

Taunton Deane Borough Council

At a meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held at Oake Manor Golf Course, Oake, Taunton on 19 March 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

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

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

1. **Apologies**

Councillors Mrs Blatchford, Hunt, Ryan and Ms Webber.

2. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillors Coles, Govier, and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mrs Adkins, Bowrah, Brown, Cavill, Gaines, Govier, Henley, James, Nicholls, Mrs Reed, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stone, Townsend, Mrs Warmington and Watson all declared personal interests as Members of Town or Parish Councils.

3. **Public Question Time**

(a) Terry Sutcliffe, representing Gideon Amos (prospective Liberal Democrat candidate for the Taunton Constituency), read out a statement questioning the liability the taxpayers of Taunton Deane Borough Council faced with the creation of the new Authority.

It was argued that making a decision without holding a public vote seeking a mandate first was undemocratic. Further comment was made on the public consultation being unpopular and Mr Sutcliffe requested that the decision be postponed until after the next Local Government Elections.

(b) Ray Tulley raised concerns over the reduction in numbers of Councillors removing the democratic representation of local residents. A further suggestion was made in favour of a Unitary Authority being formed rather than this proposed merger.

Councillors had been democratically elected to represent the residents of Taunton Deane and not West Somerset. Consideration as to the future of Taunton Deane Borough residents was urged and a chance for them to

vote on the New Council was requested.

- (c) Councillor Mrs Smith made a statement on behalf of Sue Levinge raising concerns over the cost of the slippage of the Transformation Programme. Further data setting out the 2018/2019 Transformation savings were questioned on their accuracy. She also felt that the confidence expressed in an efficient timetable was misplaced.
- (d) Mike Owen questioned that the estimated savings anticipated would not be realised. He felt that other options for joint working should be looked at across the County as a whole with other District Councils. Councillors were requested to draw up a full options appraisal and test these against financial gains and efficiency and address them before any decision to proceed with the formation of a new Council. This would ensure transparency.

4. Transitioning to a New Council

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the formation of a New Council.

In March 2016, Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) and West Somerset Council (WSC) confirmed their commitment to a core, and on-going JMASS (Joint Management and Shared Services) Partnership and authorised and prioritised work to create a high level Transformation Business Case that tested what transformation could deliver under three governance scenarios.

In July (TDBC) and September (WSC) 2016, the Councils had agreed to progress work to create a new transformed Council for their combined areas.

Following this decision, a public consultation exercise was carried out which sought views on the proposal before submitting a case to the Government for consideration in March 2017.

Since then, engagement with the Ministry for Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) had continued and although a number of high profile matters had diverted the Government's attention away from progressing Local Government issues, the Secretary of State had published his "minded to implement" decision on 30 November 2017.

Following this, the Secretary of State had invited representations on the proposal (closing date of 19 January 2018), and currently the Secretary of State's final decision was awaited.

If this was positive, this would set in train the Parliamentary process for making the Statutory Orders required to bring the new Council into effect. The Secretary of State – with the consent of the Councils – would lay orders before Parliament dissolving both Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Councils and create a new single Council covering both areas.

In order to facilitate this, both Councils were asked to consider:-

- Granting consent to the making and laying of the Orders to dissolve TDBC and WSC and create a new single Council covering both areas; and
- That a Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton should be commenced at the earliest opportunity.

Following both Council meetings, the Executive would be asked to consider some key information for inclusion in the Order – (name / size of the new Council / shadow authority arrangements). Copies of these papers had been shared with all Councillors who had been invited to attend the Member Briefing scheduled to follow the Full Council meeting.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements which included:-

- Concerns were expressed by various Councillors relating to the loss of sovereignty through the creation of the new Council along with the impact on the democratic representation and decline of Taunton as the County Town as a result.
- There was no mandate from the electorate to make a decision on the new Council. Residents should have been given the opportunity to express their views on the proposed merger through a referendum. It was not in Taunton Deane Borough Council's interest to merge with West Somerset due to the cost of providing services in rural areas, residents of Taunton would be paying more and getting less.
- A review of Local Government finance to address future funding issues was encouraged.
- Concerns were expressed over financially supporting West Somerset by the creation of a new authority which had not been tested by public opinion.
- The needs of the Unparished Area of Taunton had been disregarded. Without a third tier of Local Government, residents in the centre of Taunton would not be catered for with the creation of the new authority. A Community Governance review was needed to address this.
- Loss of assets through the creation of the new Council along with the West Somerset pension fund deficit was questioned. The name of the new authority would need to hold sufficient weight in recognising Taunton as the County Town.
- It was considered that the savings would be realised through the implementation of the Transformation programme. The Transformation Business Case was considered the best approach to maintain frontline services valued by communities.
- Through the first transformation and creation of The One Team the projected savings had been delivered. Therefore, there was confidence that the savings projected could be delivered. If the Transformation Programme was not progressed then the community would lose services elsewhere.
- The democratic representation was in the lowest quartile for representation of the electorate per Councillor, with the creation of the new Council. This would be addressed through the Boundary Review as a priority.

- Holding special meetings of both Councils before receiving the Secretary of State's decision was not unprecedented. To hold simultaneous meetings ensured parity for both Councils.

In accordance with Standing Order 18(2)(b), the Mayor called for a formal roll call of votes to be taken and recorded in the Minutes in relation

The first recommendation, which is detailed below, was put and was carried with 26 Councillors in favour, 22 against and 3 abstentions; The second recommendation was also carried with 50 Councillors in favour and one abstention as follows:-

Resolved that subject to the Secretary of State confirming his final decision, the following be approved:-

- (a) To give consent under Section 15(4) of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 to the making and laying of the necessary Orders for the dissolution of Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset District Council and the creation of a single new Council covering both areas.

| Yes | No | Abstain |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Councillor Beale | Councillor Mrs Adkins | Councillor M Adkins |
| Councillor Berry | Councillor Aldridge | Councillor D Durdan |
| Councillor Bowrah | Councillor Booth | Councillor Gage |
| Councillor Brown | Councillor Coles | |
| Councillor Cavill | Councillor Farbahi | |
| Councillor Coombes | Councillor Mrs Floyd | |
| Councillor Cossey | Councillor Gaines | |
| Councillor Davies | Councillor Govier | |
| Councillor Ms Durdan | Councillor Henley | |
| Councillor Edwards | Councillor Mrs Hill | |
| Councillor Mrs Gunner | Councillor Horsley | |
| Councillor Habgood | Councillor R Lees | |
| Councillor Hall | Councillor Mrs Lees | |
| Councillor Mrs Herbert | Councillor Ms Lisgo | |
| Councillor C Hill | Councillor Morrell | |
| Councillor James | Councillor Nicholls | |
| Councillor Martin-Scott | Councillor Prior-Sankey | |
| Councillor Parrish | Councillor Mrs Smith | |
| Councillor Mrs Reed | Councillor Mrs Smith-Roberts | |
| Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams | Councillor Stone | |
| Councillor Sully | Councillor Wedderkopp | |
| Councillor Townsend | Councillor Wren | |
| Councillor Mrs Tucker | | |
| Councillor Mrs Warmington | | |

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| Councillor Watson | | |
| Councillor Williams | | |

- (b) Subject to recommendation (a) above being supported, a Community Governance Review of the Unparished Area of Taunton be commenced at the earliest opportunity (taking into consideration the guidance from both the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government).

| Yes | Abstain |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Councillor Mrs Adkins | Councillor Mrs Reed |
| Councillor M Adkins | |
| Councillor Aldridge | |
| Councillor Beale | |
| Councillor Berry | |
| Councillor Booth | |
| Councillor Bowrah | |
| Councillor Brown | |
| Councillor Cavill | |
| Councillor Coles | |
| Councillor Coombes | |
| Councillor Cossey | |
| Councillor Davies | |
| Councillor D Durdan | |
| Councillor K Durdan | |
| Councillor Edwards | |
| Councillor Farbahi | |
| Councillor Floyd | |
| Councillor Gage | |
| Councillor Gaines | |
| Councillor Govier | |
| Councillor Mrs Gunner | |
| Councillor Habgood | |
| Councillor Hall | |
| Councillor Henley | |
| Councillor Mrs Herbert | |
| Councillor C Hill | |
| Councillor Mrs Hill | |
| Councillor Horsley | |
| Councillor James | |
| Councillor R Lees | |
| Councillor Mrs Lees | |
| Councillor Ms Lisgo | |
| Councillor Martin-Scott | |

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| Councillor Morrell |
| Councillor Nicholls |
| Councillor Parrish |
| Councillor Mrs Prior-Sankey |
| Councillor Mrs Smith-Roberts |
| Councillor Mrs Smith |
| Councillor Mrs Stock-Williams |
| Councillor Stone |
| Councillor Sully |
| Councillor Townsend |
| Councillor Mrs Tucker |
| Councillor Mrs Warmington |
| Councillor Watson |
| Councillor Wedderkopp |
| Councillor Williams |
| Councillor Wren |

(The meeting ended at 7.34 p.m.)