precepting body as Taunton Deane's preferred funding option.

Before the Deputy Mayor called for the vote on recommendation (3), Councillor Ms Lisgo, in accordance with Standing Order 18(2)(b), requested that a Recorded Vote be taken. This request was supported by the votes of at least a quarter of the Councillors present.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The progress to date in the development of the Somerset Rivers

Authority and Taunton Deane Borough Council's position as to the way forward be noted;

- (2) The progress in the delivery of the Levels and Moors 20 Year Flood Action Plan (2014) be also noted; and
- (3) The creation of a separate precepting body as Taunton Deane Borough Council's preferred funding option be approved, noting that the Council's position would be confirmed by the Somerset Rivers Authority Board meeting in late September 2015.

Recommendation (3) was carried with 24 Councillors voting in favour, 13 voting against, with one abstention, as follows:-

Yes	No	Abstain
Councillor Mrs Adkins	Councillor Aldridge	Councillor Wren
Councillor M Adkins	Councillor Appleby	
Councillor Berry	Councillor Coles	
Councillor Mrs Blatchford	Councillor Farbahi	
Councillor Brown	Councillor Govier	
Councillor Cossey	Councillor R Lees	
Councillor Mrs Edwards	Councillor Ms Lisgo	
Councillor M Edwards	Councillor Morrell	
Councillor Gage	Councillor Nicholls	
Councillor Habgood	Councillor Prior-Sankey	
Councillor Hall	Councillor Ross	
Councillor C Hill	Councillor Miss Smith	
Councillor Hunt	Councillor Mrs Smith	
Councillor James		
Councillor Parrish		
Councillor Mrs Reed		
Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams		
Councillor Stone		
Councillor Sully		
Councillor Townsend		
Councillor Mrs Warmington		
Councillor Watson		
Councillor Ms Webber		
Councillor Williams		

(The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill) left the meeting at 6.40 pm during the discussion of Minute No. 5. The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams) took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

(The meeting ended at 7.05 pm.)

Usual Declarations of Interest by Councillors

Full Council

- **Members of Somerset County Council – Councillors M Adkins, Coles, Govier, Hunt, Prior-Sankey and Wedderkopp**
- **Employee of the Department of Work and Pensions – Councillor Mrs Herbert**
- **Clerk to Milverton Parish Council – Councillor Wren**
- **Tone Leisure Board representative – Councillor Stone**
- **Director of Tone FM – Councillor Ms Lisgo**
- **Councillor Beale declared personal interests as a Board Member and Director of Tone FM, Chief Executive of the ‘Think Amy’ Charity and as a Governor of the South West Ambulance NHS Trust.**
- **Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College.**
- **Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land in Taunton Deane.**

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

Motion - Taunton Deane open its arms to refugees

Moved by Councillor Simon Coles and seconded by Councillor Federica Smith

We have all witnessed the turmoil and human distress that has arisen from the flight of the refugees through Eastern Europe. We note also that the humanitarian response from Taunton Deane residents has been huge as illustrated by the work of the People to People Solidarity Group - Taunton Deane. We thank the administration for the promise of storage to assist with the hundreds of donations received from local residents and businesses.

We also welcome the statement from the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom (UK) will take some 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years and we understand that this will help reduce the refugee problem in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

The overwhelming nature of this humanitarian crisis calls for an immediate response, especially as there is no sight of a long term political and diplomatic solution from the European Union or even worldwide.

We therefore urge Taunton Deane Borough Council to join the over 40 other local authorities who have offered support to meeting this humanitarian need and work towards providing accommodation and whatever other help by showing solidarity with our fellow human beings.

We move that Taunton Deane Borough Council be at the forefront of Councils looking to help relocate a minimum of 25 individuals and families under the UK Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Motion to Full Council: Assistance to Refugees

An assessment of the implications for the Council

Background:

The Government has announced the following:

In his statement to the House of Commons on Monday 7 September, the Prime Minister announced that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of the Parliament. These refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria using the established UNHCR process for identifying and resettling refugees. The Prime Minister also announced that the criteria for the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme will be expanded. The Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government will be working with local authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to put in place the arrangements to house and support the refugees. The cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending.

Implications for the Council

From the above statement we should assume that arrivals from Syria will be refugees and NOT asylum seekers. This is an important distinction.

Asylum seekers are not entitled to Housing Benefit or any other form of benefit. They are financially supported by the Home Office

Refugees are entitled to benefits. We assume that arrivals from Syria will have received refugee status prior to entering the UK.

Government advice is for Local Authorities to seek more information and direction from their regional representative body. For TDBC this is Sarah Short at South West Councils: Sarah.Short@swcouncils.gov.uk

However, there is currently limited available information or direction. The LGA web site states "We are awaiting more information from Government on how any scheme for resettling Syrian refugees will be run and funded. We will update this page as we receive more information. See more at:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees#sthash.PEF2B7LY.dpuf>"

We are still waiting to see the full proposals. However the Government has said:

Refugees will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will entitle them to access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion

As noted in the opening quote, the cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending.

What can local authorities do now?

The LGA will coordinate offers from councils via the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP). As such, offers of council support should be communicated to TDBC's RSMP contact – listed above – who will pass on relevant information to the LGA for a central record.

The LGA has advised that it would be useful to get an indicative sense of numbers of the adults, children or families that TDBC may be able to take given our local circumstances. This information will be treated as confidential. Giving a sense of numbers does not commit the Council to this figure, particularly in advance of information on funding and the cohort.

Accepting the Motion - Impact on TDBC resources

At this stage it is very difficult to provide any firm advice. There are a number of significant variables including timing of arrival, numbers, family size, status, government (or other) assistance etc.

Housing (Housing Options)

There is no information from central government to date instructing local authorities on how to administer the refugees from Syria. There was a vulnerable person's relocation scheme (VPRS) for Syrian migrants published in 2014. The VPRS was based on need rather than being designed to meet a quota so was prioritising help for survivors of torture and violence, and woman and children at risk or in need of medical care. The overview of the VPRS states that central government will meet the costs of the refugees in terms of accommodation and integration support, health and education costs for the first year from arrival. The individuals would be given 5 years leave to remain in the country with full access to public funds and benefits from the point of arrival. It was envisaged that the caseload of refugees would include families, woman and children and medical cases. Any unaccompanied children would fall under separate arrangements and would not be classed within the then total of 500 people (not cases) specified at the total amount of refugees expected to enter the UK. There was also mention of the possibility of family reunion. The VPRS was implemented when the Government were accepting 500 people under the scheme and this may have changed given the increase in numbers being accepted with refugee status.

The Government has given permission for the 20,000 refugees to enter the UK over the next 5 years. However, for this brief we have assumed that due to the crisis happening now, we would be looking to accept 25 families this year and not 5 families per year over the next 5 years.

Staffing Implications:

The caseload of 25 families could not be absorbed within the daily workload with the staffing resources as they currently stand so we would have to consider a temporary member of staff for a 3-6 month period to work with the families administering them onto Homefinder, identifying private rented accommodation, processing various paperwork and helping to integrate them, with the help of various agencies, into our community.

Resource Implications:

Although the refugees will have access to social housing, there will be a waiting period for accommodation to become available unless social providers hold accommodation when it becomes void. This would be assuming there is stock suitable for the family's need. We do not know the size of the family's coming to the UK but we do have to consider that there is a strong possibility that there will be large families among those coming to TDBC. This will be a major problem as we do not have much large family accommodation and few large private rental accommodation. There may be a need for two properties to be knocked through into one to accommodate a very large family as is the practise in inner cities. (This would be a financial implication also due to rent loss of a property and building work). The refugees are coming from a war torn area and it reasonable to assume there may be people with physical disabilities among them who need specific housing or adaptations, so again this may be an issue in providing suitable accommodation, either permanent or temporary.

When we have the dates of the family's entry into the UK, we would hold our temporary accommodation, if suitable, when it became vacant near their arrival time. This would have implications for our other homeless families and would result in the increase in B&B use for those who we are unable to place into TA. There would be a need to look for alternative B&B than those we currently use as these are more suitable for single clients than for families. This would have a cost implications as family rooms have a higher premium.

Other Impacts:

Family reunion may result in a settled family's accommodation no longer being suitable to their needs. This would result in having to move them to larger or additional accommodation.

Family's will need furniture, clothing, bedding which we may have to provide, and so may have a financial impact, however, we would work with voluntary groups to get these items at a much lower cost.

Estimated costs

Direct cost:

Additional staff member in Housing Options: £15.8k (based on 6 months officer post)

Indirect costs:

Keeping houses void prior to refugees arriving: £9.5k lost income (based on 25 dwellings for 4 weeks in HRA properties). In reality we are not sure that the HRA would be able to house 25 families in a short period, but this is an indication.

Additional use of B&B for families who are not able to move into temporary accommodation or tenancy: £550 per week, per family. This is an estimate of the cost over and above the housing benefit rate and so is the net cost to TDBC. We would have no indication of how many families would be displaced or for how long.

We are doubtful whether we would be able to reclaim the direct staffing cost from central government. We anticipate that we would get nothing towards the indirect costs.

Revenues and Benefits

If those fleeing Syria are granted refugee status, then any located in the Taunton Deane area would have access to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. It is unlikely there would be significant implications for Revenues and Benefits staff in undertaking any additional work for 25 new residents. In general, the cost of Housing Benefit is met by subsidy from Central Government based on the needs of the applicant and their family and their weekly income. However, subsidy can be reduced depending on the type of accommodation provided, its size and the rent charged. Council Tax Support is funded by Taunton Deane Borough Council and the other major precepting authorities. If the new arrivals are considered to be asylum seekers, there would be no entitlement to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support.

Partnership Implications

The Borough Council will need to work closely with a number of key partners

Community Safety Partnership: Integration within existing communities will be a key concern. This should be discussed with the Community Safety Partnership (these matters need debate at a county-wide level - we are aware of African refugee arrivals elsewhere in the county).

Education and Schools: Liaison with the education sector to discuss the needs / support for any person of school age (4-18).

Health Services: Arrivals from a war torn country may have physical injuries or mental health concerns. Liaison with GP surgeries and other health providers will be essential.

Children and Adult Services including Social Care: Vulnerable children and adults will be a key concern. Appropriate interventions (e.g. getset services for young children) will be essential

Voluntary and Community Sector: Critical for assisting with advice and support needs, including provision of furniture and clothing. Matter should be debated at strategic level.

Faith groups: Many arrivals will be practising Muslims (or indeed Christians/other faiths). Contacts with local faith groups for support.

The above will create additional demands on staff time (both TDBC and partners). However, for TDBC, this could be reasonably absorbed within existing arrangements through re-prioritising of existing tasks.

At this stage we will have no idea whether the arrivals can speak English. If they cannot, then this may result in costs associated with translation services (if local volunteers cannot be found).

Motions to Council – Assessment Proforma

(To be used in circumstances where it appears the wording of a proposed Motion will commit the Council to providing further financial or staffing resources which cannot be met from existing budgets)

Brief Details of the Motion -

That TDBC welcomes 25 families (Syrian refugees) with open arms. To work with Central Government by proactively integrating these families into our communities, as some 40 councils around the UK so far have pledged to do.

Questions to be addressed

- *What additional resource would be required to ensure the Motion (if approved) could be implemented?*

Answer – Staffing resources from various services (see above). Financial resources include a temporary appointment in Housing Options. Proposals will impact on both General Fund (Housing Options) and HRA (see above for details). Possible need for translation services.

- *What needs to be done to identify the level of resource necessary both in financial and staff terms?*

Answer – More clarity required on significant variables including timing of arrival, numbers, family size, status, level of vulnerability, availability of government (or other) assistance

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Are any approvals needed to provide these resources?</i> |
|--|

Answer – Yes. Budget implications will need to be further assessed and approved in the usual manner

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Will this require reports to be submitted through Scrutiny and the Executive? If a Supplementary Estimate is required, Full Council approval will be required too.</i> |
|--|

Answer – Yes

Likely timescale involved – unclear at this stage. Further dialogue required with key partners including SW Councils, LGA and Home Office

Mark Leeman 01823 356411 - m.leeman@tauntondeane.gov.uk

For specific enquiries:

Housing Options: Heather Stewart: h.stewart@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Housing Finance: Lucy Clothier: l.clothier@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Revenues and Benefits: Heather Tiso: h.tiso@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Partnerships: Mark Leeman

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Full Council – 29 September 2015

Report of the Joint Independent Members Remuneration Panel

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Richard Parrish)

1. Background

- 1.1 The attached report has been submitted by the Joint Independent Members Remuneration Panel. The report will be presented to Full Council by the Chairman of the Panel, Mr Ian Partington who will be accompanied by the Panel's Advisor, Mr Julian Gale.
- 1.2 It sets out the conclusions and recommendations of a fundamental review of the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances which has been carried out by the Panel.

2. Finance Comments

- 2.1 The Panel is aware that it is not obliged to have regard to the overall budgetary impact of its recommendations when making recommendations to the Council.
- 2.2 The Panel is also aware of the financial restraints facing local authorities currently and into the future and the public perception of elected Members awarding themselves increases in allowances. The Panel has therefore had regard to these issues when bringing forward recommendations for consideration.
- 2.3 Nevertheless, the recommendations relating to Members' Allowances – if accepted in full by the Council – will result in an additional cost to the Council of £10,163.

3. Legal Comments

- 3.1 Provisions in relation to Members' Allowances are set out in the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021) and subsequent amendments to the regulations (SI 2003/1022 and SI 2003/1692). Under the Regulations the Council has to appoint an Independent Panel to make recommendations on its Scheme of Members' Allowances, for consideration by the Council. The Council may accept, reject, or amend any of the Panel's recommendations. The Regulations provide for a single Panel to advise more than one Council.
- 3.2 The Council has joined the Joint Independent Members' Remuneration Panel alongside Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council and West Somerset Council.

- 3.3 All Members have a personal and a prejudicial interest in this item through receipt of allowances. The Council's Code of Conduct includes a dispensation allowing all Members to attend and vote on Members' Allowance issues in spite of their prejudicial interest as long as the interest is declared at the relevant meeting. This paragraph has the effect of taking these declarations as having been made by all Members.

Members do not therefore need to make a verbal declaration at the Council meeting.

4. Equalities Impact

- 4.1 Provision in the scheme for dependants' Carers Allowances will assist Members with such responsibilities in carrying out Council duties. A robust allowance regime can play an important role in attracting people from all sections of the community to stand as Councillor.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 There are no risks associated with this report and any recommendations as the Council is not required to agree them but simply to have regard to them when making decisions in respect of Members' Allowances.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 (a) The Council is **recommended**:-
- (i) To accept the report of the Joint Independent Members Remuneration Panel;
 - (ii) To approve the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2015/2016 attached as Appendix 2 to the Panel's report which includes the specific recommendations set out for:-
 - (a) A new Basic Allowance for Members of £4486 for 2015/2016 and the proposal for annual increases for a six year period;
 - (b) A new Special Responsibility Allowance structure;
 - (c) Revised Travel and Subsistence Allowance provisions; and
 - (d) Revised Carers' Allowance provisions; and
 - (iii) To agree to backdate the payment of the new allowances to the relevant date of appointment following the Borough Council Elections.
- (b) If the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2015/2016 is agreed in full, a supplementary estimate from the General Fund Reserves in 2015/2016 for £10,163 be approved,

with the costs for future years being built into the Medium Term Financial Plan.

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Report of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel

1. Introduction

1.1. This report:

- (a) Sets out the conclusions and recommendations from the fundamental review of the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances carried out by the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (b) Recommends a new Scheme of Members' Allowances for Taunton Deane Borough Council which is attached as Appendix 2 to this report for consideration.

This report builds on the previous report submitted by the Panel in February 2015 which set out the basis for the fundamental review; some proposed principles to underpin the setting of the Basic Allowance (referred to as BA throughout this report) and the Special Responsibility Allowances (referred to as SRAs throughout this report) and a recommended list of approved duties to be included in a new Taunton Deane Scheme.

In preparing this report, the Panel was aware that since the elections in May, there are likely to be new councillors who are unfamiliar with the issues considered by the Panel.

The Council in February accepted the Panel's recommendations on these issues and these approvals formed the basis for the Panel's further work leading to the proposed Scheme attached to this report.

2 Executive Summary

2.1 Section 2 of the report gives an overview of the Panel's approach to the fundamental review of the Members' Allowances Scheme and summarises the Panel's recommendations. The rest of the report explains in some detail the background to the Panel's recommendations for a new Scheme including the Panel's reasoning and the evidence used.

2.2 Context:

- (a) The statutory task of the Panel is to make recommendations to a Council before it makes or amends a Scheme of Members' Allowances. The Council must have regard to the Panel's recommendations before agreeing or amending a Scheme.
- (b) This report is based on comprehensive data, information and evidence obtained from internal and external resources including the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the Bank of England (BoE), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
- (c) The Panel has used the latest available data but, unavoidably, this has not always been up-to-date.
- (d) Since 2008 the real value of the BA has declined with the rate of inflation. The decision in December 2013 to increase the BA to £4,344 where it has remained, although welcomed by the Panel, only slightly compensated for

the loss of real value. By 2012, before the increase in 2013, the real value of the BA had fallen to £3,792 and by 2015 the real value is still only £3,644, ie. less than its value in 2008. An inflation-adjusted nominal BA that returns today to the real value of 2008 would need to be around £5,194 rather than its current value of £4,344.

- (e) SRA payments have also been suppressed over recent years alongside the BA but are within the range paid by comparable councils. The Panel is not proposing significant amendments to levels of SRA payments at this stage noting that they will increase on an annual basis in line with the annual increases proposed to the BA. This will start to bring SRAs up to an appropriate level.
- (f) The main report:
 - (i) also embodies previous decisions taken by the Council in response to recommendations made by the Panel including an agreed list of approved duties;
 - (ii) contains relevant evidence, data, and the detailed recommendations.

2.3 Main recommendations:

- (a) The Panel was strongly of the view that in respect of the level of the BA and SRA, the overriding concern and focus at this time should be the declining real value of the BA compared with levels agreed by the Council in 2008/9 and the need therefore to recommend a move to recovering the previous real values. Establishing a firmer rationale for a definitive BA should follow once the real value of the BA has been recovered and could be a later task for the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel.
- (b) The Panel is **recommending:**
 - (i) that the BA for 2015/16 should be increased to **£4,486**; an increase of £142 over the current BA;
 - (ii) that further annual increases in the BA of £142 (inflation linked) should be agreed over a period of up to six years (the last 2 years of this period would be an 'in principle' decision at this stage) to achieve a Basic Allowance of £5,194 in Year 6. Such a level of BA (adjusted for inflation) should, approximately adjust the BA to its earlier real value. A review after four years of these arrangements is necessary because annual increases and indexing arrangements can only be agreed for a maximum of 4 years and this Council cannot bind the new Council to be elected in 2019 to this decision;
 - (iii) a new SRA structure linked to the BA and the Leader's SRA which seeks to keep payments in line with the Council's existing SRA scheme;
 - (iv) revised Travel, Subsistence and Carers' Allowance provisions

bringing the arrangements into line with the other district council schemes where it makes sense to do so and including comprehensive supporting rules.

3. Members' Allowances and Remuneration Panels – the legal position

- 3.1** Following the district council elections in May there will be some new members of the Council who may not be familiar with the Panel and its work. By way of an introduction the legal provisions in relation to members' allowances are set out in the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (SI 1021) and subsequent amendments to the regulations (SI 2003/1022 and SI 2003/1692) ["the Regulations"]. Under the Regulations each Council must appoint an Independent Panel to make recommendations on its Scheme of Members' Allowances. The Council must have due regard to the recommendations of the Panel before it makes any decisions in relation to its Members' Allowances Scheme but it may accept, reject, or amend any of the Panel's recommendations. The Regulations provide for a single panel to advise more than one Council. [see 3.4]
- 3.2** The regulations define a number of basic requirements for allowances' schemes but also give considerable scope to allow a council to adopt local provisions according to their circumstances. The only mandatory element provided for in the Regulations is the payment of a Basic Allowance to all members of a Council. All of the other elements that are currently paid under the scheme, ie, Special Responsibility, Travel, Subsistence and Carers' Allowances are discretionary.
- 3.3** The basic principles on which Remuneration Panels work are not set out in statute but there are national operational standards. In summary they include:
- The 50% rule (no more than 50% of Members of any individual Council should receive an SRA)
 - Any Member should only receive one SRA at any one time;
 - BA payments should be based on a voluntary time contribution of 30% or 33% to maintain the differential between a salary and an allowance¹.
 - When considering the payment of SRAs, clarity is needed by both Council and the Panel when considering each specific position and whether it qualifies for an SRA. Eg. is the position one which requires judgement and responsibility; or is it a supporting role that nevertheless requires very substantial time and effort.
- 3.4** Joint Independent Remuneration Panel: The Council joined the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel alongside Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council and Mendip District Council in 2014 as a way to maximise the efficient use of resources and to bring greater consistency to the members' allowances schemes of the councils. The Panel's membership comprises 3 independent representatives appointed by the County Council and 1 each by the District Councils. All of the members of the Panel are residents of Somerset. The current Panel membership is outlined in brief below for the information of the Council:

¹The Panel recommends the contribution is set at 33%. This discount on hours 'worked' by councillors reinforces that the BA payment is not a salary paid for employment

Ian Partington	Economist. Appointed JP in 1982. Previous academic employment: Principal Lecturer in Economics at Oxford Brookes University.
Paul Fellingham	Barrister at law. Previously 43 years in the Magistrates Courts. The last 20 years as the Justices Clerk for Hertfordshire.
Jason Woods	Engineering, Business, and Training professional. Officer in the Royal Navy. Elected Parish Councillor
Graham Russell	Former Head of Democratic Services (Bath & North East Somerset Council). Chair of annual meeting of IRP Chairs and member of, and adviser to, a number of IRPs across the region and in Cumbria
Keith Bevan	Resigned from the Panel – August 2015
Robert Govier	Farmer and parish councillor for 20 years, former school governor, former parish representative on the West Somerset Standards Committee.

4 Background

4.1 Introduction and context

4.1.1 This report builds on the earlier reports to the Council which set out the Panel's intentions:

- to undertake the fundamental review of the Council's Scheme alongside the other district schemes;
- to establish some general principles across all three district schemes where this makes sense but with each Scheme continuing to be individual to each council to reflect the history of each Scheme and the particular circumstances of the Council;
- to bring forward full Scheme recommendations including actual amounts of allowances after the District Council elections and the adoption of new democratic arrangements by each Council;
- to undertake a survey of the members of each council in advance of the district elections for views on the current arrangements to be considered alongside extensive benchmarking information inside and outside Somerset;
- that its recommendations must be, inter alia, supported by the evidence, based on reasonable assumptions, be relevant to the needs of the Council and its members, and must be flexible enough to cope with future changes.

The Panel also brought forward for consideration a list of approved duties to be applied across all three district council schemes [see

Appendix 2, Annex C].

The Council has to date approved all of the recommendations and intentions of the Panel as set out above and this report builds on these approvals and brings forward a new Scheme of Members' Allowances for the Council for approval.

4.1.2 A fundamental review of the Taunton Deane Scheme was considered necessary for the following reasons:

- (a) the widening of the Panel's remit to encompass three district councils to enable effective benchmarking within Somerset as well as wider comparisons outside Somerset;
- (b) an intention, if the scope allowed, to remove financial barriers to potential candidates for election;
- (c) to establish a rationale for the BA and SRA payments.

4.1.3 The Panel is aware that it is not obliged to have regard to the overall budgetary impact of its recommendations when making recommendations to a Council. However, the Panel is conscious of the financial restraints facing local authorities currently and into the future, as well as the public perception of elected Members awarding themselves substantial increases in allowances. The Panel has had regard to these issues in bringing forward its recommendations for the Scheme.

5. Basic Allowance (BA)

5.1 Background

5.1.1 The payment of the BA is intended to recognise the time commitment of all councillors, including attending meetings, attending member learning and development events, dealing with constituency matters, representing the Council on external bodies. It is also intended to cover incidental costs such as the use of their homes, and telephone costs.

5.1.2 Since 2008 the BA has remained unchanged except for a 1% increase agreed by the council in December 2013.

5.1.3 The result of the lack of regular updating of the BA is that since 2008 annual inflation has reduced its real value, until by 2014 the value of the Allowance had fallen by over £800 in nominal terms.

5.1.4 The Joint Panel recognised the difficulty that councillors have in voting increases in allowances for themselves – notwithstanding such supportive commentary as provided, for example, by *Councillors on the front line*². The Joint Panel would hope that its report provides Councillors with a sound rationale for an increase in the BA.

² Communities and Local Government Select Committee report (Sixth report of session 2012-2013)

5.2 Evidence

5.2.1 In preparing this Report, the Panel has used the best available data, but this has not always been up-to-date or consistent. In considering the rationale and size of the BA, the Panel has made use of several sources of numerical and other data. In particular:

Internal sources:

- Questionnaire survey of councillors (January 2015);
- Commentary from councillors;
- Officer and senior councillor sources;

External sources:

- Office of National Statistics (in particular, the Annual Survey of Hours & Earnings [ASHE]; Nomisweb); Bank of England;
- Local Government Association (Members' Allowances surveys)
- TaxPayers' Alliance (Members' Allowances data);
- South West Councils data;
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (especially the "Nearest Neighbour" tool).

5.3 Questionnaire survey January 2015³

5.3.1 (a) Questionnaires were made available to all councillors and out of 56, 16 councillors provided responses. The Panel recognised that with a relatively small response, the data generated by the questionnaires would need to be used judiciously.

(b) Of the 16 responses, 7 supported a rise in the BA (12% of all Taunton Deane councillors) and 9 did not. There was also concern expressed as to the 'democratic effect' of not raising the BA, for example:

"I believe it has been allowed to slip backwards too much over recent years and may not be encouraging to potential new councillors."

"Cllrs give of their time and energy willingly and represent a valuable resource for their community. I believe this should be acknowledged by an increase in allowance to at least show some appreciation if not keep pace with inflation as has been happening with several years of no increases."

"I believe we should link the basic allowance to an increase % consistent with other staff since the last increase."

"It would need to rise by this amount a year {i.e. 20%} for this next Quadrennium in order to merely be at the same level when it froze some years ago; to a new allowance starting in 2019 of £7,033. If we wish to empower more diversification and ensure that being a Councillor is not restricted to those who can afford it or are past working age then we must address the risible remuneration."

³ Copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix, Item 2.0

“it may be politically correct to say no to an increase in the basic allowance year on year but ordinary councillors should still be awarded a small increase for the time, dedication, to what is, in some words, very unrecognised for what they do.”

5.4 Panel’s approach to the BA

5.4.1 The Panel’s approach focused on the following elements:

- (a) the real value of the BA;
- (b) the possible effect of a continuing decline in the real value of the BA;
- (c) the methodology in determining the BA;
- (d) the recommendations and conclusions of the Panel.

5.4.1.1 The real value of the BA

- (a) The Panel considered an array of data relating to the real value of the BA following the financial and fiscal events beginning in 2007/2008 (See Table 3);
- (b) Table 1 below shows that in 2008 the average hourly pay in the south west was £12.86 and if this had been adjusted for inflation to 2015, the appropriate hourly rate would be £15.32. The median hourly rate of pay in the Taunton Deane local authority area (est. 2015) is £11.39. *The BA of £4,301 in 2008 if inflation-proofed, would be about £5,194 in 2015 rather than its current value of £4,344*

Table 1
South-west region hourly pay and Taunton Deane Borough Council’s BA at 2008 value and adjusted for inflation to 2015

Year	Average hourly rate for south-west England (£s)	Taunton Deane Council BA (£s)
2008	12.86	4301
2009	13.14	4395
2010	13.58	4540
2011	14.9	4745
2012	14.58	4877
2013	14.95	5043
2014	15.17	5119
2015	15.32	5194 est. (target)
Actual (2015)		4344
Taunton Deane (LA) area hourly pay	£11.39 (median)	

- (c) Table 2 provides a broader comparison by considering the shift between 2006 and 2012 in the relative position of Taunton Deane Borough Council's BA compared with the BA paid by other district councils, using the latest available data.

So, for example, in 2006 (Col. i) 51.2% of councils in England had a lower BA than Taunton Deane whereas in 2011/12 the figure was only 47.0% (Col. iii). Similarly, in the south west in 2006 (Col. ii) 54.0% of councils had a lower BA than Taunton Deane but in 2011/12 this had fallen to 39.7% (Col. iv). Taunton Deane's BA had at that time moved relatively lower both nationally and locally⁴.

Table 2
Taunton Deane Borough Council's BA compared with other councils
(2006-2007 & 2011-2012)

	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)
	% of District Councils 2006 in England with a <i>lower</i> BA	% of District Councils 2006 in South West England with a <i>lower</i> BA	% of District Councils 2011 (County Council) in England with a <i>lower</i> BA	% of District Councils 2011 in South West England with a <i>lower</i> BA
Taunton Deane	51.2	54.0	47.0	39.7

¹ Excluding London boroughs.

It is recognised that the definition of "South West" in official statistics includes parts of England that might be disputed.

- (d) Table 3 uses index numbers to allow an easier comparison of the real value of Taunton Deane's BA. Col. (ii) makes clear the 15% decline in the real value compared with hourly rates of pay in the south west which had declined in real terms by 'only' about 8% (nominal wage rates in the south-west have increased whereas the BA has been virtually constant).

⁴ The increase in the BA in 2013, by £43, probably has made a difference to the ranking today but likely to be small since some other councils have also adjusted their BA.

Table 3

Taunton Deane Borough Council's BA and comparator (real values)

	(i)	(ii)
Year	Hourly pay South West	Taunton Deane Council
2008	100.0	100.0
2009	100.3	97.8
2010	98.0	94.7
2011	93.9	90.6
2012	92.0	89.1
2013	92.9	86.9
2014	91.2	85.6
2015	91.5	84.7

5.4.1.2 Possible effect of a continuing decline in the BA

- (a) The Panel discussed the familiar argument that the BA was important because it helped to cushion the personal costs of becoming a councillor and thus whilst not actively encouraging, does not discourage citizens from taking part in elections and the democratic process.
- (b) The Panel took particular account of two sets of data: one was the large scale and reliable survey of local councillors by the Local Government Association in 2013 and the other was data relating to local elections since 2003; regarding the latter, of particular interest was the ratio of number of candidates to council seats, and the number of uncontested seats. [see Table 4]
- (c) The amount of information contained in Table 4 is limited and allows no firm conclusions. However, the large scale survey by the Local Government Association did provide fairly hard evidence for the Panel, representing perhaps financial opinions of councillors not always readily expressed publicly. It is clear from Table 5 that although 25% of councillors would be able to fulfil their responsibilities without financial benefits, over one-third of councillors would be seriously affected in fulfilling their role without financial benefits.

Table 4
Ratio of number of candidates to council seats at election

Year	Taunton Deane	% u/c
2003	2.59	[1.96]
2007	2.36	[0]
2011	2.45	[0]
2015	3.0	[0]
Average	2.6	

Figures in [] are the percentage of seats that were uncontested [u/c]

Table 5
LGA Survey - the extent to which councillors would be able to fulfil their role without the current package of benefits, England 2013

	No.	%
Fully/to a great extent	4329	24.4
To some extent	6778	38.2
To a small extent	3351	18.9
Not at all	2615	14.8
Don't know	650	3.7
Base (population)	17723	

5.4.1.3 Methodology in determining the BA

- (a) The Panel noted an earlier approach by some IRPs to the setting of the BA: using a local or national median (male) white-collar wage; a figure previously – but no longer published by the Local Government Association. In using such an approach, IRPs are equating the role of a councillor with observable productive activity, ie. output. However, the BA is partly a payment to cover incidental costs incurred by councillors, such as telephone, and councillors' use of their own homes, and it is also a recognition of the *time* commitment of councillors - it is not a payment for explicitly doing a job involving quite specific obligations that require particular skills and competences. Had the purpose of the BA been defined in this latter way, then the use of alternative employment comparators would have been quite straightforward and unquestionably valid in view of the skills and competences needed to be a good councillor. Nevertheless, the Panel did consider a range of comparators -see Table 6 below and Table 1 in Appendix 1 in order to provide a useful context.
- (b) The generally accepted wide obligations of being a councillor are such that a competent councillor would need a wide range of fairly high-level skills and competences.
- (c) The estimates in Table 6 provide a broad range of earnings and receipts compared with the BA and the Panel concluded that the Taunton Deane BA was too low.

Table 6
Sample occupations and hourly earnings,
and state benefits (provisional 2014)

<u>Occupations in South-West England</u>	Hourly rate (£) (excl. overtime)
Elementary admin. & service occupations, eg. sorting, delivering mail, simple clerical tasks	8.18
Sales & customer service occupations	8.75
Skilled agricultural & related trades, eg. producing crops and animals, tending private and public gardens	9.12
Secretarial & related occupations, eg. medical secretary, school secretary	9.94
Health & social care associate professionals, eg. dental technician, sports therapist	13.35
Health professionals	20.27
Teaching & educational professionals	21.54
Corporate managers and directors	21.55
Approximate (estimated) hourly rate of payment – average of 8 state benefits	5.95
<u>Calculated hourly rate for Taunton Deane councillors using BA formula and data</u>	6.68

- (d) The Panel, having concluded that the BA is low, considered as its next step what might be a reasonable and justifiable level of BA and how such a BA might be achieved.

5.4.1.4 Recommendations and conclusions of the Panel

- (a) Since 2008, the decline in the real value of the Taunton Deane Council BA, as a result of the freezing of the Allowance for a number of years, is substantial (15%) compared with a range of valid comparators, and without any increase in the Allowance, continuing inflation will clearly reduce its real value further. For example, at even modest rates of inflation such as 1.5% pa which is the consensus mid-range forecast up to 2019, the value of the BA will decline by a further £250 or by about 6%.
- (b) The Panel attached significance to the Local Government Association survey of councillors (2013) that showed the importance of financial benefits for a large proportion of councillors in the proper fulfilment of their political role. Low levels of BA could only have a damaging effect on local democracy and in particular the representative nature of councils. In the absence of a more comprehensive and detailed survey of Taunton Deane Councillors the LGA Survey 2013 represented good evidence (See [Appendix 1](#), Item 3.0, page 17).
- (c) The Panel took the view that if Taunton Deane Borough Council in 2008/9 had decided that there were good reasons that an appropriate rate of BA was £4,301 then, as a minimum, such a payment is defensible and justifiable today. Correspondingly, the decision by the Council to increase the BA to £4,344pa in 2013 can be judged in the same way. In other words, an appropriate BA should be one which is

adjusted for intervening inflation. The appropriate BA on these assumptions would be about £5,194pa. This would amount to an increase of over £800 on the present Allowance.

- (d) The Panel is conscious that such an immediate increase in the BA would not be feasible, given that the decline in real terms had been, altogether, over six years.
- (e) Nevertheless the Panel was convinced that after virtually six years of decline, an upward adjustment was essential and, pragmatically, this should be achieved through a fairly simple mechanism and over a period of up to six years. The Panel therefore recommends a BA for 2015/16 of £4,486 and an annual increase, as a lump-sum rather than a percentage adjustment, of £142 and that this annual lump-sum increase should be inflation-indexed over the period.
- (f) The Panel recommends that the Consumer Prices Index (H) is used for the annual inflation-adjustment of the lump-sum. CPIH includes housing costs which is an element referred to in the BA. In recent years, CPIH has been slightly lower than CPI.
- (g) The Panel accepted that formally the recommended indexing could only be for a four-year period under the regulations. It is also aware that the annual increases proposed can only be agreed for a four-year period as this Council cannot commit the new Council to be elected in 2019. The Panel hopes however that the Council would consider making a commitment, in principle, to the final two years of the annual increases and indexing proposals. If accepted in principle these would then be the subject of a further decision by the Council after the next district council elections in 2019.

6 Special Responsibility Allowances

- 6.1** SRAs are paid to Members who are appointed to posts which have significant additional responsibilities. The amount of the SRA is primarily based on the degree of responsibility that relates to the position and also includes consideration of the perceived call on Members time.
- 6.2** The critical issue for the Panel was to re-establish a sound basis for the calculation of SRAs. The Panel was informed that at one stage there had been a clear link between the SRA scheme and the BA but this had become less clear over time. The Panel has also benchmarked current SRAs against comparable councils to assess whether current levels of payment were appropriate.
- 6.3** The Council accepted in February that the SRA structure should be based on:
 - (a) multiples of the BA so creating an automatic indexing provision as increases in the BA will be reflected in increases in SRA payments;
 - (b) a limited number of SRA bands and that these should be consistent across the three councils where it makes sense to do so but to also allow provision for individual council requirements to reflect their culture and their democratic arrangements.

- 6.4** The SRA structure set out below and which is included in the Members' Allowances Scheme achieves these aims by placing the Leader of Council in Band 1 reflecting the fact that this post carries the most individual responsibility within the Council. The Leader's SRA is based on a multiple of the BA. Bands 2 to 6 are all relative to Band 1 and are based on multiples of the BA.
- 6.5** The proposed amounts of SRA in each band have been set by the Panel after careful consideration of benchmarking data, consultations, and comparisons with other councils. This exercise shows that the values of the SRAs have been restrained as a result of the BA being effectively frozen for a number of years. But the SRAs are, nevertheless, considered appropriate given the level of the BA. The Panel is not, therefore, recommending significant changes to SRA payments at this stage because the adoption of annual increases to the BA over six years (along with provision for inflation) will result in automatic annual increases to SRAs. This will ensure that the SRAs are brought back up to an appropriate level alongside the BA. The bands and type of role envisaged to be included in each band have been informed by a list of role profiles – attached as Appendix 3 - which attempts to outline at a high level the primary responsibilities of key posts.
- 6.6** The resulting Table 7 below:
- (a) sets out a simplified banding structure of 6 bands based on the table agreed by the Council in February 2015;
 - (b) bases SRA bands on multiples of BA but retains current level payments wherever possible. The level of SRA for Scrutiny Chairmen and the Chairmen of the lower level committees is low compared to other Councils. The Panel was aware of, and has respected, a previous Council's decision to pay Scrutiny Chairman at a lower level of SRA than the main decision-making committees and maintaining this differential down to the secondary decision-making committees ;
 - (c) reflects current levels of responsibility associated with posts;
 - (d) shows existing payments shown in ordinary type;
 - (e) shows proposed SRA payments shown in bold together with the multiples of BA for each band in brackets - as an example the Leader's SRA is set at a multiple of 2.8 X the BA;
 - (f) proposes the inclusion of an allowance for the Leader of larger Opposition Groups – this is consistent with the approach taken by other councils;
 - (g) proposes the inclusion of a Band 6 SRA for the Chairman of the Standards Committee. The Panel is aware that a previous Council considered this issue and decided not to pay an allowance. The Panel considers that the Standards Committee, although only advisory to the Council, has an important role to play on member conduct, with its serious implications for the Council and the public's perceptions - alongside the Independent Person - and therefore considers that the role of Chairman justifies the payment of a small SRA.

6.7

Table 7
TAUNTON DEANE SRA Structure based on new BA of £4486

Band	Post	Amount
1	Leader	12219 12560 (x2.8)
2	Cabinet Member Deputy Leader	7 x 4752 4935 (x1.1)
3	Chairman /Mayor - Council Chairman – Planning Committee	4752 (Planning) 4486 (x1) 9087 (Mayor) 8972 (x2)
4	Chairman – Scrutiny Committee	3000 (Scrutiny – 2 posts) 3140 (x0.7)
5	Vice-Chairman – main committee / Council Chairman – secondary committee	1660 (Deputy Mayor) 1357 (Corporate Governance) 1357 (Licensing) 1346 (x0.3)
6	Other posts	500 (Independent Person) 449 (x0.1) 0 (Chairman - Standards Committee) 449 (x0.1) 0 (Leader –Opposition Groups with 5+ members) 150 per member 250 (Chair – T&FG) 225

Notes:

1. Existing SRA payments are shown in ordinary type
2. Proposed SRA payments for 2015/16 are shown in bold type
3. Multiples of the BA are shown in brackets

7. **Travel and Subsistence Allowances**

7.1 These allowances are intended to provide recompense for expenditure incurred by members on travel and subsistence for duties undertaken under the Council's list of approved duties. The Panel is proposing the adoption of the same provisions, for all three district councils for these allowances, to bring them into line with officer rates and HMRC tax thresholds.

7.2 The Panel is proposing additions to the Travel Allowance provisions to enable councillors to claim travel expenses for modes of transport other than by private car, motorcycle and bicycle. The recommendation is that the use of taxis should be eligible in exceptional circumstances and hired motor vehicles. This will ensure that councillors are not left out of pocket and are able to fulfil

their duties. The rural nature of much of the Borough combined with the majority of council meetings being held in the evening when public transport provision is limited means more creative solutions may be required for transport purposes.

7.3 It is proposed that eligible modes of transport should include:

- (a) Public transport including rail
- (b) Car sharing through the payment of an additional 5p per mile when one or more passengers travel to an approved duty in the same car
- (c) The use of taxis in exceptional circumstances
- (d) The use of hired motor vehicles (including car share clubs) in but with the level of reimbursement not to exceed the normal mileage rate paid for travel of 45p per mile. In exceptional circumstances it is recommended that the Chief Finance Officer may authorise reimbursement up to the full cost of hiring.

7.4 Current provisions across the three district council schemes for payments are very similar and there is no obvious reason to have differences. The advantage of agreeing the proposals set out in the Scheme is that the provisions are consistent with the County Council's Scheme so helping members who are both county and district councillors understand and apply the requirements when submitting claims for expenditure. The current differences in the payments are a result of the history of these allowances. They used to be set nationally and applied to all councils. Since these were removed as national provisions it has been down to each council to update the payments and local decisions have led to the differences apparent across the 3 district schemes. The proposed payments which are set out in the Scheme – Appendix 2 - are based on the current Taunton Deane provisions.

Overnight stay provisions have also been included to cover, for example, attendance at conferences.

7.3 The Scheme at Appendix 2 includes the revised list of approved duties as Annex C as agreed by the Council earlier this year. The list provides the basis for claims for travel, subsistence and carers' allowances and gives clarity to members (and to the officers who approve/audit the claims) about council duties undertaken and which can be claimed for and which cannot.

8. Carers' Allowances

8.1 All three district Schemes make provision for the payment of reimbursement of expenditure incurred by Members (a) for professional child-care services or (b) on professional care for elderly, sick or dependant relatives who live at the same address as the member. Reviewing these provisions has been a challenge for the Panel because historically there is limited experience within the councils of members claiming these allowances. The provisions in the three current district schemes are similar although the detail of the payments available differs to a degree.

8.2 The Panel's view is that the rules to be applied to the payment of the carers' allowance should be comprehensive and the same across the three councils although the payment provisions will continue to have local variations based on the current provisions in each Council's Scheme. The rules and payment provisions are set out in the Scheme at Appendix 2. The Panel have retained the current payment provisions within the Taunton Deane Scheme but the hourly rate has been updated to bring it into line with the current National Minimum Wage rate.

9. Members' Allowances Scheme - detail and rules

9.1 The BA and SRA payments are paid on a monthly basis as a matter of right (unless a member chooses not to receive allowances or a specific allowance). Other allowances have to be claimed against actual expenditure incurred up to the limits allowed in the Scheme. The Scheme recommended by the Panel includes brief descriptions of what each allowance covers and comprehensive rules to guide members through the process of making claims to ensure that claims are only made in the right circumstances, that evidence of expenditure is provided and to ensure that claims are submitted in a timely manner. Good practice in this area is essential for audit purposes and to provide assurance to the public that claims are appropriate and reasonable. Each of the existing district Schemes include some rules but the level of detail varies and in general this was an area which the Panel felt could be improved upon. The County Council's Scheme was used by the Panel as the basis for the rules now proposed for inclusion in the three district Schemes.

10. Recommendations

The Panel is recommending the Council:

- (a) accepts the Report of the Panel;**
- (b) approves the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2015/16 attached as Appendix 2 which includes the specific recommendations set out in the Report for:
 - (i) a new BA for Members of £4486 for 2015/16 and the proposal for annual increases for a six year period;**
 - (ii) a new SRA structure;**
 - (iii) revised Travel and Subsistence Allowance provisions;**
 - (iv) revised Carers' Allowance provisions;****
- (c) backdates the payment of the new allowances to relevant dates of appointments following the district council elections.**

**Panel Chairman:
Ian Partington**

**Lead Officer:
Julian Gale, Monitoring
Officer, SCC**

APPENDIX 1

Item 1.0

Table 1.0

Hourly rates of pay (excl. overtime) – local government areas (provisional 2014)

<u>Average rates of hourly pay calculated within local government areas</u>	£
Taunton Deane	13.35 (10.56)
Somerset	13.09 (10.15)
England & Wales	15.39 (11.59)
<u>Estimated hourly rate received by councillors using Basic Allowances formula and data</u>	
Taunton Deane	6.68

Figures in () are median values

Item 1.1

Using 'South West Councils' data for 2013, Taunton Deane's Basic Allowance is less than the average of £4,424. Earlier comparisons are difficult because of lack of data but in 2008/9 the average Basic Allowance for all district councils in England was £4,194 – which placed Taunton Deane below the prevailing average.

Item 2.0

JOINT IRP SURVEY OF MEMBERS

The Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) has started its review of the Members Allowance Schemes for the three District/Borough Councils that it advises. Members' views will be very important in informing the review, so the Panel is asking all Members to complete this short questionnaire.

BASIC ALLOWANCE

The Basic Allowance for ~~~~~ Council is currently £#,###.

Question 1: Should the Basic Allowance be kept at its current level for 2015/16?
YES / NO

Question 2: If you answered 'NO' to Question 1, should the Basic Allowance:
Be increased. If so, to what level? £.....
Be reduced. If so, to what Level? £.....

Question 3: Are there any comments that you wish to make about the Basic Allowance?

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ALLOWANCE SCHEME The Scheme covers a number of other aspects, including Special Responsibility Allowances, Travel and Subsistence, Approved Duties and Carers Allowance.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the wider Scheme and/or are there any specific issues that you would like the Panel to consider in its review?

TIME SPENT OF DISTRICT COUNCIL DUTIES

Question 5: On average, over the course of a year, how many hours per week do you spend on District Council duties? (This includes meetings, travel, dealing with constituent problems, etc.) hours per week.

Thank you for completing the survey. All the responses will be combined and no responses will be attributable to any individual Member.

Item 3.0

Table 2.0 contains selected data from the LGA census published in 2013. The data are not sufficient to draw conclusions about the effect of a declining real value of the Basic Allowance - which has occurred nationally and not just in the south west - in regard to enthusiasm for local democracy. But it is striking that nationally just over 60% of councillors are aged over 60 and the proportion of councillors who are retired has increased to almost half elected councillors – both of which have increased since 2004. One effect of these two facts might be a lack of interest in the size of the Basic Allowance, and that view coming from a group that is relatively well off – almost 80% of councillors occupying the top socio-economic groups and in 2013 almost 60% of councillors had a degree or degree-equivalent qualification.

Table 2.0**Local Government Association: elements of Councillors' profiles**

	2004	2013
Average hours per week spent on Council business	n/a	20.8
% of Councillors under 35 yrs age	3.8	5.0
% of Councillors over 60 yrs age	48.4	60.8
% of Councillors who are white	97.3	96
% of Councillors: retired	38.7	46.6
% of Councillors :self-employed	16.4	16.0
Length of service < six years	48.0	41.4
Length of service > 20 years	8.8	11.6
Intend to stand for re-election	54.0	65.3
Do not intend to stand for re-election	12.7	15.0
	2004	2013
% of Councillors in highest socio-economic groups	74.0	79.2 [44.0 national average]
% of Councillors in manual or craft socio-economic group	12.2	8.1

APPENDIX 2

Taunton Deane Borough Council Scheme of Members' Allowances – 2015/16

1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Council's Scheme provides for payment of:

- a Basic Allowance (referred to as BA throughout this Scheme), a flat rate payable to each Borough Councillor;
- a Special Responsibility Allowance (referred to as SRA throughout this Scheme) for Members undertaking 'special duties', as defined by the Council;
- a Carers Allowance (CA) to reimburse expenditure incurred by Members (a) in providing professional child care arrangements and (b) on professional care for elderly, sick or dependent relatives to enable them to undertake approved duties;
- Travel Allowances and Subsistence Allowances for Members undertaking 'approved duties'.

2. **GENERAL POINTS**

- 2.1 The term "Member" in these notes means a Taunton Deane Borough Councillor. Some aspects of the Scheme also apply to 'co-optees' (a member of a committee or sub-committee who is not elected) and the Independent Person appointed by the Council to advise on member complaints, as detailed.
- 2.2 Members and co-optees have the option of not claiming all or part of an allowance. The Chief Finance Officer must be notified in writing if a Member wishes to pursue this option.
- 2.3 Where a Member's or co-optee's term of office or appointment to a post qualifying for an allowance begins or ends during the financial year, he/she is entitled to the appropriate proportion of the annual payment.
- 2.4 Where there is an amendment made to the Scheme of Allowances that amendment may be applied retrospectively by the Council to the beginning of the financial year or to another agreed date in the year.
- 2.5 Where a Member takes on duties entitling them to a different level of allowances, the new entitlement may be applied retrospectively to the date the changes were effective from.
- 2.6 To cater for changes in circumstances that occur during the year and to ensure that no individual cases of exceptional hardship are experienced, the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader, can temporarily agree allowances and / or expense claims for individual Members as required where it is unclear if these are covered by the Scheme.

2.7 All enquiries relating to members' allowances should be made to (insert name or the relevant officer).

3. **BASIC ALLOWANCE (BA)**

3.1 A **BA of £4486 per annum**, has been approved for 2015/16 and will be paid to all Members in monthly instalments. In order to return the BA to its earlier real value (2008), the allowance will be increased by £142pa (index linked) for up to six years.

3.2 **Definition of BA:** BA recompenses Members for time devoted to their work as a councillor, and is intended to cover:-

- constituency and community duties, including use of their home;
- dealing with correspondence;
- single Member duties;
- attendance at single party/political meetings;
- attendance at formal meetings of the Council (including travelling time to and from meetings);
- attendance at seminars, conferences and training sessions;
- attendance on 'outside bodies' as a Council representative; and
- other incidental costs, for which no other specific provision is made.

4. **SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE (SRA)**

4.1 **SRAs are:**

- paid to Members who have significant additional responsibilities
- allocated primarily on the basis of the degree of responsibility that relates to the position and also includes consideration of the perceived call on Members time
- paid in addition to the BA which the Member continues to receive; and
- paid in monthly instalments for as long as the Member has the responsibility.

4.2 **SRA** payments provide recompense for the following activities associated with the position of responsibility:-

- meetings with Officers;
- attendance at Council premises to undertake official Council business;
- meetings with fellow Chairmen or decision-makers and including some single party meetings / activities;
- dealing with correspondence;
- visits directly connected to the performance of an SRA duty e.g.
 - official openings
 - familiarisation / fact findings visits;
- press meetings;
- any other official Council business carried out by the Member in the role.

4.3 The Council has adopted multiples of the BA as the basis for the calculation of the SRA bands contained within this Scheme. The top band of SRA – Band 1 - which applies to the post of Leader of Council reflects the importance and responsibility of this role. The Leader's Allowance is based on a multiple of 2.8 X the BA.

4.4 Other SRAs are allocated to bands below the Leader's Allowance reflecting diminishing levels of responsibility associated with specific roles.

4.5 The SRA bands, posts approved to receive a SRA and payments agreed for 2015/16 are set out in **Annex A**.

4.6 An individual Member may only receive one SRA at any one time. Where a member is entitled to more than one SRA in different bands because of the posts they hold then they shall be entitled to receive the higher SRA.

5. **CARERS ALLOWANCE (CA)**

5.1 Reimbursement of expenditure incurred by Members may be claimed (a) for professional child-care services or (b) on professional care for elderly, sick or dependant relatives who live at the same address as the member. These payments are intended to enable the member to undertake “approved duties”.

5.2 *General requirements*

- Reimbursement will only be paid where professional care is provided and the carer must not be a close relative.
- Reimbursement provided is taxable as it is classified as an “emolument of the ‘office’.”
- The child or relative being cared for must be normally resident with the member claiming reimbursement.
- Members’ are required to self-certify claims, confirming that they have incurred expenditure in accordance with the scheme and provide receipts.
- That neither the Member nor the person being cared for receives an allowance for care from any other source.
- The Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer have delegated authority to agree a higher limit for specialist care where required.

5.3 *Child-care*

- That payments are restricted to the care of children up to their 14th birthday who normally reside with the Member;
- That no reimbursement will be made for the care of children of compulsory school age during school hours except where the child is absent from school due to illness.

5.4 *Care of Dependant Relatives*

- That reimbursement is restricted to the care of an elderly, sick or disabled dependant relative normally living with the Member and requiring constant care.

5.5 *Reimbursement*

- Reimbursement will be made at the National Minimum Wage rate applicable at the time of the claim (£6.50 per hour at the time this Scheme was agreed).

6. **TRAVEL ALLOWANCE (TA)**

6.1 **TA:**

can only be claimed for an approved duty, or for any duty covered by a special responsibility payment and for 'normal allowable journeys' .

- is claimed monthly on the Members claim form and receipts, including fuel VAT receipts, should be submitted to support expenditure.
- is payable at the rates shown in **Annex B**.

6.2 **List of 'Approved Duties'**

The list of approved duties is set out in **Annex C**.

6.3 **Definition of 'normal allowable journey'**

The **normal allowable journey** (for which mileage can be reimbursed) is from a member's home to council offices and then back again. 'Council offices' will often be the main Council premises but could relate to any building where a member is undertaking an 'approved duty' under the Scheme, including, for example, attending a parish council meeting in their capacity as a district councillor.

The mileage that members can claim for is the **actual additional mileage** as a result of council business that the member incurs on any journey. The **maximum** mileage the member can claim for is the normal allowable journey mileage.

6.4 **TA - additional information**

- Members who are District and County Councillors may claim Travel Allowances, if applicable, from both Authorities, if attending approved duties for both on the same day. However, a Travel Allowance cannot be claimed from both Authorities for a joint meeting where the member is representing both councils. In this case, the Member should claim from one of the Authorities.
- VAT fuel receipts submitted should pre-date the first date claimed for on the relevant claim form.
- Claim forms must include details of all journeys to include the date of the journey, starting and finishing addresses and the purpose of the journey. Failure to include such details may result in a claim being rejected.

7. SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE (SA)

7.1 SA is

- Claimable for any approved duty exceeding 4 hours which spans the agreed meal time periods as set out in **Annex B**;
- Claimable for the actual cost of the meal or the overnight expenses up to the maximum allowed;
- Claimed monthly via the Members claim form; VAT receipts should be submitted to support expenditure wherever possible;
- Not claimable if a meal is provided free of charge;
- Only claimable for a members own meal. There is no provision in the scheme for reimbursing claims for hospitality for other people.

8. NON CLAIMABLE DUTIES

8.1 For the avoidance of doubt, the following duties are **not approved for the purpose of claiming Travel Allowances and Subsistence Allowances:-**

- Single Member duties including single party meetings except where the Scheme provides otherwise
- Constituency meetings and duties
- Duties relating to outside organisations that are not Board, committee, sub-committee or working group meetings. e.g. book launches, openings etc.
- Attendance at party political conferences
- Social functions including religious meetings / church services
- Where an outside body to which the member has been appointed itself pays members expenses.
- Where the member attends an outside body but in circumstances where they have not been appointed as an official representative of the Council, ie appointed either by the Council or the Leader of the Council.

9. CLAIMS

9.1 How to Claim

- BA and SRA are paid automatically on a monthly basis.
- Carers' Allowance, Subsistence Allowance and Travel Allowance expenditure must be claimed on the Members' Claim Form.
- Claims must be submitted monthly to the authorising officer in order to payroll deadlines.
- Late claims will result in late payment unless notification is given in advance. Claims older than 2 months will be referred for approval to pay to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Leader, and payment may be delayed or refused unless there is good cause for the lateness. Claims older than 3 months will not be reimbursed.
- Allowances must not be claimed where the member is entitled to receive payment from another body.

ANNEX A**SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCES (SRA) 2015/16****SRA Structure based on Basic Allowance of £4486 per annum**

Band	Post	Amount
1	Leader	12560 (x2.8)
2	Cabinet Member Deputy Leader	7 x 4935 (x1.1)
3	Chairman /Mayor - Council Chairman – Planning Committee	(Mayor) 8972 (x2) (Planning) 4486 (x1)
4	Chairman – Scrutiny Committee	(2 posts) 3140 (x0.7)
5	Vice-Chair – main committee / Council Chairman – secondary committee	(Deputy Mayor) (Chairman - Corporate Governance) (Chairman - Licensing) 1346 (x0.3)
6	Other posts	(Independent Person) 449 (x0.1) (Chairman – Standards Committee 449 (x0.1) 150 per member (Leader –Opposition Groups with 5+ members) (Chair – T&FG) 225

Note: The figures in brackets show the multiple of the Basic Allowance that applies to that band.

ANNEX B**SUMMARY OF RATES OF ALLOWANCES FOR MEMBERS****1 TRAVELLING ALLOWANCE**

Type of Expense	Rate
Travel by car irrespective of cc	45p/mile (this figure is in line with the current Inland Revenue threshold and automatically stays in line with changes to the threshold).
Car Share	In addition to the above rate a further 5p/mile will be available when one or more members are passengers in the same car
Travel by motorcycle	24p/mile
Travel by bicycle	20p/mile
Travel by railway or other public transport and car parking, tolls and ferries	Reimbursed at actual cost – Standard Fare for rail. Receipts are required.
In exceptional circumstances where all of the above options have been explored and deemed unviable	
Travel by Taxi	The rate for travel by taxi is not to exceed: i. in cases of urgency where no public transport or other means of travel is reasonably available the amount of the actual fare paid (receipt required) ii. in any other case, the amount of the fare for travel by appropriate public transport.
Hired Motor Car (including car share clubs e.g. Co-wheels or Zipcar) other than a taxi	The remuneration paid is not to exceed the level of the mileage allowance normally paid to members (currently 45p per mile), although the Chief Finance Officer may agree a higher level of remuneration up to a maximum of the actual cost of the hire.

2 SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE

Subsistence – in line with the rate paid to Council officers.

Breakfast **£6.72**, (actual expenditure up to this limit can be reclaimed when away from the normal place of residence for more than 4 hours before 11am)

Lunch **£9.24**, (actual expenditure up to this limit can be reclaimed when away from the normal place of residence for more than 4 hours and including the lunchtime period between 12 noon and 2pm)

Tea **£3.64**, (actual expenditure up to this limit can be reclaimed when away from the normal place of residence for more than 4 hours, and including the period between 3pm and 6pm)

Evening meal £11.44 (actual expenditure up to this limit can be reclaimed when away from the normal place of residence for more than 4 hours, ending after 7pm)

3	OVERNIGHT ABSENCE (BED AND BREAKFAST)	£
	Maximum (outside London)	106.40
	Maximum (London)	120

LIST OF APPROVED DUTIES

LIST OF APPROVED DUTIES for the purposes of Travel and Subsistence and Dependent Carers' claims

	<u>Attendance at:-</u>
1.	formal meetings of the Council, including Committees and Sub Committees and any other authorised meeting of these bodies or event organised by these bodies (including joint committees), where the councillor (a) has been appointed by the Council as a member, a substitute or representative or (b) is exercising a constitutional right to attend and /or to speak or (c) is attending in an observer capacity only;
2.	formal meetings of the [Executive/Cabinet], its sub committees and any other authorised meetings thereof where the councillor has (a) been appointed by the Leader/Council as a member or (b) is exercising a constitutional right to attend and/or to speak or (c) is attending in an observer capacity only;
3.	ad-hoc formally constituted working groups/panels (e.g. scrutiny task and finish groups) where the councillor is (a) a named member of the body or (b) is formally invited to participate;
4.	meetings of Somerset County Council committees/sub committees where the councillor has been appointed by the Council as a member or a representative;
5.	meetings of bodies to which the Council makes appointments except where the body itself pays allowances to the Council's representative (<i>the approval relates to meetings of the body itself, its standing committees/sub committees but not to other activities of the body</i>)
6.	meetings of any local authority association of which the Council is a member where the councillor is the appointed representative or nominated substitute;
7.	any conference where attendance is authorised by the Council [and involves an overnight stay];
8.	any Council premises, or other agreed location, for a meeting agreed with either a member in receipt of an SRA or an Officer for the purpose of discussing matters relating to Council business in which it is reasonable to expect the councillor to have an interest;
9.	briefing meetings at the invitation of an Officer of the Council provided that the members of at least two political groups have been invited;
10.	an approved agenda setting meeting or member development/awareness raising/seminar activity organised by the Council;
11.	meetings of Parish/Town Councils or equivalent community associations where the councillor attends as the local district councillor or as a representative of the District Council and not as a member of the Parish/Town

	Council/Community Association itself;
12.	any civic or ceremonial event at the specific invitation of, or in support of, the Chair/Mayor of the Council;
13.	site visits by members of the Planning/Development Control Committee;
14.	any site visit or inspection visits undertaken by members approved by or on behalf of the Council;
15.	tender opening meetings where invited by an Officer to attend;
	<u>Performance of:-</u>
16.	duties carried out by a member holding an office for which a special responsibility allowance applies;
17.	any particular duty for which express authority is given by or on behalf of the Council in case of emergency;
18.	such other duty for which prior approval has been given by the Chief Executive or other authorised Officer, in consultation with the Leader.

APPENDIX 3

DISTRICT COUNCIL - KEY MEMBER POSTS - ROLE PROFILES

Leader of the Council

This post carries the highest level of responsibility within the Council as it has full responsibility for decisions taken to run the Council's services within the Council's policy and budget framework. The post-holder

- Is the political lead for the Council
- Is responsible for all 'executive' decisions and the arrangements for making them
- Appoints and co-ordinates the work of Cabinet
- Allocates areas of responsibility to Cabinet Members and allocates 'executive' decision responsibilities to members and officers

Deputy Leader of Council

This post appointed by the Leader holds a portfolio of service responsibilities as a member of the Cabinet as well as additional responsibilities as deputy to the Leader

- Deputises as required in the absence of the Leader and exercises **all** responsibilities of the Leader in these circumstances
- Participates as a Member of Cabinet and assists the Leader in co-ordinating the work of the Cabinet
- Undertakes the service responsibilities of a Cabinet Member as detailed below.

Cabinet Member

Cabinet Members are appointed by the Leader and have a range of corporate (as a Member of the Cabinet) and individual service responsibilities including taking decisions as required by the Leader. Each Cabinet Member:

- Is the political lead and spokesperson for a range of Council services both inside and outside of the Council
- Shapes and develops the Council's strategic priorities and vision and the priorities and vision for the service areas for which they are responsible
- Takes decisions as a member of the Cabinet and as the single member for a range of Council services.
- Exercises responsibility for a range of Council services including their performance, efficiency and effectiveness

Chairman of Council / Mayor

The Chairman is the 'civic' head of the Council. The role requires political neutrality when acting in the capacity of Chairman, and the key purpose is to advance the interests of the Council and the district. The Chairman has no decision making responsibilities but is responsible for the conduct of Full Council meetings and ensuring that the Council's Constitution is upheld and promoted. The post-holder:

- Chairs Full Council meetings and other Council events as required
- Is the Council's ambassador at civic, ceremonial and other significant local events and hosts such events on behalf of the Council as required
- Promotes public involvement in the Council's activities
- Is the conscience of the Council.

Committee Chairman – main DECISION-MAKING Committees

Primary role is to chair meetings of one of the regulatory public decision-making committees of the Council. The post-holder does not take formal individual decisions but is responsible for the management of the committee's business and the conduct of its meetings.

In relation to the Committee, the post-holder:

- Is accountable to the Council for the efficient and effective conduct of its business including decisions taken in accordance with constitutional requirements
- Presents its recommendations and summaries of its business to Cabinet/Council as required by the Constitution.
- Is its media spokesperson in relation to Council business.

Committee Chairman - Scrutiny Committee

Primary role is to provide leadership for the Council's statutory scrutiny function and in particular the Committee's activities and meetings. The Committee does not take formal decisions under a scheme of delegation.

In relation to the Committee, the post-holder

- Is accountable to the Council for the efficient and effective conduct of its business in accord with constitutional requirements including reporting as necessary to the Cabinet and Council
- Promotes the role of scrutiny inside and outside of the Council and is the media spokesperson.

Committee Chairman – secondary DECISION-MAKING Committees

Primary role is to chair meetings of a public decision-making committee of the Council. The post-holder does not take formal individual decisions but is responsible for the management of the committee's business and the conduct of its meetings.

In relation to the Committee, the post-holder:

- Is accountable to the Council for the efficient and effective conduct of its business including decisions taken in accordance with constitutional requirements
- Presents its recommendations and summaries of its business to Cabinet/Council as required by the Constitution.
- Is its media spokesperson in relation to Council business

Vice-Chairman of Council

The Vice-Chairman's primary role is to assist the Chairman of Council / Mayor in carrying out his/her duties and be the 'civic' head of the Council in the absence of the Chairman. The post-holder:

- Chairs meetings of Full Council in the absence of the Chairman of Council / Mayor and exercises the full legal responsibilities of the Chairman for the duration
- At the Chairman's request, represents the Council and, when appropriate, the District, at civic and ceremonial events, and hosts such functions on behalf of the Council.

Committee Vice-Chairman

Primary role is to support the Chairman of the Committee.

In relation to the Committee, the post-holder:

- Assists the Chairman in managing its meetings and chairs meetings when the Chairman is unable to.
- In co-ordination with the Chairman, acts as a Council spokesperson in respect of its activities.

Full Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor John Williams – Leader of the Council

1. Congratulations to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth

- 1.1 Our great Queen is a very modest lady and it was indicated she did not wish to have great celebrations for the remarkable achievement of becoming our longest ever reigning Monarch, however remarkable we may regard it and it certainly is a tremendous achievement of longevity.
- 1.2 There was also an element of respect for Queen Victoria and of course a reminder of the loss of her father all those years ago.
- 1.3 So we confined ourselves to flying the Union Flag outside The Deane House and our Mayor sent a letter of thanks and congratulations from the Council and our Community. We also counted our blessings for 63 years reign of a Sovereign who has charted a very steady course through some extremely difficult waters. Long may she continue to reign over us.
- 1.4 I am sure you will all be supportive of the Mayor's representation and join in wholehearted congratulations to our wonderful Queen.

2. Town Centre Vibrancy

- 2.1 It is great to see well established and successful new restaurants opening in Taunton. Four restaurants have opened in the space of almost as many months and are proving extremely popular.
- 2.2 This all adds to the vibrancy of the town centre and helps reduce what is already a low number of empty shops. Our town centre vacancy rate is standing at 3.14% against the national vacancy rate of 10.4%. This stands us in good stead as a popular shopping destination for shoppers and a base attractive to traders and retailers.
- 2.3 It must also be recognised that the excellent range of restaurants also makes an enormous contribution to our night time economy, which is to be welcomed.

3. Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) Progress

- 3.1 The NIDR works are progressing and to update on the Kingston Loop

Bridge (Station Road) instructions have now been issued to the contractor for the construction of the bridge. Information from the contractor on the timescale to complete the works is awaited but it is expected they will have a piling rig on site in October. Once the rig has commenced work on site it should be possible to provide a projected completion date.

- 3.2 Regarding the rest of the works on the NIDR it is anticipated this should be finished well within the timespan of the bridge construction across Station Road. This will include reopening of the access road to the Priory Park housing estate and removal of the temporary access road through the former Priory Bridge Public Car Park. Much to the relief of local residents!

4. Junction 25 (J5) and A358

- 4.1 These two schemes are inextricably linked as the J25 enlargement and modification will take place ahead of the upgrade of the A358 and this will ensure early access to the proposed strategic employment site. County Highways are responsible for the design of J25 and are working closely with Highways England to ensure any future route for the A358 can be joined seamlessly with the upgraded roundabout.
- 4.2 In respect of progress the design of J25 is underway but we are awaiting Highway's England (HE) traffic modelling reports for the junction which is anticipated late this year. The design can then be finalised.
- 4.3 Planning of the A358 upgrade process is currently progressing through the governance in order to proceed to the next stage involving the development of options. During this stage possible options will be reviewed leading to a public consultation exercise early in the subsequent stage, currently anticipated to be in 2016.
- 4.4 Although there have been previous exhibitions on possible routes in the past, it is necessary for HE to review the current constraints to determine what options may now be applicable. It is therefore possible that the previous option as publicised may or may not be appropriate when taking account of changes that have occurred in the interim.
- 4.5 During the options stage they will seek to identify constraints and develop a traffic model to inform the options and selection. To help with developing a traffic model there is a need to obtain traffic data and understand the journeys people make in terms of their origin and destination. Surveys will be undertaken in October of this year to inform future planning work, this will include roadside interviews.

5. Strategic Employment Site Adjacent J25

- 5.1 Very positive meetings have taken place with both the Environment

Agency, HE and Somerset County Council (SCC) with a constructive approach to working. The team is being mobilised to prepare a planning application in the second half of next year to tie in with the Planning Department's single site allocation process. Positive meetings with a number of organisations regarding the site have been held, from both the private and public sector including health and education. There is strong and positive interest in this proposed site.

- 5.2 The usual environmental and ecological surveys are necessary and these have been commissioned and are underway so that when a planning application is made it has all the necessary supporting reports for consideration.

6. Junction 26 – Westpark, Wellington

- 6.1 Demand for sites continues at Westpark. Construction has commenced on the next block of units with one exchanged (SCC Scientific Services) and two more under offer from existing occupiers on the business park.
- 6.2 The secure hospital is well under way and due to complete during the second half of next year. Two others from this block of seven are complete and occupied. Planning is in hand for the next block of industrial units which are scheduled to commence in Spring 2016 and complete by the Autumn. This is evidence of very buoyant demand for employment space.

7. Crown Estate Housing Changes

- 7.1 We have been notified that the Crown Estate have recently exchanged contracts for the sale of an England-wide portfolio of 50 residential properties to Dorrington Residential Limited. The properties are predominantly subject to protected Rent Act 1977 tenancies.
- 7.2 Six of the properties are located in Dunster and seventeen in Taunton. I am assured the tenants are being kept fully informed both in writing and through personal visits with the managing agents and the Dorrington Team providing reassurance. We are not aware of the specific location of these properties but will be making enquiries.
- 7.3 The Crown have offered reassurance that they understand the importance of conducting sales of residential properties responsibly and that they have made absolutely sure that tenants' rights will be protected following the sale.
- 7.4 Furthermore, tenants affected by the sale were offered the opportunity to purchase the property they live in before the property was included within the portfolio sale. It seems they have taken heed of the very strong representation made last time when selling rural properties.

- 7.5 Having discussed this with our Housing Department there is currently a Private Members' Bill - the Crown Tenancies Bill 2015/2016 - that is making its way through Parliament, the next event is the second reading: House of Commons at 6th November 2015. This is a Bill to provide that Crown tenancies will be assured tenancies, subject to certain exceptions. It could, if enacted, lead to Crown tenants having much greater protection than that to which they previously been legally entitled.
- 7.6 We are consulting with the Shared Legal Service which provides legal services to the Council for further information on the Bill going through Parliament versus current rights of tenants. One aspect on which clarity will be sought is the extent to which the tenants' rights which are being proposed by Dorrington reflect the full improvements which will ultimately be enjoyed by tenants generally once the Crown Tenancies Bill becomes law.
- 7.7 As for Dorrington Residential Limited, they are major residential property investors and developers. They obviously have a wide experience with a current portfolio of over 4,000 residential units and a range of tenancy types. Little is known other than this as they have not previously operated in this area. The Crown have assured us that they are committed investors who are in it for the long term and will maintain tenants' rights.

8. Ongoing Major Projects

- 8.1 DLO relocation - We have exchanged contracts with Helston Motors for the sale of the DLO premises and we are in final negotiations for an alternative site. Details should be brought to Members shortly.
- 8.2 Thales site - The developers for this site have now reached agreement in principle with Thales and ourselves and final negotiations are continuing. We hope to bring details to Members shortly to confirm agreement.
- 8.3 The Deane House Accommodation Project – Negotiations are continuing with SCC to agree Heads of Terms and once agreed details will be brought back for consideration by Members.
- 8.4 Firepool - An interesting and very successful recent consultation about proposals based on the "Taunton Town Centre Rethink" with a planning application proposed for late October 2015. This will include full consultation required under the planning requirements.

9. Refugee Crisis

- 9.1 This has been very ably covered by my colleague Cllr Jane

Warmington in her report but I add to this with reassurance as the Leader of the Council that we are very aware of the tragedy unfolding before us and we must do all possible to assist. As a nation we are most generous with the Government committing to accepting a substantial number of refugees and £millions being provided to assist those staying in the temporary camps that barely provides the basic necessities of life but the funding is to improve conditions there.

- 9.2 Nobody can fail to be moved by the tragic scenes we see night after night on our television screens and we are ready and willing to do our bit in Taunton Deane to assist where possible.
- 9.3 I would also like to offer special thanks to all those individuals and groups that have risen to the occasion by collecting vital clothes and foodstuff and shipping it to where most needed. I commend all involved for your commitment and wish to help.

Councillor John Williams

Council Meeting - 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington - Community Leadership

In our most disadvantaged areas, the strategic vision for Taunton Deane 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, multi-agency teams based in each area. Rural parishes with more scattered communities will be helped to access services through local village agents identifying, signposting and supporting residents to get the help they need. Urban priority areas need excellent local education and health facilities which are then accessible to all, if we are to build independence, resilience and raise aspirations in individual people, families and communities and sustain these improvements in the future.

1. Response to the Refugee Crisis

- 1.1 We expect to receive refugees direct from the camps set up in adjacent countries from where they are fleeing and it is likely that these refugees will be the most vulnerable (poor, ill, orphaned), who could not or would not attempt the perilous journeys others have undergone to get themselves to Europe.
- 1.2 The Local Government Association is co-ordinating the National Action Plan and its Chief Executives are in discussion with Central Government about the role and responsibilities of local Councils and how this support will be funded (the Prime Minister has told Members of Parliament that the existing Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, in place since early 2014, would be expanded). The first two hundred refugees have already arrived in Bradford and are being settled in.
- 1.3 Chief Executives of our local authorities have met together in preparation and nominated their lead officers for when those refugees we will be asked to settle arrive here in Somerset. Initially they may be housed in temporary accommodation and emergency banded before finding homes through Homefinder Somerset, our choice based letting system.

(Homefinder Somerset shows housing demand to be high as the most recent figures for Taunton Deane show - 3,067 on the waiting list; three emergency banded; 406 gold banded (166 of these listed homeless); 714 silver banded; 1944 bronze banded; with 532 properties available for rent last year).

- 1.4 Some refugees may be ill though and need to go straight into hospital and others will need additional support from community health services. All refugees will be encouraged to register with local doctors' surgeries and dentists in order to establish and manage their health needs. Foster parents and carers may be sought for orphaned children and school places identified where these are needed.

- 1.5 The education requirement will be much wider though with the need to support adults to learn English and basic lessons in citizenship to help them understand the country they have moved to. Schools, colleges, churches and others in the voluntary sector will no doubt rally to do this with funding we hope will be provided by Central Government, probably through the local authorities.
- 1.6 There are both skilled and unskilled jobs available to apply for in Somerset for those refugees able to work and the Department of Work and Pensions, can try to match the skills of those who settle here with support from local businesses and colleges. However Revenues and Benefits are being kept informed about what to expect in order to best support the refugees.
- 1.7 The simplest thing we as residents can do is be friendly, tolerant, respectful, non-judgemental and understanding to help them settle in and through our communities welcome them and offer support and guidance at a difficult time for people far from home, forced to settle somewhere new and strange.

2. Councillor Federica Smith's Local Initiative to Help Refugees and Migrants in Europe

- 2.1 Local efforts are underway to help provide aid to those migrants and refugees who have reached Europe especially those in Calais who are living in camps awaiting registration and decisions on their futures. Councillor Federica Smith has begun collections of non-perishable food, winter clothing, sleeping bags, shelter, hygiene goods and spare mobile phones working from her garage. She has linked up with others volunteers arranging weekly deliveries to the continent (facebook group Calais - People to People Solidarity - Action from UK). She can be contacted via her facebook page or on her Councillor email cllr.federica.smith@tauntondeane.gov.uk. This is admirable and the huge effort she is putting in is commendable.
- 2.2 Another local scheme is Neroche Communication Action Group which has established a link with Councillor Federica Smith so locally collected items can go off together. Rachel Green is the organiser and she says the Aid charities are struggling to help private groups get donations to the right people in the right way. They are hoping that by the time Full Council meets, the collection and donation system will be more organised and items collected will get to where they are most needed.
- 2.3 There is an official UK government web page (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/syria-refugees-what-you-can-do-to-help--2>) and a British Red Cross helpline (tel:0800 107 8727 open from 9am-7pm) which have been set up to provide advice for any members of the public who want to help.

3. Support for Mental Health

- 3.1 So much underpins health and wellbeing, not least mental health which we know is giving cause for concern and needs to be managed alongside our tackling the underlying issues through One Team working, Village Agents and our adopting a different approach to supporting our tenants and managing our estates.

- 3.2 Simon Lewis has been working with Public Health and the Clinical Commissioning Group who have agreed to a needs assessment across all the One Team areas around the different mental health demands and Public Health are to commission this.
- 3.3 Somerset Partnership Talking Therapies Service is the county-wide service that was commissioned in 2009, as part of the Department of Health's initiative to make talking therapies more widely available to adults of 18 and over, struggling with common mental health problems like anxiety and depression. However at the moment only one in six of those with a known need are able to receive this support.
- 3.4 The previous Housing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Jean Adkins, asked for a dedicated mental health worker to be taken on for a year to support our tenants. This was based on the increasing need identified through the One Teams with insufficient available expertise to refer onto. Mind, the mental health charity have now been grant aided to do this work in North Taunton, Halcon and Wellington, delivering advocacy and support.
- 3.5 One Teams have a caseload to refer to Mind who after an initial triage will follow this with in depth help as required. Mind will attend a One Team meeting in each area a week and monitor outcomes as their work is carried out. This work starts on 1 October 2015 and it is anticipated they will see approximately five new clients a week totalling up to 250 clients over the year.

4. Employability

- 4.1 Taunton Deane is committed to helping those of working age into employment where extra help is needed. The successful voluntary community workforce Link Power is being further developed in Halcon by a new Community Development Officer Suzanne Rea. This successful local scheme was developed with the local community Link Centre three years ago and has attracted some additional funding over this time. The workforce has been based in one of the shops in Roman Road for over a year when the number of volunteers outgrew the Link Centre where they congregated.
- 4.2 Further employment skills and training are planned across the three One Team areas based on learning from Yarlinton Housing Association's Inspire To Achieve, getting people back to work by improving job readiness and employability. The funding for this has already been agreed from underspend (£139,000 spread over three years) and is primarily aimed at tenants of working age in those areas where unemployment is particularly high and will have clearly defined outcomes. This is still under development and experienced Community Development Officer Martha Dudman has been asked to help draw up the specification.

5. One Teams Estate Housing Staff

- 5.1 There are a number of other changes in Housing and Communities staff : an additional Estates Officer, Jack Madge; a replacement Estates Officer following Michelle Garcia's resignation – Amalia Hakim starting on the 13 October 2015; and

Interim Area Community Manager covering Cyndy Simpson's absence – Julie Sabey starting on the 8 October. We welcome each of them to Taunton Deane and wish our leavers well.

6. Community Safety

- 6.1 Local authorities and specified organisations such as schools and colleges are expected to get involved in raising awareness to counter terrorism. The Safer Somerset Partnership is leading on this, embedding Prevent (the first of four elements of CONTEST, the Government's counter-terrorism strategy to prevent, pursue, prepare and protect) which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
- 6.2 Our Community Safety Lead, Scott Weetch has already organised ten staff workshops across both authorities (the first districts to do so) to introduce this and explain what we are expected to do. These sessions are an hour long, begin at the end of September and training will cascade to make other staff and interested Councillors aware.
- 6.3 Put simply, it is awareness training and it is about all of us having this on our radar (alongside our awareness around dementia, safeguarding and domestic abuse for example). This is so we are alert and have some idea if we notice someone/ something odd, what to do and who to tell. The nominated single point of contact is Scott Weetch.
- 6.4 The concern would then be raised to a CHANNEL Panel, which is multi-agency and meets on an ad hoc basis when a specified authority (school/ college/ local authority) raises it. Their vulnerability is assessed and an action plan produced. So far there have been three cases in Somerset, all young vulnerable males known to other services and numbers are expected to rise as our awareness increases.

7. Taunton's Experience with 'Legal Highs'

- 7.1 The portfolio holder has been asked to speak at a Westminster Briefing on 23 September 2015 about our experience here in Taunton on tackling the abuse of 'legal highs' in the lead up to a ban with the new Psychoactive Substances Bill. The portfolio holder has consulted in the town centre and is being accompanied by the Community Safety Lead, Scott Weetch.
- 7.2 The total Anti-Social Behaviour statistics (ASB) for the town centre over the last three years provided by the Avon and Somerset Police (ASP) show a marked increase associated with the two shops selling 'legal highs' throughout last year and the dramatic reduction when both shops stopped trading in them towards the end of that year.
- 7.3 One shop voluntarily stopped selling and the other closed after a Community Protection Order was served and then extended using new powers under the recent ASB, Crime and Policing Act, 2014. The Home Secretary then announced her timely intention to ban these and the closed shop has not since reopened.

- 7.4 Under the same legislation Taunton Deane quickly explored a Public Place Protection Order with North East Lincolnshire Council who had already done this, to ban all intoxicating substances and replace the existing no drinking zone. After consultation with the Police, the area covered was extended, the public consulted, found to be in agreement and it was in place in the Summer. Lincoln have also been invited to speak at the Westminster Briefing.
- 7.5 The Summer of 2014 is probably etched on all our minds following increased activity for the Police from the Spring and local and national headlines when the daughter of a Taunton resident Nick Smith was spiked by a discarded needle whilst playing in one of our parks. He set up South West Action Group as a result and highlighted the plight and the blight of 'legal highs' on our town to a much wider audience. Unfortunately it also resulted in Taunton being known as the legal high capital when actually it was one of many market towns nationwide with similar problems.
- 7.6 Last Summer the Taunton Town Centre Police Team were inundated with ASB calls and calls relating to discarded needles and they faced extremely chaotic behaviour from users on an almost daily basis. This Summer they have not. They know the problem has not gone away but it is far less visible and intrusive for most people. They believe their ASB closure of the shop has made a massive difference for the town.
- 7.7 Taunton Deane's Parks and Open Spaces Team are now collecting far fewer discarded needles than they were last year and the number of confrontations the staff had in the past has dropped.
- 7.8 From a CCTV perspective they have seen a noticeable decrease in the levels of ASB associated with New Psychoactive Substances (NPS is the proper name for a 'legal high').
- 7.9 Previously, they were having issues from very early on in the day with users trying to buy the NPS's congregating in and around premises which sell them. This brought with it various issues of ASB amongst themselves, towards other citizens and was generally intimidating to members of the public going about their lawful business.
- 7.10 The effect these substances were having was clear and CCTV operators could tell when a person was under the influence simply by their demeanour. They noticed that users were also gathering throughout the day in the centre of town and being a general nuisance. It was also clear that as these substances were deemed legal, consumption was openly undertaken in public, which in itself is antisocial.
- 7.11 Following the closure of one shop and an agreement from another to stop selling the NPS's, instances of ASB related to the use of the drugs seen on CCTV reduced almost overnight.
- 7.12 However, the problem has not gone away and the views of the Senior Nurse in the Emergency Department and the Assistant Director of Nursing at Musgrove Park Hospital were canvassed. It remains very tricky there and after a sense check across the department, the feeling is that although they understand a lot more about legal highs now, anecdotally they are not yet seeing a decline in numbers.

- 7.13 Recreational use of 'legal highs' is still having impact upon Accident and Emergency (A&E), with a number of admissions every week. They do not officially code for these patients (something they may consider) so cannot compare actual attendances with last year.
- 7.14 Those who attend A&E are often significantly disruptive, requiring Police/security for their/everyone else's safety, as they are unwell and often require admission. 'Legal highs' are frequently cut with other chemicals including amphetamines, so an individual can require a disproportionately high amount of attention. The Emergency Department would welcome moves to reduce the use of 'legal highs'.
- 7.15 Taunton Deane's ASB Officers were asked for their experience on the displacement of problems because anecdotally 'legal highs' are still used on the Estates. It appears a network of suppliers have evolved and many users now travel to Bridgwater to purchase 'legal highs', and some buy in bulk to distribute to users on the Estates.
- 7.16 They do not see as much evidence of 'legal high' usage on the Taunton streets as they used to, perhaps because users take them as soon as they buy them. It might also be that 'legal highs' are being consumed in houses or users are being more discreet because they are buying from street dealers. From an environmental perspective, the situation has improved but from a social and health perspective they believe the problem is still very much as bad as it was [which is reflected in what the hospital feel].
- 7.17 Other traders near to where both shops were have noticed a difference with fewer people hanging around and much less associated litter and unpredictable behaviour. 'Legal highs' are not so readily available locally and although health issues in particular remain a serious concern, the problems are much less visible to the public and less prevalent.

8. Read Easy

- 8.1 Catherine Berry, a new trustee on the North Taunton Partnership has successfully applied to become a Read Easy Pioneer and begin the process of setting up a Read Easy (adult literacy) group in North Taunton. In the meantime, she would like to canvas support for the project, especially from people interested in getting involved as reading coaches. Training and support are provided throughout. Please contact Catherine at northtaunton@readeasy.org.uk.
- 8.2 It would be lovely if some Councillors and members of staff were interested and could commit to the two half-an-hours a week they coach their pupils.

Councillor Jane Warmington

Council Meeting - 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor Terry Beale – Housing Services

1. Deane Housing Development

- 1.1 The Weavers Arms development at Rockwell Green, Wellington was approved through the Planning Committee on the 12 August 2015. The scheme will deliver 26 affordable units and the Council is currently tendering for a contractor. There are two remaining decants which need to be finalised.
- 1.2 With regard to the Creechbarrow Road site in Taunton, The Council is acutely aware of the delays both within the Knightstone element and across the site. I believe that when completed, the units will be an excellent addition to our stock. A revised programme is due imminently and I will be monitoring progress closely.
- 1.3 We are also acutely aware of the current levels of uncertainty within the delivery of affordable housing. We still await the full details and implications of the Budget Statement with regard to rentals and I will be in a better position to report fully once those details are known. The position is still very strong for 2015/2016 with 329 homes in the pipeline and although we must be cautious in light of circumstances I still remain optimistic that we will deliver over 250 homes which would be a record year for the Authority.

2. Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Panels Scheme

- 2.1 The scheme to fit PV to 350 Council owned houses is nearing completion, with the final installation due near the 7 October 2015.
- 2.2 The two appointed installers were Glevum Heating and Prolectric. Glevum have already installed their target of 175 properties and have the final one to fit in October. Prolectric still have approximately 12 properties to install.
- 2.3 Western Power Distribution decide how many properties in an area can be connected to the National Grid, therefore some tenants have not had PV fitted whereas their neighbours have. This has caused some complaints. All we can do is reiterate the fact we need permission from Western Power Distribution to install PV to their home and connect to the Grid.
- 2.4 A recent Government announcement informed us that Feed In Tariffs (FIT) are dropping from 12p per kilowatt hour to 1.63p on the 31 December 2015. The Council's installed properties will be secure on the 12p rate but any future ones will be on the much lower rate.
- 2.5 Therefore it is unlikely future schemes will be financially viable as the cost of panels are unlikely to drop in price to match the drop in FITs.

- 2.6 The investment Taunton Deane has allocated for the PV scheme is £1,500,000. The FITs we receive will go towards paying off the cost of the panels, which is estimated to take 13 years. From year 13 – 20 the Council will have paid off the investment figure and will be in a positive cash flow due to the FIT income.
- 2.7 Over the lifetime of the panels it is anticipated they will save 11,000 tonnes of carbon emissions.

3. External Wall Insulation Scheme to a selection of Cornish type non-traditional properties

- 3.1 Solid External Wall Insulation (EWI) to a selection of Cornish house types is well underway and due to complete in late October. The original cladding from the early 1990s has been removed and a new 150mm fibre board and render system has been applied.
- 3.2 This is to make the homes easier to heat as it will insulate the whole of the lower elevations. The installation has happened over the summer months so tenants will not feel the cold while the original cladding was removed.
- 3.3 There has been a slight delay in completing the project as materials have had to come into the country via Calais, which has encountered problems recently.
- 3.4 Following fitting of the fibre boards, two coats of render are then applied. Window cills are replaced, pipes are extended out to allow for the four inches of insulation and all external fixings are replaced. Tenants are informed not to affix anything to the EWI as it is not a hard material and puncturing it will lower the thermal efficiency.
- 3.5 Both the PV and EWI schemes have been very well received by the residents and will assist with meeting the challenges of fuel poverty.

4. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan

- 4.1 The 30 year HRA Business Plan was implemented in April 2012 with the introduction of self-financing. It has been reviewed annually in line with the budget setting timetable, but the intention was that there would be a periodical major review. Plans were in place for this to happen, but the impact of the Summer Budget, including social rent reductions and the sale of high value houses, has now made this work essential.
- 4.2 External consultants have been appointed to assist with the work and to give assurances that the Business Plan remains robust and affordable. The first phase of work will include looking at refreshing the priorities of the HRA,

validating the financial position, looking at the data held on our stock and the impact of the Extra Care Housing review. This will be reported to members and tenants late 2015.

- 4.3 The second phase will develop an Asset Management Strategy, a Development Strategy, and will include a review of sheltered housing. This will conclude with a new 30 year Business Plan which will be reported to members and tenants early in the new financial year.

5. Welfare Report

Welfare Reform Visits

- 5.1 The number of tenants affected this month are 329, however this is subject to change on a daily basis due to tenants moving in and out of employment.
- 5.2 The breakdown of tenants that have now downsized are:-
- 2 Direct Match approved and completed;
 - 47 Successful moves on Choice Based Letting (CBL) completed;
 - 2 Successful bids pending a move on CBL;
 - 0 Mutual Exchange's being processed;
 - 23 Mutual Exchanges Completed; and
 - 1 Moved to private sector.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- 5.3 All affected tenants are being offered advice on DHP's and assistance to help them complete the application form. Due to the Revenue and Benefits Team completing end of year reports and gearing up for the introduction of Universal Credit. Since the start of this financial year 62 DHP's have been awarded to Taunton Deane's tenants.

Rent Arrears

5.4

- 1 April 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £41,483.73 with 179 tenants in rent arrears;
- 1 May 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £44,874.09 with 192 tenants in rent arrears. With an increase in rent arrears of £3,390.36 on the previous month;
- 1 June 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £41,762.32 with 184 tenants in rent arrears. With a decrease in rent arrears of £3,111.77 on the previous month;
- 1 July 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £38,152.16 with 162 tenants in rent arrears. With a decrease in rent arrears of £3,610.16 on the previous month;

- 1 August 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £38,765.54 with 164 tenants in rent arrears. With an increase in rent arrears of £613.38 on the previous month;
- 1 September 2015 Welfare Reform rent arrears were £37,920.78 with 167 tenants in rent arrears. With a decrease in rent arrears of £844.76 on the previous month.

Universal Credit (UC)

- 5.5 Universal Credit went live on 20 April 2015. To date Taunton Deane has 15 tenants who have submitted a claim. We have been working closely with these tenants and the level of help and support needed is substantial and needs to be tailored to each of their personal circumstances.
- 5.6 Currently only single newly unemployed people are able to make claims for UC, which accounts for the small number of affected tenants at this time. However, as the roll out of UC becomes wider and involves families the number of our tenants claiming UC will increase significantly.

Councillor Terry Beale

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor Patrick Berry – Environmental Services and Climate Change

1. Licensing / Environmental Health

Licensing

- 1.1 We are disappointed to advise, as most of you already know, that our Licensing Manager, Ian Carter has decided to leave. We wish Ian well in his new position. In the meantime John Rendell has agreed, with immediate effect, to stand-in as acting Manager.
- 1.2 As mentioned previously, the Taxi Forum has been meeting regularly and a full list of areas of concern has been drawn up. Action has already been taken on two of the most concerning issues namely to introduce a filter on applicants and exclude applicants who do not reside in and/or have no connection with Taunton Deane.
- 1.3 A second regulation has been introduced to reinforce the current fit and proper person check. This will include a Taunton Deane 'knowledge' as well as a basic English language check. These two new requirements have already resulted in a reduction in the number of applications well down from the peak we experienced earlier in 2015.
- 1.4 The above have both had an effect on the workload and the resultant backlog in the processing of applications. The departure of Ian Carter will cause a temporary further loss of resource but this is already being addressed. However the backlog and challenge is significant.
- 1.5 It is intended to make one of the two temporary Licensing Officers (covering Taunton Deane and West Somerset) permanent to enable West Somerset to be covered.
- 1.6 Community and Client Services Manager, Scott Weetch, to whom the Licensing Manager reports, has taken the opportunity to start a complete review of the Licensing activities in particular the staffing, the work flow and the backlog. Once this activity is complete the adequacy of the current resources and any need to increase or decrease should be clear.

Environmental Health

- 1.7 Two members of staff have left and this has contributed to a very busy summer period. The team works closely with the Private Sector Housing Partnership to investigate complaints from tenants regarding the standard of their accommodation. These complaints are likely to increase over the winter

period when tenants are more likely to suffer from conditions such as damp and mould.

- 1.8 The team is also working with Economic Development on plans for the Festive period and will be helping to put event management plans together and assist with risk assessments. Meetings are starting this month.
- 1.9 The same applies to Licensing where the team monitored events during the summer, for example Summerfest and the children's festival in Goodlands Gardens, Taunton.
- 1.10 The team continues to investigate complaints regarding nuisance across the district including noise, odour, drainage, overgrown gardens and overflowing bins. The Environmental Health Team are often the first port of call for many residents of Taunton Deane and where it is unable to help, officers signpost people to organisations where they can obtain further help or advice.

Food Hygiene

- 1.11 Food Inspections continue apace. Newly opened premises have added to the workload. Advice on a wide range of issues including staff training and allergies is given as part of the service.

2. Climate Change

- 2.1 Solar Power/ Photovoltaic Panels (PV) is currently being installed on two projects:-

- The Housing Revenue Account project to retrofit panels on 351 existing Council homes across Taunton Deane is now almost complete. The completion date is expected in October 2015.
- With effect from 1 January 2016 the Feed-in Tariff (FIT) has been reduced from 12 p per kWh to 1.63 p per kWh. This will vastly reduce the commercial incentive to install PV.

- 2.2 External Wall Insulation (EWI)

- The installation of EWI on 40 Cornish type non-traditional homes is almost complete. The substandard existing cladding is being replaced with EWI. The aim is to prevent heat loss from the properties, therefore increasing thermal comfort and reducing heating bills for tenants. The completion date is expected in October.

3. Somerset Waste Partnership

3.1 Somerset Waste Partnership (SWP) met on 25 September 2015. This report predates the meeting.

- SWP are now executing a detailed analysis of the Recycle More trials carried out around Somerset for recycling of additional materials. The Recycle More trials helped thousands of families over several months to recycle plastic pots, tubs and trays – such as those for yoghurt, margarine or meat – Tetra Paks and other beverage cartons, small electrical items and household batteries.
- The trials also involved tests of recycling collections every two weeks and three-weekly rubbish collections, which between 82% and 86% of people preferred if they involved additional materials being recycled. Earlier analysis showed that the Recycle More trials led recycling rates to jump by up to 29% while rubbish levels fell by as much as 27%. Separate trials of stickers on rubbish bins to remind families not to throw away food saw a 20% rise in food waste recycling. Combining both the sticker and the Recycle More collection changes led in some areas to food waste recycling rising by 45% or more.
- The commercial analysis, which involves the collection truck configuration as well as the processing and packaging facilities, is continuing.

4. Deane DLO

Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning

4.1 The DLO brought in, on a free of cost for a six week trial period, two new solar powered compactor bins which were installed near the Market House at the end of High Street in Taunton and a second one in Wellington. The manufacturers claim that this new type of bin will contribute savings in the cost of collecting refuse. Analysis of the results and their effect on the cost of town centre rubbish collection is continuing.

4.2 It has been realised that despite sharing many resources with West Somerset, the Street and Toilet Cleaning Service is provided differently. In Taunton Deane the service is provided through the DLO whereas in West Somerset the service is provided by contractor. The WSC contract is coming to its end date and the TDBC mechanical equipment is going to need replacement soon. It is logical that there would be savings if the two work scopes were combined. It has therefore been decided to seek Member approval to progress a procurement exercise for a shared service for Street and Toilet cleaning. If it were to proceed, it would be a TUPE contract, therefore no employees would be put at risk of redundancy. During the procurement activity there is no commitment on the Council to agree delivery through a contractor as this would require a further decision by Members.

4.3 A litter bin replacement programme has just been started for Wellington.

5. Crematorium

- 5.1 The Cemeteries Department is currently developing four new burial sections at Taunton Deane Cemetery. Some works have already been completed such as drainage, paths, water supply etc. Planting will be carried out during the autumn and winter period when it is hoped to start using the burial sections.

Councillor Patrick Berry

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

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

1. Growth Deal Bids

- 1.1 I am pleased to report that three bids to the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have been submitted to further strengthen Taunton's role as a regional growth destination.
- 1.2 Two of the bids are in relation to transport improvements at Toneway Corridor and Cross Keys, in Taunton. The third bid is for the major upstream flood alleviation project, providing long term flood protection for Taunton and enabling future growth.
- 1.3 It is likely that the overall funding pot available will be smaller this year, so the competition will be tougher. Taunton Deane has fared well in recent funding rounds, with successful bids for the Junction 25 enhancement and Taunton Railway Station, and we hope for similar success when results of latest bids are known, probably in early 2016.

2. Supporting Business Growth

Investor support

- 2.1 The team continues to support investors, be they local or inward investors. I was pleased to hear about recent investment made in the Taunton Deane by Faithorn, Farrel and Timms, a consultancy business in the development and construction industry that took offices at Blackbrook Business Park earlier this year. This national business intends to build a new team in the Taunton office over the next few months, enhancing its services across the South West. The Leader and the Economic Development Manager visited the business in September and I am meeting with them shortly.
- 2.2 Officers have spent significant time in recent months meeting and supporting the owners and developers of employment sites across Taunton Deane. Strong progress is being made by the owner of the new Taunton Vale Business Park at Monkton Heathfield in bringing the site to the market. The application for site roads is currently working through the planning process.
- 2.3 Westpark continues its rapid development, and the new Medium Security Hospital within the park is currently under construction by Montpellier Estates. The Wellington community will benefit not only from the much needed local accommodation it will provide to people with mental health issues, but also from the hundreds of jobs and supplier opportunities that it will create directly

and indirectly. Also on Westpark I was also very pleased to see the completion of a new unit for Prolift, a locally owned equipment and plant hire company that has relocated from elsewhere in Wellington.

Taunton Deane Business Directory

- 2.4 Working with the national publisher, Burrows, the Economic Development Team is currently producing a new business directory, featuring a printed directory of larger employers, and an on-line business directory. Funded by advertising, the directory promotes the advantages of investing in Taunton Deane. The publication has been completed and is due to be published later this Autumn. Copies will be circulated to Members for their information.

Taunton Deane Business Conference

- 2.5 I mentioned in July plans to organise a large conference to be held in November at the Somerset County Cricket Ground. Plans are progressing and further details will be announced later this month, but it will be an opportunity to inform businesses of the major schemes planned and underway to enhance Taunton's connectivity, be they via rail, road or digital routes. We are currently considering an event for around 120 delegates with exhibition space for partner organisations.

Sector Research

- 2.6 Earlier this year the team commissioned Somerset County Council to carry out research in to the growth sectors within the area. The research has now been completed and it contains interesting findings, which will be drawn upon to influence our business support services.
- 2.7 For example, in job numbers where health and social work are currently the largest sector, the sector forecast to grow the most in the period to 2020 is within Arts, Entertainment and Recreation. Other sectors where jobs are forecast to grow at a rate above the regional average are the Scientific and Technical sector, and Professional Industries. In GVA terms (where GVA represents the value rather than the number of jobs) Health and Social Work is strongly represented, as is the Public Sector and administration of the State. Both sectors are forecast to grow to 2020, as are Professional services and the Retail trade.
- 2.8 A copy of the findings of the report can be made available to any Members that are interested.

Small Business grants

- 2.9 One New Business grant has been awarded in recent months to Dan Upshaw in Angersleigh. The Council has offered Dan £500 towards training and chainsaw safety equipment for his business.
- 2.10 The Council has also awarded £2,000 to the 10 Parish Arts Festival towards promotional print in support of local artists and creative businesses. Officers are also working with the West Buckland Stores to support the business to buy equipment.

10 Parishes Business Survey

- 2.11 Earlier this year the Council supported the Wiveliscombe Business Group to carry out a survey amongst businesses of their needs. The survey has produced a useful list of priorities, including the need for better business advice and support, enhanced marketing of the area and the need for affordable business space.
- 2.12 What is apparent is that many of the respondents are not aware of the services already provided by the Council and its partner organisations and that better communication of that support is necessary. Officers are liaising with the 10 Parishes Business Group to raise that awareness and to identify new services that might be introduced.

Client-based Approach

- 2.13 At the Executive's meeting of 9 September 2015 the Council approved the implementation of an initiative to work with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to deliver employment, apprenticeships and training through planning obligations linked to major construction projects. Economic Development Officers are now working with the Planning Department and the CITB to embed the approach in all relevant policies and procedures.

3. Supporting inward investment and fulfilment

Into Somerset

- 3.1 Work is continuing with the new Into Somerset service, led by Somerset County Council and comprising all of the Districts in the County. Since it was established in April, two enquiries have been received via the Into Somerset website.
- 3.2 In both instances officers have met the business, explained the advantages of relocating in Taunton Deane, and showed them around various potential properties. The second, a national pub/restaurant chain which visited in August, was very interested in road frontage sites in Taunton.
- 3.3 The marketing carried out by Into Somerset complements the Council's own inward investment activity, which is focussed around www.taunton.uk.com.

Investment Grants

- 3.4 A full audit of the Council's business grants has recently been carried out. The review looked in considerable detail at the New Business Grant and the Investment Grant, and tested the governance and delivery processes of both schemes.
- 3.5 A number of recommendations have been agreed with the auditors which will be addressed in the next few months. These will lead to improvements in the checks placed on grant applicants and improve the robustness of the

processes. While these are being addressed we will place a hold on the approval of any new investment grants.

4. Place Based Regeneration

Coal Orchard Redevelopment

- 4.1 In April MACE was appointed to produce a delivery strategy for this site which is a key element of the Taunton Rethink strategy for the town centre. A short consultation event was carried out during the summer amongst local businesses and stakeholders. The proposals were discussed by the Growth Steering Group on 17 September 2015 and are scheduled to be considered by Scrutiny and the Executive in the early part of October.

Firepool consultation

- 4.2 St. Modwen, Taunton Deane Borough Council's development partner for Firepool, hosted public consultations on 11 and 12 September 2015 to enable the public to view emerging proposals for the Firepool site and to ask questions and comment on the latest Firepool proposals. Exhibitions were held at the Auction House, Canal Road on 11 September and Taunton Visitor Centre, Market House, Fore Street on 12 September.
- 4.3 The consultation events included an exhibition and a promotional video of the The Rethink regeneration plans for the town centre and the proposals for Firepool. The deadline for feedback is 25 September 2015 and responses can be made online or in paper form. The consultation was promoted by an article on the front page of the Taunton Gazette, radio interviews and social media. Details of the public consultation and the video can be found on the web address below:
- www.firepool-taunton.com/public-consultation.htm
- 4.4 The vision for Firepool is a vibrant mixed use development with a waterfront setting, including offices, retail, cinema leisure, restaurants, hotel and new homes together with associated landscaping, public realm, infrastructure and parking. Firepool is a vital link in the chain of Taunton's wider regeneration plans and one of the biggest mixed-use schemes in the region with the potential to create in excess of 1,800 jobs.
- 4.5 In the region of 250 people visited the two day exhibitions. Following the closure of the public consultation, St. Modwen will be reviewing public responses and amending their proposals ahead of submitting a planning application at the end of October.

Town Centre Wi-Fi

- 4.6 The Council has employed an IT consultancy, Broadband Access Strategies LLP, to advise on the design and delivery of several Wi-Fi "Hotspots" throughout Taunton Deane. Following a technical mapping exercise, which looked at existing provision in Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe Town Centres, and a high level costing exercise, the team is currently progressing

the project to tender stage. Once up and running the Wi-fi will be a significant asset for the town, offering free internet access for visitors, and providing a platform for sharing information and disseminating promotional messages.

Market House

- 4.7 After the successful relocation of the Visitor Centre to the Market House in July further work to the soft square outside has been carried out. This has included the repositioning of the street traders outside of the centre and the siting of one of our town centre poster rotunda units outside of the office. The only task outstanding is a replacement seat (around the tree) which is awaiting approval and sign off from Somerset County Highways. There is a continuing discussion with a tenant for the remaining west wing first floor office which will, if successful, complete this phase of the work. A formal launch of the building with its new tenants will take place later this Autumn.

5. Cultural Events

Taunton Events Group

- 5.1 Over the course of this Summer Taunton has witnessed some excellent events that have attracted thousands of visitors and have strengthened our reputation as a first class cultural location. The Taunton Events Group, which I Chair, comprises all of the organisers of events and the cultural establishments in Taunton, and has established itself as a really useful communication medium and coordinating group. At its quarterly meetings we review recent activities, and we hear about events planned over the forthcoming months, offering mutual advice and support to raise the quality and quantity of events.
- 5.2 The following have been tremendously successful events this Summer, and they collectively demonstrate just how busy Taunton has been in hosting community-based arts activities:-
- Dragonboat Race on the River Tone in June;
 - Somerfest, our annual celebration of the County Town, in June;
 - The Sustainability Show and Food Fair at Queens College;
 - Taunton Live, at numerous locations across Taunton during July;
 - The Race for Life at Somerset College in July;
 - Santander family event on Castle Green in July;
 - Taunton Flower Show at Vivary Park in August;
 - Parrot in the Park Concert, organised by the Apple and Parrot Pub in Castle Green;
 - The Brick Wonders Exhibition at the Museum of Somerset;
 - The Steam Fayre and Vintage Vehicle Rally at the West Somerset Railway;
 - The Stand Against Violence 10 year Commemoration, held on Castle Green in September.

Christmas 2015

- 5.3 Planning is currently underway to deliver a month long programme of events and activities during the run up to the Christmas season. Led by Make Taunton Sparkle and TIME4, and supported by the Council and other Taunton Events Group members the Festive season will commence on 20 November 2015, and will continue with a full programme of activities on weekends and late night shopping days through to Christmas Eve.
- 5.4 The Council is doing its part to support a great Christmas, providing £25,000 towards the Christmas lights across Taunton Town Centre and additional funding towards candle lit processions and festive decorations. We will also, once again, be offering free car parking after 3 p.m. on the four Saturdays preceding Christmas.
- 5.5 As per previous years the Council is also offering £10,000 to the festive lights displays in Wellington and Wiveliscombe.
- 5.6 I want to commend the efforts made by a hardcore group of individuals including Councillor Kelly Durdan, they have all proved the rule of doing and not just talking and I for one am looking forward to a wonderful Festive season in our County Town.

The Brewhouse Theatre and Southern Sinfonia

- 5.7 I was particularly pleased at the last Events Group meeting in September to welcome the new Chief Executive of The Brewhouse Theatre, Vanessa Lefrancois. Vanessa is currently recruiting a team of paid staff to run the venue and re- establish it as a regional performance asset, delivering an increasingly diverse and extensive programme of performances. The theatre is playing a greater role in enhancing events in the town centre and is particularly keen to put on activities in Somerset Square to attract visitors to that part of the town.
- 5.8 Vanessa was accompanied at the Events Group meeting by the Managing Director of the Southern Sinfonia Orchestra, which has recently taken up residency in the theatre. The presence of this World-class professional orchestra in Taunton is extremely prestigious and further enhances the town's cultural status. Southern Sinfonia's first season at The Brewhouse will include three main house concerts, as well as a series of chamber performances.

6. Marketing the Borough to Visitors

New Taunton Visitor Centre

- 6.1 The new centre opened for business on the 18 July 2015. In its first six weeks of operation, nearly 12,000 visitors have come through the doors. Customer feedback has been very positive and the team are welcoming far more visitors (especially those from overseas) than before.
- 6.2 New brown tourism signs have been added to direct customers and an

advertising campaign to promote the centre has now begun with Clear Channel on bus shelters throughout the area. The new office has also been used to host a Council Tax and the recent Firepool consultation events, if you have not been in already to visit, I would suggest calling in to have a look.

Town Centre Marketing Contract and social media

- 6.3 Destination CMS continue to work with the Visitor Centre Team to promote offers and events taking place in the town centre. A monthly e-Shot promoting events has been produced and circulated, in addition to the daily content being added to our social media channels. The @moreTaunton account on Twitter now has over 4,000 followers, on Facebook nearly 2,000 likes and Instagram 150, each of these avenues provide a valuable way of promoting the area to visitors and local residents. Opportunities to feature the town to Travel journalists are currently being explored.
- 6.4 The contract with Destination CMS was for one year, commencing 1 October 2014. I intend to extend that contract for a further six month period to enable officers to evaluate the service amongst businesses and to agree a way forward.

Visit Wiveliscombe Leaflet

- 6.5 Working with the Wiveliscombe Business Group and Walkers Welcome, the team have produced an extremely useful promotional leaflet for the town. This leaflet with an initial print run of 5,000 will be circulated in the wider area to encourage greater use of the businesses and walking routes on offer. A new Taunton welcome leaflet will follow this Autumn, with one planned for Wellington in the Spring. The Visit Wiveliscombe leaflet has been distributed to all Members.

7. Asset Management Service General Fund Activities

- 7.1 During the past three months the following projects are particularly worthy of mention:-
- Blackbrook Leisure Centre - Completion of land acquisition necessary for the construction and necessary leasing of the new Blackbrook Pool facility.
 - Former Mike Chedzoy premises off Greenbrook Terrace, Taunton – Marketing of this site which has development potential for circa 20 residential units and with offers sought by 25 September 2015. A report will be taken forward with recommendations as to which offer to accept.
 - Community Asset Transfer Policy – Policy drafted and presented to the Community Scrutiny Committee for support to go out to consultation with Parish Councils and other community groups. Work is taking place to identify and then agree key stakeholders to consult with.

Consultation will take place for a period of eight weeks with a report being taken forward late 2015 / early 2016 in respect of the policy (with or without amendment) being adopted.

- Blackdown Business Park, Wellington – A significant number of vacant units which Greenslade Taylor Hunt Chartered Surveyors are now marketing. There is strong initial interest.
- Former Park Keepers Cottage, 277 Cheddon Road, Taunton - Declared surplus and works now progressing in respect of disposal of open space enabling the site to then be marketed. A report will be taken forward with recommendations of which offer to accept.
- Options Reports prepared for both Blackdown Business Park and land at Frobisher Way, Taunton to determine future uses and strategy. With Frobisher Way outline planning consent has now been granted for development of industrial units.
- 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.
- Potential change of use of Vivary Park Toilets to a café / other uses.

Councillor Mark Edwards

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor Roger Habgood – Planning Policy and Transportation

1. Planning Policy

Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP)

- 1.1 The SADMP sets out policies for the allocation of land for housing, employment and other development proposals across Taunton Deane excluding the allocations in the Taunton Town Centre, up to 2028. It also contains detailed development management policies against which planning applications will be considered. The SADMP document will form part of the Council's suite of statutory plans, which comprise the basis for determining planning applications across Taunton Deane.
- 1.2 The SADMP has undergone a number of stages of preparation, starting with an Issues and Options consultation in January/February 2013, a Preferred Option consultation in October/November 2013 and a Draft Plan consultation January-March 2015. The Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination on 13 July 2015.
- 1.3 The SADMP is now at the Examination stage. No dates have yet been set for hearing sessions. The likely timescale for these sessions is now November. The Council has responded to the Inspectors initial questions and observations. The Plan will probably be ready for adoption in early 2016.
- 1.4 The SADMP is key as it builds on the framework set out in the Core Strategy (adopted 2012), which provides the strategic framework for growth in Taunton Deane over the period to 2028. The Core Strategy defines a hierarchy of settlements ranging from Taunton and Wellington, which will accommodate the significant proportion of the Borough's future growth, through to the major and minor rural centres which will be expected to play a lesser role in meeting requirements and lastly, to the villages, where further formal allocations of land for development will not be made.

Specific Site activity

- 1.5 The Staplegrove Framework Masterplan is currently being finalised by the site promoters and will be presented to Members for consideration and adoption. An outline planning permission is likely to follow the adoption of the framework in autumn 2016.

Local Development Order (LDO)

- 1.6 An LDO can be made by Local Authorities to give a grant of planning permission to specific types of development within a defined area. LDOs streamline the planning process by removing the need for developers to make a planning application to a Local Planning Authority. They create certainty and save time and money for those involved in the planning process.
- 1.7 Officers are currently working up proposals for possible LDOs. A paper will be presented at the end of the year to Members setting out proposals.

Gypsies and Travellers

- 1.8 Taunton Deane is part of a working group with other districts, the County Council and the Homes and Communities Agency to try and identify a five year supply of sites for gypsy traveller and showpeople's accommodation. This is no easy task. The project team aim to present their findings by the end of 2015.

Sport, Recreation and Open Spaces

- 1.9 The Council is currently updating its 2010 Playing Pitch Strategy in partnership with Sport England, National Governing Bodies and the Somerset Sports and Activity Partnership. This will provide valuable evidence and direction to ensure a good supply of playing fields and pitches to meet the needs of local communities across Taunton Deane.

Neighbourhood Planning

- 1.10 West Monkton and Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish Councils have submitted an application to undertake a combined Neighbourhood Plan for their parishes. The Council is hosting consultation on the application, which runs until 30 October 2015. The Councils responsible for designating the geographical area the proposed Neighbourhood Plan covers which will be determined once the consultation closes.
- 1.11 Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone and Trull and Staplehay have produced final draft Neighbourhood Plans. The hard work in recent times of pulling these plans together will culminate in the next stage - submission of plans to Taunton Deane. Pre-examination consultation is expected soon.

2. Transportation

Schemes

- 2.1 The Council continues to work with partners on a range of transport schemes related to the growth prospects for Taunton.

Funding

- 2.2 Bids have recently been submitted for the Toneway corridor improvements and the A358 Cross keys and Silk Mills junction capacity improvements. It is hoped these schemes will be prioritised and then submitted by the Local Enterprise Partnership to Central Government in November.

Northern Inner Distributor Road

- 2.3 Work continues to progress. The finalised programme for the remaining works is being developed by the contractor and is awaited.

Car Parking Operations

- 2.4. Income to date is up overall by 2%.
- 2.5 There have been incidents of theft in Belvedere Road Car Park and machines have been damaged. The Police are aware of these incidents.
- 2.6 High Street Car Park - A daily clean has been instigated and sustained to overcome issues in this car park. This is having a positive effect.
- 2.7 The swap from Ringo to PnP (Phone and Pay) occurred in April 2015. Some reported issues remain and officers are working with partners to resolve them.

Car Parking Strategy

- 2.8 The signage review work, including Variable Message Signs, with partners has commenced.
- 2.9 Proposals to introduce 'pay at exit' at four major car parks are being considered. This work is linked with the above signage review and is continuing.

Taunton Rethink

- 2.10 The Project Team for the proposed redevelopment of Coal Orchard is now in place.

Councillor Roger Habgood

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

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

1. Parks

- 1.1 We still await the written reports from Green Flag so I am unable to update you on the Victoria Park, Taunton result at this point.
- 1.2 Britain in Bloom judging in July went very well and we are hopeful of another successful award. A star of the show as far as the judges were concerned was Bath Place where they had put on a sneak preview of the 'yarn bombing' that we saw later in the summer.
- 1.3 The last bandstand concert of the season in Vivary Park, Taunton was at the start of September and the painters will soon be giving it a lick of paint. I ask all Members again this year that if they know of any school, college or community group that would like to use the bandstand and bring music or entertainment to the park that they let Community Leisure know.

2. Community Leisure and Play

Hudson Way

- 2.1 The site is well underway now and a giant hole has been dug for the foundations and fixings required for the pirate ships.

Blackbrook Pool

- 2.2 The Blackbrook Pool project continues on schedule and I hope you have been finding the newsletter helpful.

3. Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities

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

Health Development

North Taunton One Team

- 3.1 The Active Lifestyles Officer has delivered weekly sports sessions for children at North Taunton Youth Centre every Monday and Wednesday throughout the summer. There were consistently 10-20 children attending, who enjoyed trying new sports such as volleyball, hockey, tennis and badminton.

- 3.2 Tone attended the Pride in Priorswood activity days, delivering circuit sessions, sports day races and racquet sports across the weeks. This is a well established event with up to 600 children and parents attending each week.
- 3.3 From September Tone will deliver a free six week Boot Camp Programme in Lyngford Park, Taunton. This project is part of Knightstone's Creating Active Communities Project and is in line with Taunton Deane Borough Council's goal of encouraging local residents to exercise outdoors and use the outdoor gym facility that is available in the park.

Project Wellington

- 3.4 The Active Lifestyles Officer is part of the Project Wellington team in partnership with Taunton Deane Borough Council, Knightstone and GetSet Children's Centre. A summer of events for the Children's Centre's families and the local community was delivered, with weekly outdoor craft and sport activities in Cades Farm, Westford Grange and Wellington Recreation Ground.
- 3.5 Weekly sports sessions for 8-16 year olds were delivered in Howards Road Playing Field. The children enjoyed playing rounders, cricket, volleyball and Ultimate Frisbee.
- 3.6 A Summer Olympics was held on 27 August 2015 in Dobree Park, with the Mayoress starting the children's races. Over 80 children and families attended.
- 3.7 Wellington mums were encouraged to keep active with weekly Buggy Walks throughout the summer. 17 mums joined in and discovered new routes to walk in their local area and two volunteer mums plan to continue these walks throughout the coming months.

Health Walks

- 3.8 687 Health Walks were held in Taunton and 408 in Wellington during July and August.

Play Walks

- 3.9 A programme of Play Walks started in September in conjunction with Knightstone Housing for residents living at Waterside House, Taunton. These consist of a series of short walks for parents and toddlers, stopping half way to play in the local park.

Facility News

- 3.10 Tone Leisure's Net Promoter Score (NPS) for customer satisfaction in Taunton Deane currently averages 42%, which is 16% above the industry standard for Leisure Trusts. This is a very encouraging score and demonstrates many of Tone's customers are satisfied and considered to be Promoters of the facilities.

Blackbrook Pavilion

- 3.11 Blackbrook Pavilion celebrated the 10 year anniversary of Body Step being taught at the centre, with 100 Steppers participating in a Stepathon led by international trainer Ben Grant and raising £750 for the site's charity 'Think Amy'.
- 3.12 Blackbrook participated in the BBC's 'Share Your Skill' week with a live broadcast held at the centre during July. Members of the local community were invited to try various activities put on by the site.
- 3.13 Blackbrook Swimming Pool and Spa is taking shape and Tone Leisure is busy mapping out the new programmes for both this pool and Taunton Pool. Consultation is well under way with clubs, schools and staff to ensure the company is ready for the opening next summer.

Councillor Catherine Herbert

Council Meeting – 29 September 2015

Report of Councillor Richard Parrish – Corporate Resources

1. Corporate Strategy and Performance

- 1.1 JMASS 2 Corporate Visioning and Priorities – the team have been heavily involved in preparing for and delivering the various Taunton Deane and West Somerset Member workshops. Work is currently focussing on turning the output from these sessions into draft Corporate Strategies for both Councils and in arranging additional Member engagement activities.
- 1.2 Quarter 1 Performance Reporting – the report is working its way through the Scrutiny and Executive cycle during September and October.
- 1.3 Risk Management Update – an update report is due to be considered by the Corporate Governance Committee on 28 September 2015. A copy of the draft report will be available in due course.
- 1.4 Corporate Governance Action Plan Update – This is a progress update on the actions identified in the Annual Governance Statement and will also be submitted to the Corporate Governance Committee.
- 1.5 Data Protection – The Council has had a minor breach this quarter, which affected two people, and which has been investigated and dealt with in accordance with our policy.

2. Facilities Management and Business Support

- 2.1 Office Moves – the remaining office moves flowing from the JMASS Phase 1 restructure are scheduled to be completed over the next few months. This will affect elements of Corporate Services and the Finance Team who will move in late September/early October. The only remaining move will then be for the Housing Enabling Team and this is currently being planned.
- 2.2 Procedures for evening meetings – procedures have been implemented in conjunction with Democratic Services to ensure that an evacuation announcement is made by the Chairman at the start of each evening meeting. Work with Democratic Services is continuing to improve the content and scope of the standard announcement. Additionally, we are working in conjunction with the Health and Safety Team to organise a short briefing for Members at a Council meeting regarding evacuation procedures.
- 2.3 First Aid Risk Assessment – We are in the process of reviewing the risk

assessment for both the Taunton and Williton offices to identify any improvements required.

- 2.4 Bomb Evacuation Drill – We are planning a drill and are consulting with the Police on how to best organise and maximise the effectiveness of this exercise.
- 2.5 PAT (Portable Appliance Testing) – The Council was looking to arrange for this to be undertaken in the near future.

3. Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development

- 3.1 Terms and Conditions Review – The HR Team are heavily involved in supporting the staff consultation process and associated briefings. The team will also coordinate the collection and reply to the consultation responses.
- 3.2 Absence Management – Our absence figures for quarter 1 indicate that we may just miss our target for the year of 8.2 days per employee. Consequently we are continuing to focus on the management of absence and the issue was considered at this month's Leadership Team meeting. However, things are improving and of our recent long term absence cases (nine members of staff), five are now back at work.
- 3.3 Learning Pool rollout – The work to launch the new computer based training module across the organisation has commenced. Managers were briefed on 10 September 2015 and this will now be rolled out to staff via briefings and team meetings.
- 3.4 TUPE Transfer – The transfer of five Deane DLO staff to MITIE has now been completed.

4. ICT and Information

- 4.1 ICT Strategy – Following the recommendations from Alan Evans of iESE we are currently producing a Resourcing and Delivery Plan to accompany the draft strategy. The intention is to take this to Full Council in November 2015 for consideration.
- 4.2 Disaster Recovery Audit – The audit is now finalised and only offers a “partial” assurance. The auditors have made a number of recommendations and we are working with the SWO ICT service to implement these. SWAP drew attention to this audit in their report to the Corporate Governance Committee on 28 September 2015.
- 4.3 VPN and Encryption Software Upgrade – The rollout of the upgrade has commenced and is progressing satisfactorily. This requires all laptop users, including elected Members, to make an appointment to leave their laptop for overnight upgrade. This process is being coordinated.

- 4.4 Intranet Project – This was continuing and remains on target for 31 December to go-live.
- 4.5 WI-FI Extension Project – This will enable us to publish the Taunton Deane corporate WI-FI signal at West Somerset House and vice versa for West Somerset users in The Deane House thereby further enabling ease of cross-site flexible working. The plan is for this to go-live by November 2015.

5. Transformation Programme Management

JMASS Phase 1

- 5.1 Terms and Conditions Review – The staff consultation exercise has started and the draft proposals have been circulated to all staff for comment. The consultation period will last a month and complete on 9 October 2015.
- 5.2 Transition Plan – This continues to be regularly monitored to ensure delivery of the outstanding actions from Phase 1.
- 5.3 Building Control Shared Service – Work continues on this and we aim to finalise the decision within a month.

JMASS Phase 2 (Transformation)

- 5.4 Project 1 Corporate Visioning and Priorities – (See Corporate Strategy update above)
- 5.5 Project 2 Affordability – Officers are currently analysing the results from the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan undertaken by Bill Roots from the Local Government Association and will feedback to Members in due course.
- 5.6 Project Resourcing – The temporary administrative support role has been filled and the communications support role has been advertised. Managers are also working on producing a detailed resourcing plan to support the delivery of the ICT Strategy.

6. Southwest One (SWO) Succession Planning

- 6.1 Succession Project – The options review is continuing and remains on track to report back to Members in the late Autumn. The review is focussing on both future service delivery options for the SWO services and potential alternative computer system options. Currently we are in the process of undertaking a market soundings exercise to understand the availability and potential cost of alternative computer systems.
- 6.2 SAP Migration – This is the project to migrate the existing SAP servers from the Warwick Data Centre to the new Police Data Centre in Bridgwater. The contractual target date for completion is the end of December 2015. The

project is being delivered by the SWO ICT service, but will involve an element of testing by Council services. Monitoring of the delivery of this service continues.

- 6.2.1 Day-to-day service delivery – Officers continue to monitor day-to-day delivery and the ICT service continues to require significant client input.

7. Additional Priorities

Corporate Business Continuity Planning

- 7.1 The aim of this project is to ensure that we improve our current business continuity planning processes and refresh our plans by 31 October 2015. This is being led by a small Corporate Project Team and has identified that we need to introduce new corporate level plans to cover areas such as ICT Disaster Recovery, Premises, Staffing, Communications and Fuel Shortage.
- 7.2 Work has started to develop these plans. Additionally, development of a standard Sharepoint based template for services to use is under development and officers are working with a number of services to develop and trial a new approach.

Budgets/Governance

- 7.3 Budget Savings Options for 2016/2017 – Work will shortly commence to identify potential savings options for next year.
- 7.4 Quarterly Performance Measures – Work is continuing to develop a new quarterly performance scorecard for Corporate Services.
- 7.3 Staff Appraisals – Now completed for nearly all Corporate Services staff.

8. Council Tax Support

- 8.1 Consultation on options for our Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme in 2016/2017 ended on 9 September 2015. Officers in the Revenues and Benefits Service worked hard to obtain 383 responses from the public, as well as obtaining feedback from other interested groups. A report will be presented to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee in October. This will reflect the views we have received as well as considering the financial implications and equality impact of each of the proposed options.
- 8.2 Council Tax collection at the end of August 2015 was 53.3% - slightly under the target of 53.5%. Business Rate Collection at 50.4% is also below the target of 51.6%. So far this year, we have helped 109 households with awards of Discretionary Council Tax Assistance totalling £13,500.

- 8.3 We continue to perform well in speed of benefit processing for 2015/2016 with the average time to reassess benefit at six days from when the customer tells us of a change in their circumstances. We are working out new claims on average within 18 days of the date they are submitted.
- 8.4 From 1 August 2015 the South West Counter Fraud Partnership (SWCFP) started to deliver a Corporate Anti-Fraud service for Taunton Deane Borough Council as well as two other District Councils. The work of the Counter Fraud Partnership will place greater emphasis on a targeted approach to review key fraud risk areas and areas identified at greatest risk from fraud.

9. Customer Contact

- 9.1 The Customer Contact Restructure (2014) was a cost neutral project which aimed to achieve the following:-
- To become more resilient and more efficient;
 - Shorten Training time for specialist services;
 - Create more motivated, empowered teams;
 - Creation of enhanced career path and development opportunities – leads to increased discretionary effort and more motivated workforce; and
 - More dynamic and highly skilled workforce in order to meet the demands of a changing customer profile.
- 9.2 This has been achieved through the creation of new roles within the operational teams which creates a clear development and career path, making roles more diverse and interesting and increasing job satisfaction. Service types have been separated into Specialist (Higher risk, higher complexity) and Non-Specialist (Lower risk and lower complexity) groups. People new to the organisation will operate in non-specialist areas first and at the same time (in line with a personal development plan) will be training in a chosen specialist area and when a vacancy arises, there is an opportunity to move into a Specialist team.
- 9.3 Since the implementation of the new design, the time taken to fill Specialist vacancies has decreased by 70%. Staff sickness and attrition have also both reduced by 6% and 25% accordingly.

10. Law and Governance, SHAPE Partnership Services

- 10.1 The new partnership continues to operate well and in the months of July and August there have been 21 referrals from Taunton Deane with a breakdown of the subject areas set out below:-

Commercial , Contract and Procurement Advice on New Contracts	12
Enforcement/Prosecutions Advice on enforcement	1
Housing General Advice	1
Litigation Housing/Property repossessions	1
Planning S106 Agreements CIL Advice Lawful Development Certificates	1 1 2
Property Agreements Leases Advice on Property Law Purchases Right To Buy	1 3 3 1 4
Licensing Provision of Legal Adviser for Licensing Committee	1
TOTAL	21

11. Electoral Services

- 11.1 The main focus of the team over the last two and next few months will be on the canvass of the Electoral Register and everything is currently on course to publish an updated register on 1 December, 2015.

12. Democratic Services

- 12.1 The past two months have been busy for the team, dealing with helping new Members to settle in, organising induction sessions and servicing the 'business as usual' meetings during the 'holiday season'.

13. Code of Conduct Training for Town and Parish Councils

- 13.1 After the recent Elections, two training sessions – on 3 and 30 September, 2015 - have been offered to Parish/Town Councillors and Clerks on the Code of Conduct. The sessions are being run by the Monitoring Officer and held at The Deane House. The first session had 25 attendees.

14. Finance and Procurement

- 14.1 Following on from the completion of the end of year financial accounts, the Finance Service has been supporting our external auditor – Grant Thornton LLP – through the audit process. This will culminate in the Statement of Accounts being presented for approval on 28 September 2015 at Corporate Governance Committee, where the auditor will also present findings and opinion in respect of the financial statements and value for money.
- 14.2 As has happened in previous years, Members of the Committee will be supported with training and guidance in advance of the actual meeting to help prepare for the important task of reviewing, understanding and approving the statements.
- 14.3 The service is also working with Managers and budget holders to progress the annual budget process. Members will be aware that the Council faces a significant Budget Gap for next year of approximately £1,300,000 and this is projected to increase significantly in subsequent years as the squeeze on Local Authority funding continues. The updated Medium Term Financial Plan position was reported to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 13 August 2015, setting out our projections for spending and income through to 2021, with the Council needing to find net savings estimated at £3,900,000 over the next five years – through transforming services, identifying savings and efficiencies, and through income generation.
- 14.4 The first budget monitoring report of the year indicates that the financial position in the current year is broadly on track. There is a shortfall of income

identified in Quarter 1 for the General Fund. However officers and portfolio holders will seek to manage this through the remainder of the year.

- 14.4 The staffing position for the service is close to settling down following the JMASS 'Phase 1' process, with the final vacant substantive post being filled on 21 September 2015. The team has utilised a number of interim / agency appointments pending completion of permanent appointments. There will be one temporary change, with a Senior Accountant being seconded to focus on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review, and backfill arrangements are currently being implemented.

Councillor Richard Parrish

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on 29 September 2015 at 6.30 p.m.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hill)
 The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams)
 Councillors Mrs Adkins, M Adkins, Aldridge, Appleby, Beale, Berry,
 Bowrah, Brown, Coles, Coombes, Davies, D Durdan, Miss Durdan,
 Mrs Edwards, M Edwards, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gage, Gaines, Govier,
 Mrs Gunner, Habgood, Hall, Mrs Herbert, C Hill, Horsley, Hunt, James,
 R Lees, Mrs Lees, Ms Lisgo, Martin-Scott, Morrell, Nicholls, Parrish,
 Prior-Sankey, Mrs Reed, Ryan, Miss Smith, Mrs Smith, Stone, Sully,
 Townsend, Mrs Tucker, Mrs Warmington, Watson, Ms Webber,
 Williams and Wren

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 8 September 2015, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Cavill, Ross and Wedderkopp

3. Communications

The Mayor reminded Councillors of the forthcoming Charity Masquerade which would be held on the evening of Friday, 23 October 2015 at Oake Manor Golf Club. She hoped as many Members as possible would join her at this event.

4. Declaration of Interests

Councillors M Adkins, Coles, Govier, Hunt and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Beale declared personal interests as a Board Member and Director of Tone FM, Chief Executive of the 'Think Amy' Charity and as a Governor of the South West Ambulance NHS Trust. Councillor Stone declared a prejudicial interest as a Tone Leisure Board representative. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College. Councillor Mrs Herbert declared a personal interest as an employee of the Department of Work and Pensions. Councillor Ms Lisgo declared a personal interest as a Director of Tone FM. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest as the owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillor Coombes declared a personal interest as a Stoke St Mary Parish Councillor and as the

owner of land at Haydon. Councillor Hall declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One.

5. Public Question Time

(a) Mr Alan Wedderkopp asked the following questions:-

- (1) The monitoring of Nitrous Oxide and other harmful gases was discontinued in 2007 when the apparatus at The Deane House was removed and monitoring in East Reach also ceased. I raised this at the time but did not receive a satisfactory explanation. Can I have one now?
- (2) In light of recent car emissions revelations, what does the Council do regarding the monitoring of pollution throughout the town and surrounding areas? What recordings were now taken at East Reach? When were the last recordings made and what were the results?
- (3) In addition, in 2010 'Climate Change' was dropped from the Taunton Deane's Core Strategy at the time when the Council was pushing for pedestrianisation of Taunton Town Centre because of the effect of car exhaust fumes and particulates on local people. Councillor Williams said at the time that this would make it difficult for businesses to cross the town. Has he had any fresh thinking on pedestrianisation since that time? Will any attempt be made to clean-up the air in Taunton?

Councillor Williams thanked Mr Wedderkopp for his questions and promised that a full written reply would be sent to him in due course.

- (b) Mr Bob Symons stated that he had worked for the United Nations during the Kosovo War in the late 1990's. He therefore had some experience of refugees both as they left the country and when they returned. Refugees faced a dilemma as they mostly did not want to flee a country they loved but needed to find a place of safety. He urged the Council to find the means to assist refugees from the current conflict in Syria.
- (c) Mr Sigurd Reimers said that many people in Taunton are concerned at the suffering of Syrian refugees. What kind of help is the Council prepared to offer and to how many?
- (d) Fran Hicks asked whether it was better for refugees to arrive legitimately, with structures in place to support them and enable them to contribute, than illegitimately where they will either be exploited by unscrupulous individuals, housed in crowded unsanitary dwellings, subjected to what amounts to slave labour, or where excluded from legitimate means of earning a living and contributing to society, they become the exploiters, working criminally. Which sort of society do we want?

Councillor Williams commented that the refugee issue was a sensitive subject but agreed that it would be better for people to arrive legitimately. The Council was currently working within a group to ensure we were ready and waiting to assist. There was a need to ensure the Council could handle the

arrival of any refugees and their proper integration.

6. **Motion – Taunton Deane opens its arms to refugees**

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Miss Smith.

“We have all witnessed the turmoil and human distress that has arisen from the flight of the refugees through Eastern Europe. We note also that the humanitarian response from Taunton Deane residents has been huge as illustrated by the work of the People to People Solidarity Group - Taunton Deane. We thank the administration for the promise of storage to assist with the hundreds of donations received from local residents and businesses.

We also welcome the statement from the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom (UK) will take some 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years and we understand that this will help reduce the refugee problem in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

The overwhelming nature of this humanitarian crisis calls for an immediate response, especially as there is no sight of a long term political and diplomatic solution from the European Union or even worldwide.

We therefore urge Taunton Deane Borough Council to join the over 40 other local authorities who have offered support to meeting this humanitarian need and work towards providing accommodation and whatever other help by showing solidarity with our fellow human beings.

We move that Taunton Deane Borough Council be at the forefront of Councils looking to help relocate a minimum of 25 individuals and families under the UK Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.”

Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Mrs Warmington moved amendments to the wording of the final three paragraphs of the Motion which would read as follows:-

“We have all witnessed the turmoil and human distress that has arisen from the flight of the refugees through Eastern Europe. We note also that the humanitarian response from Taunton Deane residents has been huge as illustrated by the work of the People to People Solidarity Group - Taunton Deane. We thank the administration for the promise of storage to assist with the hundreds of donations received from local residents and businesses.

We also welcome the statement from the Prime Minister that the United Kingdom (UK) will take some 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years and we understand that this will help reduce the refugee problem in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan.

The overwhelming nature of this humanitarian crisis calls for an urgent response to receive those most in need and especially work towards implementing long term political and diplomatic solution from the European Union and worldwide.

Taunton Deane Borough Council remains ready and willing to provide accommodation and the necessary resources as necessary to welcome the numbers as determined by the Local Government Association as our representatives to Government. All as set out in Councillor Warmington's report to Full Council as contained later in this agenda.

We move that Taunton Deane Borough Council officers be authorised to respond quickly to any request for accommodating those referred to us under the UK Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme."

The amendments were put and was carried.

The substantive motion was put and was carried.

7. Report of the Joint Independent Members' Remuneration Panel

Reference Minute No 9 from the meeting held on 31 March 2015, reported that following further discussions, the Joint Independent Members' Remuneration Panel had set out its conclusions and recommendations of a fundamental review of the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances which had been carried out by the Panel.

Mr Ian Partington the Chairman of the Panel and Mr Julian Gale the Panel's Advisor were in attendance to answer questions and queries from Members.

The comprehensive report submitted had taken into account the following matters:-

- (a) The statutory task of the Panel was to make recommendations to a Council before it made or amended a Scheme of Members' Allowances. The Council had to have regard to the Panel's recommendations before agreeing or amending a Scheme.
- (b) The report was based on comprehensive data, information and evidence obtained from internal and external resources including the Office of National Statistics, the Bank of England, the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The survey undertaken with Members earlier in the year had also been taken into account.
- (c) The Panel had used the latest available data but, unavoidably, this has not always been up-to-date.
- (d) Since 2008 the real value of the Basic Allowance (BA) had declined with the rate of inflation. The decision in December 2013 to increase the BA to £4,344 where it has remained, although welcomed by the Panel, had only slightly compensated for the loss of real value. By 2012, before the increase in 2013, the real value of the BA had fallen to £3,792 and by 2015 the real value was still only £3,644 - less than its value in 2008. An inflation-adjusted nominal BA that returned today to the real value of 2008 would need to be around £5,194 rather than its current value of £4,344.

- (e) Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) payments had also been suppressed over recent years alongside the BA but were within the range paid by comparable Councils. The Panel was not proposing significant amendments to levels of SRA payments at this stage noting that they would increase on an annual basis in line with the annual increases proposed to the BA. This would start to bring SRAs up to an appropriate level.
- (f) The report also embodied previous decisions taken by the Council in response to recommendations made by the Panel including an agreed list of approved duties and contained relevant evidence, data and the detailed recommendations.

The report set out in detail the methodology as to how both the BA and SRAs had been assessed leading to the recommendations being made by the Panel. Travel and Subsistence Allowances and Carers' Allowances had also been reviewed by the Panel.

As a result, the Council had been recommended:-

- (i) To accept the report of the Joint Independent Members Remuneration Panel;
- (ii) To approve the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2015/2016 (Appendix 2 of the Panel's report) which included the specific recommendations set out for:-
 - (a) A new Basic Allowance for Members of £4486 for 2015/2016 and the proposal for annual increases for a six year period;
 - (b) A new Special Responsibility Allowance structure;
 - (c) Revised Travel and Subsistence Allowance provisions; and
 - (d) Revised Carers' Allowance provisions; and
- (iii) To agree to backdate the payment of the new allowances to the relevant date of appointment following the Borough Council Elections in May 2015.

If the Taunton Deane Scheme of Members' Allowances for 2015/2016 was agreed in full, reported that a supplementary estimate from the General Fund Reserves in 2015/2016 for £10,163 would need to be approved, with the costs for future years being built into the Medium Term Financial Plan.

During the ensuing discussion various points were made including (i) the difficulty of accepting an increase in allowances for Councils at a time when the officers were facing changes to their Terms and Conditions to save in the region of £100,000; (ii) the need to set allowances at a level to attract younger people to become Councillors; and (iii) the greater difficulty of addressing the real value of Members' Allowances if the issue was not grasped soon.

Councillor Morrell proposed, seconded by Councillor Prior-Sankey, that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

Resolved that the recommendations of the Joint Independent Members' Remuneration Panel be **not** accepted.

8. **Written Questions to Members of the Executive**

(1) Questions to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Simon Coles

(a) Could the Leader of the Council explain why the Executive took so long to deliver the full (and final) South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) report dated 9 September on Business Grants to the Corporate Governance Committee for its meeting on Monday 28 September?

Why was the administration trying to hide the facts that the public should be aware of, of its inept handling of the processing and granting of both Investment Grants and small business grants and try to wriggle past the role of scrutiny by its underhand and glib approach to this important misuse of public money? His group had to concede at the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 17 September that it would have to suspend all grants given in this key area of financial support until it had implemented the proposals of the Auditors.

My colleague Habib Farbahi is asking further questions on this topic of the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and I have to congratulate my deputy Leader Federica Smith for establishing the significance of this report from the Chief Executive and the Section 151 officer and getting it to be part of the Corporate Governance meeting Agenda to be held later today (Monday). No doubt he will comment on the outcome of the Corporate Governance meeting.

Is he aware of the reputational damage that this can cause to the Council both from the early failure to release this document in full and also by what appears to be clear examples from the SWAP report of some of the cases reported on of fraud and cronyism?

Reply

The Level 4 recommendation was included in the SWAP report to the Corporate Governance Committee in line with standard practice. The full report was provided as requested by Councillors following consultation with the Committee Chairman.

My understanding is that the issues around the investment grants have been debated a number of times at Scrutiny Committees, at Corporate Governance last night and in this Chamber. I am struggling to see how this number of debates is underhand and glib. The facts have been fully debated on a number of occasions.

I understand that Councillor Horsley raised a number of questions around a specific section of the report. I am advised that as he requested sight of invoices which have now been submitted to the Council and of course he will be provided with copies of them.

I do not believe the audit has been subject to any delay. The Lead Officer met the Shadow Portfolio Holder to brief them shortly after the report was finalised. The high level recommendation is in the Corporate Governance report and the audit has been shared. There are a number of improvements recommended in processes which are being addressed but not the substance of what we are trying to achieve.

The audit report recommends changes to process – we have to learn from this – and I know Economic Development is already on top of this with their team. We have to also accept that if we are to invest and support ‘new’ businesses – there will be an element of risk. We cannot guarantee that a business will not go bust again.

(b) We understand that a meeting was held recently with 17 Council Leaders in the area to discuss the response to Central Government’s discussion on Devolution.

As we understand it there has been no discussion whatsoever with the Members of this Authority. Nor, indeed is there even a mention of this in his report. Why not? What are you hiding from all Members? What “deals” have you agreed? When will you bring something to the Members to discuss and agree or otherwise?

Reply

The local authorities of Devon and Somerset have submitted a devolution ‘Statement of Intent’ to the Government and this was circulated to all Members of the Council on 4 September 2015. This was prepared in a very short space of time and there is clearly a long way to go to move from what is an early statement of intent to any full devolution ‘deal’. There will be engagement with all Members as discussions move forward and endorsement sought for any final deal that might be proposed. Members have also been advised of a briefing session on 1 October 2015 where devolution is included on the agenda.

(c) We understand that Trudi Grant the Local NHS Director of Public Health in Somerset, has been in discussions with Council Leaders across Somerset discussing the best use of monies from Central Government regarding Public Health issues arising from any refugees who might be accommodated in Somerset.

Why is there no mention of this in his report?

Why are you not fully engaging with partners as to the best way forward to assist refugees during this crisis?

Reply

All Chief Executives are working together to ensure a co-ordinated solution. Simon Lewis is now the nominated Lead Officer to report to the Council on this. We await further information from the Government on allocations,

funding, placings, family sizings etc, after which we will ensure an appropriate response. All of our services are on standby and preparing for this.

(2) Questions to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Habib Farbahi

(a) Can the Leader inform me whether Taunton Deane has taken any further advise on the EU procurement law as Firepool predominately was meant to be a scheme with an employment (office buildings) lead and a small retail park? We were constantly reminded by Joy Wishlade (the then Director responsible for Economic Redevelopment in 2011 and 2012) that any changes we make to the proposal would mean going back to the EU and the process could take up to a further 18 months!

(b) In light of this, is there a possibility that the Council might be challenged by the other contractors/developers in bidding both nationally and regionally for the original tender for not following the rules?

Reply (to questions (a) and (b))

The proposed redevelopment plans for Firepool as proposed in the Taunton Rethink, will work within the parameters of the original Development Agreement for the site, thereby minimising the risk of any procurement challenge.

(c) Could he also inform us what evidence does he have that there is operator demand for the current scheme? Has Waitrose really committed itself to going ahead?

(d) Do the numbers really stack up?

(e) With the infrastructure cost escalating on a daily basis, not to mention the compulsory purchase of adjoining properties costing some millions, how is Firepool going to stack up commercially?

(f) Would Taunton Deane tax payers ever get a return on their capital?

(g) What get out clause do we have with St Modwens?

(h) Would he agree with me that overall the influence that Taunton Deane has exercised on the past six years is little more than adjusting to the wishes of St Modwen as contractors and part landowners and that the Council is reneging on all its promises to make this a sustainable site and make Taunton a true Sub-Regional Centre for the South West?

Reply (to questions (c) to (h))

There is evidence of demand from a variety of operators, as well as evidence that the scheme is commercially viable and deliverable, with a return to the Council as primary landowner, taking account of all known costs and

projected returns. Until such time as a planning permission for the scheme is in place, there is a potential risk with any development that occupiers currently expressing an interest will fall away.

Even with planning permission, commercial realities are such that no occupier can be considered as completely 'secure' until contracts are exchanged and units are built. St Modwen's efforts at the present time are therefore focussed on submitting a planning application for the scheme that is consistent with the Taunton Rethink proposals, and there is no intention or appetite to hinder St Modwen in this task – quite the opposite.

The Taunton Rethink was commissioned and endorsed by the Council, primarily as a result of major changes in commercial demand following the worst recession in living memory. It is the Taunton Rethink – led by this Council – that has led to the proposals now coming forward from St Modwen. Along with our other growth plans, the Firepool scheme will enable Taunton to take a major step forward in its ambitions as a regional centre for retail, leisure, business and culture.

(3) Questions to Councillor Mark Edwards from Councillor Habib Farbahi

With the Assistant Director Ian Timms, Councillor Edwards briefed me and handed me the Final Report of the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) on the way the Council had handled Business Grants at the Portfolio Holders meeting on Tuesday, 15 September 2015.

Sadly little happened after that and there was a brief reference to this report in the Economic Development Officer's report that went to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee two days later on 17 September when reviewing Small Business and Investment Grants. However, it did not reveal the contents of the report and the bad news therein.

It was a shock to me when the agenda for the Corporate Governance Committee was published for its meeting on 28 September 2015 with no mention of the SWAP report. Fortunately my colleague Federica Smith and deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats was able to persuade the Section 151 Officer that the publication of the report was in the public interest and it was circulated in full to all Members of the Committee for its consideration. No doubt the Portfolio Holder will inform the meeting of the outcome of the Corporate Governance Committee's deliberations.

What I would like to know is why he had not taken action earlier to ensure its publication? Was it because its contents were unpalatable and revealed too much about the shoddy and unacceptable facts that SWAP have given the Council only 'partial assurance' on its processes in this report and highlighted two particular cases where there have been blatant lack of due diligence and following of rules that have cost the Council at least £30,000?

Was he aware that the outcome of the Corporate Scrutiny discussions had been the Economic Development Officer being unable to advise the Executive on how to take forward its policy on business growth and investment,

particularly business grants, as it had to await the scrutiny by Corporate Governance of the proposals in the SWAP report?

Was it not trite of him to try and dismiss the recommendations of the SWAP in a single sentence (paragraph 3.5) particularly as the ruling group have had to suspend all Investment Grants as a result of this fiasco?

Reply

Firstly I did not brief you.....Ian Timms briefed us both. I saw the report at the same time as you as an indication of my openness to share the conclusions. I am therefore more than a little irritated by this flagrant unnecessary attack on my integrity. Nothing was being hidden quite the opposite.

I understand the Committee raised an issue around the Level 3 rating of one of the audit recommendations. Clearly we are in the hands of the auditor with regards to rating of the actions. I also understand Councillor Horsley requested the invoices relating to a specific grant and as stated at the meeting he will of course be provided with them for his consideration. The report was finalised on the 9 September 2015. As you are aware we met to discuss it on the 15 September to ensure that you were aware of its contents. The report does identify a number of items that require action and a clear plan has been agreed to deliver the identified improvements that are required.

However I understand that the normal practice is for Level 4 recommendations to be reported to the Corporate Governance Committee and this was indeed the case as part of last night's auditors report. Level 3 and below are normally dealt with at service level.

As already stated we have an agreed an action plan to tackle the audit recommendations. In terms of this assertion that there is a lack of due diligence the money relating to the grant to ACS has been added to the Council's top twenty debts and we intend to pursue this through our Debt Collection Team. This amounts to £24,000.

As mentioned above there is a plan in place to address all of the actions and I am confident that officers will follow this through fully.

The report itself was not being hidden but officers needed some time to assess how they dealt with the issues in hand and it would have made its way through the necessary channels. My reference to the existence of the report (in my Council report) was written not long after we received the report. It was purely a matter of timing. I accept that the outcome of the audit is of concern and need to be dealt with, which is why we have taken it so seriously but we also have to accept there will be risk in any investment and support of new business.

As for being trite...at the last Full Council I was dancing the 'hokey cokey' now I am trite!! I await the next Full Council insult with interest.

(4) Questions to Councillor Mark Edwards from Councillor Habib Farbahi

(a) Notwithstanding the long term nature of the bid for the major upstream flood alleviation project, what contingency plan does he have should our Local Enterprise Partnership Growth deal bid not be successful? What would be the implications for the Firepool development and Taunton Town Centre?

Reply

The Council is working closely and constructively with the Environment Agency on a range of interim measures – specific to individual sites – that will enable development in Taunton (including Firepool) to come forward in advance of any large scale alleviation scheme upstream of Taunton. The alleviation scheme now in place at Longrun Meadow already enables key developments to come forward in Taunton Town Centre and we will continue to pursue alternative funding options should the current bid to the Local Enterprise Partnership for longer term additional flood protection be unsuccessful.

(b) In light of Somerset County-wide research outcomes identifying health and social work along with Scientific, Technical and Professional industries as the largest growth sector, can you please tell us why none of these sectors will be represented at Firepool? Is it time yet again to rethink the Rethink?

Reply

The Taunton Rethink showed clear demand for the mix of uses now being proposed at Firepool, and there are no signs of any reduction in this demand at the current time. All sites are different however, and we will be looking to accommodate demand from other sectors at other sites, including the proposed strategic employment site adjacent to Junction 25 of the M5 Motorway. All sectors are an important part of the mix in stimulating a thriving Town Centre and wider economic growth and prosperity.

(c) I am absolutely delighted with the new Town Visitor Centre and know it is already attracting many more people than the former site adjacent to the Library. Would the Portfolio Holder please also acknowledge the role played by one of his predecessors, Councillor Fran Smith for initiating the project and Councillor Norman Cavill and officers for completing it?

Reply

I am happy to acknowledge anyone involved in particular Andrew Hopkins and his team whose efforts have been exceptional and my thanks go to him and his team.

(d) Am I correct in assuming that the marketing of the former Mike Chedzoy premises at the end of Greenbrook Terrace means the end of this as a commercial site?

By turning a commercial site to a residential one, is he not setting a precedent for others to follow? How seriously did he consider the bid from the team known as the Somerset Medieval Centre to continue the use of the site for community and cultural purposes which could have brought thousands more

visitors to the town and would have been so complementary to the Somerset Museum and really given some boost to economic and cultural growth for Taunton?

Reply

The former Mike Chedzoy premises is allocated for residential within the Taunton Town Centre Action Plan. The allocation of such a site is a planning matter but nevertheless interest through marketing has been received for both residential and non-residential uses, with the significant difference in values which you would expect. Discussions took place prior to marketing with individuals behind the proposed Medieval Centre and we welcomed them to make an offer alongside others, which they have now done.

Once there has been an assessment of the offers we will come forward for discussions with Scrutiny but I will always consider a priority as deliverability and best value for the Council tax payer as this is a key site which I don't want to stand undeveloped for any further length of time.

We are challenged to get best value for our assets and the receipt on this site could be significant so we need to carefully consider.

(e) When does he anticipate having a dedicated team in place to look at our assets of £65,500,000 that is generating very little revenue?

Reply

The Asset Management Service are delivering the General Fund Asset Strategy through a dedicated temporary agency Asset Strategy Surveyor post. This dedicated work stream commenced in early 2015 and we are now beginning to see the results of this additional capacity. A significant revenue is generated from the portfolio and we are constantly looking at and taking forward new opportunities to enhance the financial and non-financial return

(5) Questions to Councillor Terry Beale from Councillor Simon Coles

(a) What has he done to ensure that Community Schemes are exempt from this reduction in Feed In Tariff?

Reply

The recent announcement by the Government of its intention to reduce the Feed in Tariff is now subject to consultation until 23 October 2015. I am sure the Government will seriously consider any representations received in connection with Community Schemes.

(b) Does he just not understand that smaller local installation companies are now likely to go to the wall as it will now be uneconomic to fit these panels?

Of course....and that is regrettable. However, we need to await outcome of the consultation.

(c) Why has he not been leading in this very important carbon saving initiative?

Reply

We have given our full support to the programme and we continue to support it. However as a responsible authority it is right and proper that we await the outcome of the consultation and then assess the financial viability of continuing with the project.

(d) This Administration's lack of perceivable effort has wasted opportunity after opportunity to take a lead on photovoltaic panels on our own properties. Why?

Reply

The system was introduced in late 2010. This Authority began a feasibility study in 2012 including asking Western Power to identify suitable properties for installation. It is their decision as to suitability - not ours. 700 such properties were identified in the first instance and a proposal was put to Council and agreed.

We have had a 25% refusal rate; tenants mostly saying we should be spending money on improvements and therefore they were not going to help us by agreeing to PV. They are informed they get the electricity generated at zero cost to them but they are also aware the Council receives the Feed in Tariff. Some have said "no" due to not wanting the 4 hour installation time, mostly the elderly.

A handful do not like the agreement they have to sign and say it only favours the Council. As the installation and panels can cost in the region of £4,500 per property we are keen to ensure the tenants do not damage or remove them.

(e) What steps is he taking to arrest the rise in rent arrears?

Reply

As can be seen by the figures the amount of arrears varies from month to month but remains broadly the same so there is no perceivable increase. However, any level of debt arrears is not acceptable and we work very closely with our tenants to identify issues which can be resolved. In many cases these can be complex and prolonged such as mental illness, family and job issues and education and medical problems.

(f) What practical assistance is he offering to tenants?

Reply

Our Estate Officers work with the tenants to resolve issues. We have a number of partners we can call upon to assist in many areas including medical, social and debt management and the One Team approach has

proved extremely successful in coordinating response to tenant issues including ASB and damage.

(g) Do we discuss the issue with our tenants before instigating action? If so when?

Reply

Officers will make every effort to discuss matters with tenants and offer whatever support is needed. Only as a last resort would we proceed to Court action for recovery or eviction. To put someone out of their home is a huge burden to bear and we would only contemplate that action as an extreme measure of last resort. Having said that I believe firmly that people must take responsibility for their own actions and where all help is refused and it is clear no cooperation is forthcoming then action will be taken if deemed necessary.

(h) What level of arrears is permissible before any action is started?

Reply

There are no specific figures which generate action. We endeavour to deal with the problem early so that the debt does not spiral out of control. Officers will make contact with tenants as soon as it becomes clear there is a problem.

(i) Who decided on this figure?

Reply

See above.

(j) What is the actual figure for rent arrears as opposed to only the Welfare Reform rent arrears?

Reply

The reported rent arrears are within the area of Welfare Reform. The current arrears as of the 27 September 2015 stands at £446,827.91p. Although that figure is high the amount is only a snapshot of the day. We have monthly direct debits for example which may not have been included. We have tenants who are paying their rent and arrears at a reduced rate and we have tenants on Housing Benefit and Universal Credit both usually dealt with monthly. We are working hard with our tenants to reduce the arrears levels.

(6) Questions to Councillor Roger Habgood from Councillor Simon Coles

(a) What steps has he taken to provide a “five year supply” of site for Gypsy Traveller and Show people’s sites?

Reply

The following response was recently compiled for the Independent Inspector for the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan. It covers what steps the Council has taken to try and provide a “five year supply” of site for Gypsy Traveller and Show people’s sites.

Inspector’s Question/Observation: The Core Strategy states in paragraph 3.68 the Site Allocations DPD (that I take to mean the SADMP) will make allocations for Gypsies and Travellers. However, there are none. Why is that?

Council Response:

7.1 The Council had intended to make allocations for the provision of gypsy and traveller pitches through the SADMP. Unfortunately, despite repeated efforts to identify suitable land for development no land has been put forward by willing landowners that could be considered suitable for provision. It is on this basis that the Council has been unable to allocate sites through this [SADMP] Plan.

7.2 Since 2011 the Council has publicised through the SHLAA review process, a call for sites, as part of which landowners have been actively encouraged to put land forward for gypsy and traveller accommodation. Comparatively few landowners have even been prepared to put their sites forward for these uses and in the few occasions where land has been offered up it has not met with the criteria established by DM3 of the Core Strategy. In most cases sites put forward have been in unsustainable locations extremely remote from services and facilities where housing would not be acceptable.

7.3 Having failed to identify land through general SHLAA call for sites, the Council has also independently written to landowners and agents who have previously promoted sites for inclusion in the SHLAA for general housing which were not identified for development under the SADMP. Again, this trawl failed to yield any sites which could be reasonably considered as allocations for gypsy and traveller accommodation.

7.4 Discussions have been had both with the Enabling arm of the Council as well as Registered Providers to consider the delivery of pitch provision as part of affordable housing requirements. None of the local Registered Providers have any experience of the delivery of gypsy and traveller accommodation and consequently they did not wish to enter this part of the market.

7.5 Having failed to identify suitable land for development up until now the Council has joined a Countywide Gypsy and Traveller Working Group. This Working Group has been tasked with the identification of sites for residential and transit accommodation and comprises officers from each Somerset local authority, the County Council and Homes and Communities Agency. Options for provision on public land holdings are being considered as well as the scope for joint provision across local authority boundaries.

7.6 Whilst the Working Group has yet to report its findings and recommendations, to-date the project has established search criteria and an assessment pro-forma. It is now in the process of reviewing land holdings and undertaking a desktop assessment of any potentially suitable sites.

7.7 Despite the lack of identified sites in the SADMP, it is considered that policy DM3 of the Core Strategy provides an appropriate basis to assess applications for gypsy and traveller provision against.

I understand that the previous administration had a similar experience in site provision.

(b) Does he not care about the risk of unauthorised sites springing up and being given permission on appeal due to the lack of sites?

Reply

Short answer - Yes he does care!

Full answer - There is always a risk of unauthorised Gypsy or Traveller sites. There are generally two types of unauthorised sites, travellers who are passing through on their way to somewhere else, particularly around traditional travelling periods and holidays, for events such as Bridgwater Fair, and those looking for permanent residency. The former required a transit or temporary stopping point for short periods of time and the latter a site in a sustainable location. Both require different solutions.

The risk of unauthorised sites was compounded when the County Council no longer had a statutory duty to provide sites and took the decision to dispose of its public provision, which included a residential site and a transit site in the Parish of Otterford in the Borough of Taunton Deane. Full Council took the decision to purchase the transit site at Otterford to assist with transit provision for emergency and unauthorised purposes. The purchase of the site has taken longer than hoped, because of unauthorised occupation of the site by someone who is not from the gypsy or travelling culture. The purchase is progressing and will provide the Council with access to a public sites for emergency use (unauthorised sites, homelessness).

Granting planning permission on appeal is always a risk where there are no suitable sites to allocate. Government recently amended the national Policy for Travellers Sites. This will make it more difficult for planning permissions to be granted on appeal for gypsy or traveller provision where an occupant/s have been in unauthorised occupied of the site, where they have ceased traveling and where it is in an area of landscape sensitivity. The aim is to bring policy for travellers residential sites in line with policy for settled housing thereby reducing permissions by appeal which would otherwise be unacceptable.

A clear direction of travel has been set here by Central Government.

Unauthorised sites and identification of suitable sites for temporary stopping points, transit and residential sites is not just an Executive Membership issue

nor is it the sole responsibility of planning. There are no easy solutions to the controversial and sensitive nature of gypsy and traveller sites, be they authorised or unauthorised. Effective solutions require pro-active involvement and support of the corporate, the cross-departmental and the cross-party Elected Membership of The Council. I look forward to that collaborative approach should the need arise.

(c) Would he please tell the members the actual cost to Taxpayers of the Northern Inner Distributor Road and how that figure compares with the original estimate?

Reply

This is a Somerset County Council Highways Authority matter. I ask Councillor Coles to therefore refer his question to his County Colleagues and officers across the road.

Be assured however that this Council is engaged and is working with the County Council to do all we can to apply appropriate encouragement to get the works delivered.

(7) Questions to Councillor Jane Warmington from Councillor Chris Appleby

(a) Money was set aside (£25,000) to help fund specialist provision for those addicted to legal highs working alongside Taunton Association for the Homeless, Citizens Advice Bureau, Turning Point and others. Has this money been spent? If yes, how successful has it been? How many people have benefited from the support? If the money has not been spent, why not? Is there a plan in place?

Reply

No, the money has not been spent yet. We are not specialist providers of training so look to support (and challenge) services provided by others. We are doing this to some extent already through the One Teams established in our most disadvantaged areas to better support those in most need. Where there are gaps, the One Teams have stepped in with local initiatives (such as Chill and Chat, Link Power, Supported Sports). This is a more holistic approach to an individual's or family's problems which seems more effective and can address more than one problem at a time which is often necessary to make a difference.

Somerset Drugs and Alcohol Service has Turning Point delivering part of its re-commissioned service and is the main provider of support along with Taunton Association for the Homeless.

The Community Safety Lead has already been asked to share our experiences on legal highs both across the County and further afield, next to a Health Protection Forum, passing information to other Safety Officers. Although there are other towns which share our problems, we have found

ourselves a bit further ahead of them along with Lincolnshire where we both shared a platform together recently.

Is there a plan in place? Not as such but we have now had a summer free from shops in our town centre trading in legal highs and anti-social behaviour in the vicinity has significantly reduced. However most of us are aware that legal highs are still being used although not as convenient to get hold of as they were. By next summer the new legislation to ban these should be in place. Health issues remain a concern.

(b) The motion submitted to Council last year in respect of 'legal highs' also stated that Taunton Deane would work with Somerset County Council to implement education programmes in schools and colleges. This is not mentioned within the report. Can we have an update on this please?

Reply

The first meeting with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families has taken place and this is planned every two months when we will talk about this. I understand PHSE (Personal, Social, Health and Economics) is not mandatory so not all schools include this as part of their curriculum although this is almost certainly where it would sit. I will also ask about free schools and academies and what influence the Local Authority has with these.

(c) There is a big increase in young people asking for help with money problems. Citizens Advice says more than 100,000 17 to 24-year-olds have come to them in the last 12 months. That is up 20% on the year before. The charity says more people are using bank loans, payday lenders and family members, often on top of student loans. The average debt level is around £12,000 per person, compared to 10 years ago when it was almost £4,000. This problem is not limited to just young people and will affect people of all ages within Taunton Deane, especially those on low incomes. What measures have been put in place to address this issue within Taunton Deane and in particular, the three One Team areas?

Reply

Thank you for the interesting statistics provided. Preparing young people for work was important particularly in a home environment where few, if any, family members had been employed. Link Power had been set up several years ago to provide experience of work and the routine associated with it. Because this was locally based, the scheme had been particularly successful in addressing the issue.

The Job Centre was working closely with the One Team and Link Power had an arrangement with the Department of Work and Pensions whereby those working through Link Power had no effect on their benefits.

It was recognised that there was a need for the One Team to continue to be proactive to start people on the journey to work providing them with the confidence and the training to move forward into employment.

9. Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Congratulations to Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II;
- Town Centre Vibrancy;
- Northern Inner Distributor Road (NIDR) Progress;
- Junction 25 (M5) and A358;
- Strategic Employment Site Adjacent Junction 25;
- Junction 26 – Westpark, Wellington;
- Crown Estate Housing Changes;
- Ongoing Major Projects; and
- Refugee Crisis.

(ii) Community Leadership (Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington)

Councillor Mrs Warmington presented the Community Leadership report which focused on the following areas within that portfolio:-

- Response to the Refugee Crisis;
- Councillor Federica Smith's Local Initiative to Help Refugees and Migrants in Europe;
- Support for Mental Health;
- Employability;
- One Teams Estate Housing Staff;
- Community Safety;
- Taunton's Experience with 'Legal Highs'; and
- Read Easy.

(iii) Housing Services (Councillor Beale)

Councillor Beale submitted his report which drew attention to the following:-

- Deane Housing Development;
- Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Panels Scheme;
- External Wall Insulation Scheme to a selection of Cornish type non-traditional properties;
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan; and
- Welfare Report.

(iv) Environmental Services (Councillor Berry)

The report from Councillor Berry drew attention to developments in the

following areas:-

- Licensing / Environmental Health;
- Climate Change;
- Somerset Waste Partnership;
- Deane DLO; and
- Crematorium.

(v) Planning, Transportation and Communications (Councillor Edwards)

The report from Councillor Edwards provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Growth Deal Bids;
- Supporting Business Growth;
- Supporting Inward Investment and Fulfilment;
- Place Based Regeneration;
- Cultural Events;
- Marketing the Borough to Visitors; and
- ASSET Management Service General Fund Activities.

(vi) Planning, Transportation and Communications (Councillor Habgood)

The report from Councillor Habgood provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP);
- Specific Site Activity;
- Local Development Order;
- Gypsies and Travellers;
- Sport, Recreation and Open Spaces;
- Neighbourhood Planning;
- Transportation Schemes and Funding;
- Northern Inner Distributor Road;
- Car Park Operations;
- Car Parking Strategy; and
- Taunton Rethink.

(vii) Sports, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Herbert)

The report from Councillor Mrs Herbert dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

- Parks;
- Community Leisure and Play; and
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities.

(viii) Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)

The report from Councillor Parrish provided information on the following areas within his portfolio:-

- Corporate Strategy and Performance;
- Facilities Management and Business Support;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Information;
- Transformation Programme Management;
- Southwest One (SW1) Succession Planning;
- Additional Priorities;
- Council Tax Support;
- Customer Contact;
- Law and Governance – SHAPE Partnership Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Democratic Services;
- Code of Conduct Training for Town and Parish Councils; and
- Finance and Procurement.

(Councillors Govier, Miss Durdan, Ms Webber, Mrs Edwards, Durdan, Wren and Coombes, Mrs Gunner, Davies, and Aldridge left the meeting at 7.35 pm, 7.45 pm, 7.54 pm, 8.25 pm, 8.44 pm, 8.51 pm, 9.02 pm, 9.04 pm, 9.05 pm and 9.09 pm respectively. Councillors Mrs Floyd and Horsley left the meeting at 9.21 pm).

(The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.)