

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.)