

TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Taunton Deane Borough Council held in the Principal Committee Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton on Tuesday 25 February 2003 at 5.30 pm.

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Mrs Angus, Mrs Biscoe, Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Bulgin, Cavill, Mrs Cooper, Croad, Cudlipp, Dawson, Debenham, Denington, Eckhart, Escott, Farbus, Floyd, Gill, Hall, Henley, Mrs Hill, Horsley, House, Lee, Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Mrs Lippiatt, Lisgo, Meikle, Mrs Miller, Mullins, Murphy, R Parrish, Mrs Parrish, Partington, Paul, Phelps, Miss Phippen, Slattery, Stone, Tolchard, Vail, Warren, Watson, Mrs Whitmarsh and Williams.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 17 December 2002, a copy having been sent to each Member were signed by the Mayor.

2. Apologies

Councillors Bone, Govier, Guerrier and Hunt.

3. Public Question Time

- (a) Mr R Cudlipp, a resident of neighbouring Sedgemoor District referred to the Vision for Taunton and the proposed relocation of Taunton Market. He asked what the legal position would be if the Market was relocated to Junction 26 without the agreement of all the previous stakeholders. He suggested that this action might result in the involvement of the Ombudsman and the possible surcharging of Councillors.

Councillor Horsley replied that he had had correspondence with Mr Cudlipp regarding the relocation of the Market. He explained that surcharging no longer existed and that the Council had not acted in any way which would necessitate the involvement of the Ombudsman. He further explained the current position regarding the relocation of the Market, outlined the likely costs and undertook to provide Mr Cudlipp with a full written answer.

- (b) Jan Cave asked the following questions:

- (i) What measures were the Council taking to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees had access to:
- (a) legal representation and legal aid;
 - (b) translation services;
 - (c) citizen advocacy;

- (d) a communal drop in and advice centre and
 - (e) allowances for those with disabilities.
- (ii) How were these services to be funded?
 - (iii) In today's multi cultural society, was there any need to start Council meetings with prayer?

Councillor Horsley replied that it was not possible to answer the specific points raised other than to say that all these matters would be discussed jointly with Somerset County Council, this Council and Sedgemoor District Council. Meetings were taking place and, together with Clearsprings, these issues would be addressed.

Funding was from the Home Office to the private sector provider and not to the Council.

The Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey) replied that it had always been the practice of this Council to start its meetings with prayer. It was the prerogative of each Mayor to invite all faiths to take part.

4. Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

Following a presentation on the contents of this Bill, consideration was given to the Government's soundings exercise on the level of interest in each English region in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly.

The Consultation Paper posed a number of questions and invited responses from the Council.

RESOLVED that the following responses be submitted:

- (i) the Council are not in favour of a referendum in this region;
- (ii) the level of interest in holding a referendum was very weak;
- (iii) the Council would wish to be consulted again on its views after a period of three years.

(The meeting adjourned at 6.47 pm and reconvened at 7.15 pm).

5. Members' Allowances

Mr David Baker OBE, Chair of the independent Members' Allowances Panel reported that the Panel had completed its review of members' allowances.

A copy of its report and recommendations had been circulated to all Councillors. It had also been considered by the Resources Review Panel at its meeting on 28 November 2002.

It was emphasised that the basic allowance was not considered to be a full and proper recompense for the duties performed and that it did not reflect a similar level of responsibility in the private sector. It also reflected the fact that a proportion of any Councillor's work continued to be voluntary.

Comparisons with other authorities indicated that the level of basic allowance at Taunton Deane was below the average. This, together with the knowledge of the amount of ward work now expected of a Councillor, had persuaded the Panel to recommend an increase that more closely reflected the time Councillors spent on their public duties.

There appeared to be no reason to make any alteration to the posts previously identified as having special responsibilities. However, there was now a far greater understanding of the responsibilities of those offices that attracted special responsibility allowances. For this reason, increases were recommended which more accurately compensated Councillors for these important and time consuming duties.

Consideration had been given to the payment of expenses for attendance at political group meetings. The Panel continued to feel strongly that the payment of expenses for these meetings would not comply with the spirit of openness and transparency that formed such an important theme within the local government legislation. Although Group meetings might help the administration of Council meetings, it was felt that they were primarily used for party political purposes and should not therefore qualify as an approved duty.

The suggested list of Approved Duties was submitted.

The Panel therefore submitted the following recommendations for consideration by the Council:

1. The existing Members' Allowance Scheme be discontinued and replaced with the following scheme with effect from 1 April 2003.

	Total Cost	
	£	£
Basic Allowance (payable to all members)	3,200	172,800
Leader	9,000	9,000
Executive Councillors (8)	3,500	28,000
Chair, Planning Committee	3,000	3,000
Chair, Review Board	3,000	3,000
Chair, Review Panels (5)	1,000	5,000
Total Annual Cost		220,800

2. Travelling and subsistence allowances shall be payable to Councillors incurred by them in the necessary carrying out of those official activities as a Councillor as appear on the list of "Approved Duties" set out in the Appendix to the report.

3. Payment for the care of Councillors' dependants to be in accordance with the following conditions:
- (a) Councillors shall be reimbursed, up to a specified maximum limit, for costs actually incurred in providing care for any of the following who are at the time part of the claimant's household living with him/her and who would normally be looked after by him/her, whilst the claimant is undertaking an "approved duty".
 - children under the age of 14;
 - elderly persons (aged 60 and over);
 - people with disabilities;
 - people with learning difficulties.
 - (b) In addition to living as part of the claimant's household the dependant must be unable to be left unsupervised by the carer.
 - (c) The carer must not be someone who also ordinarily lives with the claimant as part of the household.
 - (d) For the purposes of (a) above:
 - (i) "approved duty" would be a duty under the Council's scheme.
 - (ii) The maximum hourly rate repayable would be £4.50 per hour.
 - (e) The claimant must produce a receipt for payments he/she has made to the carer and must sign a certificate which, amongst other things, will state that the costs were properly and necessarily incurred in the course of, or to permit, him/her undertaking his/her duties as a Councillor.

The Council's own Resources Review Panel, at its meeting on 28 November 2002 had considered the report on the annual review of members' allowances undertaken by the Members' Allowances Review Panel.

Having considered the report, members felt that, bearing in mind the current economic climate, it might not be the time to award themselves a substantial rise in the basic allowance.

The Resources Review Panel had therefore recommended that if it was accepted that the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances should be increased, such increase be limited to the rate of inflation or the 3.5% Local Government Staff Pay Award, whichever was the higher.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the recommendations of the independent Members Allowances Panel regarding the level of councillors allowances be not agreed;

- (b) the recommendation of the Resources Review Panel be agreed and the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances for Councillors be increased by 3.5%;
- (c) the list of "Approved Duties" recommended by the independent Members' Allowances Panel be agreed;
- (d) the payment for the care of Councillors' dependents be in accordance with the recommendation of the independent Members' Allowances Panel;
- (e) the Members' Allowance Panel be thanked for their hard work and guidance for the future.

6. Suspension of Standing Orders

Moved by Councillor Horsley that Standing Orders be amended to enable Agenda item 20 to be considered now.

The motion was put and was carried.

7. Iraq - Motion

Moved by Councillor Horsley, seconded by Councillor Henley:

"Taunton Deane Borough Council is charged with looking after the social, economic and environmental well being of its community as per the Local Government Act 2000.

It therefore views the expenditure of £4.5 billion which is the lowest estimate of the cost of dispatch of UK troops to the Middle East as harmful to the Council Tax Payers of Taunton Deane insofar as it reduces the amount available for central government support of services that local authorities have to provide by way of rate support grant. It also considers that a war against Iraq could divide our ethnic minorities here in Taunton Deane. This could add to the problems of the Crime and Disorder partnership within our Local Community Plan and make the targets harder to attain.

This Council believes the case for war against Iraq is not proven. There is a genuine fear that the war against Iraq will: a) lead to losses of thousands of innocent lives; b) increase the number of refugees which could add to the problem of asylum seekers to this country; c) destabilise the Middle East especially the Israeli/Palestinian situation; d) increase the probability of acts of terrorism within the United Kingdom and possibly Taunton; e) leave a lasting legacy of division between Muslim and Western countries which could take decades to overcome.

In light of the impact of war on the local economy and its consequences especially for those members of the armed forces who are based here in Taunton whom we hope will return unharmed, this Council urges the Government to take every measure to avoid conflict. It urges the Prime Minister to support the containment and

disarmament of Saddam Hussein through its use of weapons inspectors and the use of peace-keeping United Nations forces".

The motion was put and was carried.

8. Recommendations to Council from the Executive

(a) General Fund Revenue Estimates 2003/2004

The Executive had considered the draft forward estimates for General Fund Revenue Expenditure for 2003/04. They had also been considered in detail by the Review Board.

The report contained a statement from the Financial Services Manager on the adequacy of reserves.

On the motion of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED that the budget for General Fund services for 2003/04 be agreed and that:-

- (a) the transfer for any underspend in 2002/03 back to General Fund Reserves be agreed;
- (b) the use of £692,499 from General Fund Reserves to support the 2003/04 budget be agreed;
- (c) the development bids set out in the report be agreed;
- (d) the increases to fees and charges set out in the report be agreed;
- (e) the proposed 2003/04 budget being Authority expenditure of £11,262,515 and special expenses of £25,000 be agreed in accordance with the Local Government Act 1992;
- (f) the predicted General Fund Reserve balance at 31 March 2004 of £1,310,308 be noted.

(b) General Fund Capital Programme

The proposed Capital Programme of the Council projected a total programme of £5,861,831 over the next three financial years.

The Executive had considered the proposed Capital Programme which included: (a) schemes to be deleted/reduced from the programme; (b) new schemes to be included in the programme and (c) new schemes that had not been included in the programme. The amount of resources available totalled £5,861,830. The proposed programme as submitted projected a total programme of £5,621,830. This meant that there was currently a surplus of £240,000 available. Any new schemes that emerged during the lifespan of the programme would be funded through the surplus resources or through new resources such as additional Capital Receipts.

The Review Board had considered the General Fund Capital Programme and had not suggested any amendments.

Moved by Councillor Mullins, seconded by Councillor Partington that the General Fund Capital Programme be amended by the addition of £40,000 for Hillfarrance Flood Alleviation Scheme, to be funded from unallocated capital resources.

Councillor Horsley, as mover of the motion, accepted the amendment.

On the motion of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED that the General Fund Capital Programme, as amended, be agreed.

(c) Council Tax Setting 2003/04

The Council was required to make an annual determination which set its gross expenditure (including the Housing Revenue Account and balances brought forward) and gross income (also including the Housing Revenue Account and balance brought forward) with the difference as its budget requirement.

The estimated expenses chargeable to the non-parished area of Taunton in 2003/04 was £25,000 and this formed part of the total net expenditure of the Council. Details of the Parish Precepts levied and the appropriate Council Tax at Band 'D' were submitted.

The Police Authority had confirmed their tax increase, and would be levying a Band D tax of £111.64, an increase of 33.86%.

On the motion of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED:

(1) that it be noted that at its meeting on 17 December 2002 the Council calculated the following amounts for the year 2003/04 in accordance with the regulations made under Section 33(5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-

(a) 38,122.79 being the amount calculated by the Council in accordance with regulation 3 of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as its Council Tax base for the year.

(b)

Ash Priors	64.49	Neroche	235.83
Ashbrittle	80.93	North Curry	694.52
Bathealton	80.14	Norton Fitzwarren	652.77
Bishops Hull	1,060.29	Nynehead	143.14

Bishops Lydeard/ Cothelstone	1,747.63	Oake	318.92
Bradford on Tone	270.96	Otterford	160.35
Burrowbridge	196.94	Pitminster	435.55
Cheddon Fitzpaine	617.85	Ruishton/ Thornfalcon	602.68
Chipstable	109.92	Sampford Arundel	128.16
Churchstanton	296.10	Staplegrove	707.17
Combe Florey	107.55	Stawley	112.47
Comeytrowe	2,066.07	Stoke St Gregory	369.72
Corfe	130.85	Stoke St Mary	193.02
Creech St Michael	939.06	Taunton	15,141.11
Durston	56.75	Trull	931.31
Fitzhead	120.74	Wellington	4,501.70
Halse	140.43	Wellington (Without)	288.83
Hatch Beauchamp	241.44	West Bagborough	155.29
Kingston St Mary	426.88	West Buckland	391.84
Langford Budville	211.37	West Hatch	135.36
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	195.55	West Monkton	1,058.45
Milverton	565.70	Wiveliscombe	1,036.98

being the amounts calculated by the Council, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the Regulations, as the amounts of its Council Tax Base for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

- (2) That the following amounts be now calculated by the Council for the year 2003/04 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-

- (a) £53,818,644 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2)(a) to (c) of the Act.
(Gross Expenditure including amount required for working balance).
- (b) £42,250,019 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(3)(a) to (c) of the Act.
(Gross Income including reserves to be used to meet Gross Expenditure).
- (c) £11,568,625 being the amount by which the aggregate at (a) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) above, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 32(4) of the Act, as its budget requirement for the year.
- (d) £7,087,795 being the aggregate of the sums which the Council estimates will be transferred in the year from its Collection Fund to its General Fund in accordance with Section 97(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (*Council Tax Surplus*) and increased by the amount of any sum which the Council estimates will be transferred from its Collection Fund to its General Fund pursuant to the Collection Fund (Community Charge) directions under Sec 98(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 made on 7 February 1994 (*Community Charge Surplus*).
- (e) £117.54
$$\frac{(c) - (d)}{1(a)} = \frac{11,568,448 - 7,087,618}{38,122.79}$$
 being the amount calculated at (c) above less the amount at (d) above, all divided by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 33(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
(Average Council Tax at Band D for Borough Including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).
- (f) £306,110 being the aggregate amount of all special items referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act.
(Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).
- (g) £109.51
$$\frac{(e) - (f)}{1(a)} = \frac{117.54 - 306.110}{38,122.79}$$

being the amount at (e) above less the result given by dividing the amount at (f) above by the amount at 1(a) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no special items relate.

(Council Tax at Band D for Borough Excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses).

(h)

Ash Priors	109.51	Neroche	117.99
Ashbrittle	125.57	North Curry	126.07
Bathealton	117.00	Norton Fitzwarren	126.98
Bishops Hull	122.30	Nynehead	123.48
Bishops Lydeard/ Cothelstone	121.98	Oake	119.39
Bradford on Tone	122.43	Otterford	109.51
Burrowbridge	132.00	Pitminster	116.86
Cheddon Fitzpaine	117.60	Ruishton/ Thornfalcon	127.04
Chipstable	123.16	Sampford Arundel	132.53
Churchstanton	126.99	Staplegrove	118.70
Combe Florey	120.20	Stawley	118.40
Comeytrove	115.56	Stoke St Gregory	125.06
Corfe	116.58	Stoke St Mary	114.69
Creech St Michael	120.69	Taunton	111.16
Durston	110.21	Trull	117.03
Fitzhead	123.59	Wellington	126.01
Halse	121.97	Wellington (Without)	121.63

Hatch Beauchamp	120.28	West Bagborough	115.95
Kingston St Mary	123.57	West Buckland	127.37
Langford Budville	117.32	West Hatch	123.41
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	117.18	West Monkton	116.36
Milverton	120.12	Wiveliscombe	123.98

being the amounts given by adding to the amount at (g) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area mentioned above divided in each case by the amount at 1(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate.

(Council Taxes at Band D for Borough Parish and Special Expenses).

- (i) See overleaf

9.2.4 That, having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 9.2.2 (i) and 9.2.3 above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of council tax for the year 2003/04 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:-

Valuation Band	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ash Priors	719.68	839.61	959.57	1079.51	1319.41	1559.29	1799.19	2159.02
Ashbottle	730.39	852.10	973.85	1095.57	1339.04	1582.49	1825.96	2191.14
Bathealton	724.67	845.44	966.23	1087.00	1328.56	1570.11	1811.67	2174.00
Bishops Hull	728.21	849.56	970.94	1092.30	1335.04	1577.76	1820.51	2184.60
Bishops Lydeard/Cothelstone	727.99	849.31	970.65	1091.98	1334.65	1577.30	1819.97	2183.96
Bradford On Tone	728.29	849.66	971.05	1092.43	1335.20	1577.95	1820.72	2184.86
Burrowbridge	734.67	857.10	979.56	1102.00	1346.90	1591.78	1836.67	2204.00
Cheddron Fitzpaine	725.07	845.90	966.76	1087.60	1329.30	1570.98	1812.67	2175.20
Chipstable	728.78	850.23	971.70	1093.16	1336.09	1579.01	1821.94	2186.32
Churchstanton	731.33	853.21	975.11	1096.99	1340.77	1584.54	1828.32	2193.98
Combe Florey	726.81	847.92	969.07	1090.20	1332.48	1574.73	1817.01	2180.40
Comeytrove	723.71	844.32	964.95	1085.56	1326.80	1568.03	1809.27	2171.12
Corfe	724.39	845.11	965.85	1086.58	1328.05	1569.50	1810.97	2173.16
Creech St Michael	727.13	848.31	969.51	1090.69	1333.07	1575.44	1817.82	2181.38
Durston	720.15	840.15	960.19	1080.21	1320.27	1560.30	1800.36	2160.42
Fitzhead	729.07	850.56	972.09	1093.59	1336.62	1579.63	1822.66	2187.18
Halse	727.99	849.30	970.65	1091.97	1334.64	1577.29	1819.96	2183.94
Hatch Beauchamp	726.86	847.99	969.14	1090.28	1332.57	1574.85	1817.14	2180.56
Kingston St Mary	729.05	850.55	972.07	1093.57	1336.59	1579.60	1822.62	2187.14
Langford Budville	724.89	845.68	966.51	1087.32	1328.96	1570.57	1812.21	2174.64
Lydeard St Lawrence/Tolland	726.75	847.86	969.00	1090.12	1332.38	1574.62	1816.87	2180.24
Milverton	725.33	846.21	967.11	1087.99	1329.77	1571.54	1813.32	2175.98
Neroche	730.72	852.49	974.29	1096.07	1339.65	1583.21	1826.79	2192.14
North Curry	731.33	853.20	975.10	1096.98	1340.76	1584.52	1828.31	2193.96
Norton Fitzwarren	728.99	850.48	971.99	1093.48	1336.48	1579.47	1822.47	2186.96
Nynehead	726.27	847.29	968.35	1089.39	1331.49	1573.56	1815.66	2178.78
Oake	719.68	839.61	959.57	1079.51	1319.41	1559.29	1799.19	2159.02
Otterford	724.58	845.33	966.10	1086.86	1328.39	1569.91	1811.44	2173.72
Pitminster	731.37	853.24	975.15	1097.04	1340.84	1584.61	1828.41	2194.08
Ruishston/Thornfalcon	735.03	857.51	980.03	1102.53	1347.55	1592.54	1837.56	2203.06
Sampford Arundel	725.81	846.76	967.74	1088.70	1330.64	1572.56	1814.51	2177.40
Staplegrove	730.65	846.52	967.47	1088.40	1330.28	1572.13	1814.01	2176.80
Stawley	725.61	846.52	967.47	1088.40	1330.28	1572.13	1814.01	2176.80
Stoke St Gregory	730.05	851.70	973.39	1095.06	1338.42	1581.75	1825.11	2190.12
Stoke St Mary	723.13	843.64	964.17	1084.69	1325.74	1566.77	1807.82	2169.38
Taunton	720.78	840.89	961.04	1081.16	1321.43	1561.67	1801.94	2162.32
Trull	724.69	845.46	966.25	1087.03	1328.60	1570.15	1811.72	2174.06
Wellington	730.68	852.44	974.24	1096.01	1339.58	1583.12	1826.69	2192.02
Wellington W/out	727.76	849.04	970.34	1091.63	1334.22	1576.80	1819.39	2183.26
West Bagborough	723.97	844.62	965.29	1085.95	1327.28	1568.59	1809.92	2171.90
West Buckland	731.59	853.50	975.45	1097.37	1341.24	1585.09	1828.96	2194.74
West Hatch	728.95	850.42	971.93	1093.41	1336.40	1579.37	1822.36	2186.82
West Monkton	724.25	844.94	965.66	1086.36	1327.78	1569.18	1810.61	2172.72
Wiveliscombe	729.33	850.86	972.43	1093.98	1337.10	1580.19	1823.31	2187.96

(d) Borrowing Limit

On the motion of Councillor Horsley it was RESOLVED that for 2003/04:-

- (a) the overall borrowing be fixed at £44,000,000;
- (b) the short-term borrowing at any time should not exceed £11,000,000 representing 25% of the borrowing limit, and
- (c) that no more than 50% of the total amount of interest payable may be at variable interest rates.

(e) Housing Revenue Account - Revenue Estimates and Rent Levels 2003/2004

Both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board had considered this matter and the recommendations submitted reflected the views raised at those meetings.

On the motion of Councillor Stone it was RESOLVED that the revised Housing Revenue Account Budget be approved.

(f) Housing Capital Programme 2003/2004

The Housing Capital Programme had also been considered by both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board and the recommendation reflected the views of those meetings. It was noted that the Budget for the Cash Incentive Scheme was to be increased from nil to £30,000.

On the motion of Councillor Stone it was RESOLVED that the Housing Capital Programme for 2003/2004 be approved.

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

(a) Questions

The following questions were asked:

- (i) Councillor Mrs Bradley asked Councillor Croad (Economic Development, Property and Tourism)

In pursuit of sustainability and rural revival through connecting local farmers with local markets, please will Councillor Croad confirm that local purchasing will be pursued and promoted through the Local Strategic Partnership and become one of the measurable out comes of such partnerships.

Councillor Croad replied that he was very supportive of connecting local farmers with local markets. The aims of the Local Strategic Partnership were the same as the Council's with sustainability and

livelihood and jobs being key. He welcomed the opportunity of discussing the matter further.

(ii) Councillor Mrs Bradley asked Councillor Mullins

Now that the new telephone directories are being distributed please will Councillor Mullins confirm that the opportunity for recycling offered by The Directory Recycling Scheme, Resource Base, Television Centre Southampton is being investigated.

Councillor Mullins replied that the Council's Waste Services Manager would investigate this suggestion further.

(b) Reports

The reports submitted by the Leader and Executive Councillors are attached as an Appendix to these minutes.

10. Standing Orders

The Community Leadership Review Panel had considered a draft of the revised debate Standing Orders (SO's) of the Council.

The Council's current SO's dated back some years and no longer fitted the Council's new Constitution.

The SO's had been redrafted by the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with Councillor Denington and Councillor Miss Phippen.

The draft SO's had been updated to take account of the new Constitution and the Executive arrangements.

During the discussion of this item, Members had requested that a number of changes to the draft SO's be incorporated; details of which were submitted.

The Panel agreed that the amendments/additions should be incorporated into the draft SO's.

A copy of the amended Standing Orders had been circulated to all Councillors.

RESOLVED that the draft debate Standing Orders be agreed.

11. Wellsprings Sports and Leisure Centre - Motion

Moved by Councillor Mrs Lewin-Harris, seconded by Councillor Mrs Bradley:

"This Council regrets the disaster of Wellsprings.

While "there is no evidence that the Council have acted imprudently or improperly in this matter" according to the District Auditor, his Report however highlights the failure of the Liberal Democrat/Labour administration.

"The contractor's financial reference was marginal" yet the Liberal Democrats and the Labour failed to see or respond to signs that the contract might not be delivered to agreed timescales and budget. In the District Auditor's view the Council should have responded more actively and increased their input and resources in the project management and supervision. There should have been an increase in the level of supervision and project monitoring and management including risk analysis.

This is a clear indictment of the ruling group and the Conservatives reaffirm their assertion that the Liberal Democrat and Labour administration have been inept and incompetent and seek assurance that the business plan be updated to ensure that Wellsprings delivers what the customers want. This is of particular importance since there appears never to have been a clear decision at the outset as to whether the Council was pursuing a sports hall or a sports centre.

The Council regret the huge cost, in excess of £1.5 million now falling upon the council tax payers of Taunton Deane".

Moved by Councillor Bulgin, seconded by Councillor Tolchard, "that the motion now be put" was carried.

The motion was put and was lost.

12. Financial Competence - Motion

Moved by Councillor Williams, seconded by Councillor Hall.

This Council regrets that despite the advice of both District Auditor and Deane Officers "that every effort must be made to achieve a balanced budget i.e. a budget that is fully funded by Central Government and the council tax payer to preserve the authority's reserves)", this Council is still relying on reserves to balance the budget, and deplores the deficit in financial understanding and responsibility to the taxpayers of Taunton Deane shown by Labour and Liberal Democrat alike".

Moved by Councillor Mullins, seconded by Councillor Mrs Hill, "that the motion now be put" was carried.

The motion was put and was lost.

(The following Councillors arrived at the meeting at the times indicated: Councillor Murphy at 5.55 pm, Councillor Mrs Hill at 6.05 pm and Councillor Cavill at 6.45 pm.

The following Councillors left the meeting at the times indicated: Councillors Dawson, Cudlipp and Warren at 6.47 pm, Councillor Eckhart at 8.35 pm, Councillor Debenham at 9.10 pm, Councillor Mrs Parrish at 9.40 pm, Councillor Mrs Biscoe at 10.00 pm, Councillor Mrs Whitmarsh at 10.05 pm, Councillor House at 10.15 pm, Councillor Bishop at 10.40 pm and Councillor Stone at 10.50 pm).

(The meeting ended at 10.55 pm)

COUNCIL MEETING 25 FEBRUARY 2003
- REPORTS OF LEADER AND EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS

(a) REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HORSLEY – LEADER OF THE EXECUTIVE

Election fever is in the air. I hope however that reason and a sharing of views is not replaced by point scoring and evocative comments. The Liberal Democrats have always prided themselves on their reasoned approach towards policy and decision-making. As a minority administration I believe that we have shared our burden with the council on every item, notwithstanding the new system mitigating against this.

1. ASYLUM SEEKERS

The meeting for the members briefing with Clearsprings the private sector company appointed by the Home Office has now been scheduled for 6.00 pm on Monday 17 March. This will give members the chance of hearing for themselves the steps that are being taken. Clearsprings enjoy a good reputation with Refugee Action an independent non-government organisation whose volunteers work closely with asylum seekers in Bristol and other parts of the United Kingdom.

There are three things which should guide us in our approach:-

- a) We should support the government's policy of dispersing asylum seekers nationwide. It is right to redistribute the disproportionate burden on services borne by the Home Counties and London.
- b) We should insist that a thorough testing of the availability of resources in local services is undertaken before the number of refugees is determined for Taunton. Asylum seekers deserve the same standards of support as our own disadvantaged households and homeless. We cannot have our own waiting lists increased whether accommodation, health or education by their arrival.
- c) We should, in conjunction with Somerset County Council and Sedgemoor District Council jointly appoint a project manager to handle all our problems to our mutual satisfaction, working in collaboration with all the other stakeholders in the community such as the police, the NHS and with the voluntary sector.

We have an overall responsibility to manage this politically, keeping the lid on emotions and allowing reason and common sense to prevail.

2. WELLSPRINGS CENTRE

The "Due Diligence" report is with you. Let us dwell for a minute on its two main conclusions. Firstly the District Auditor makes clear that the council neither acted improperly or imprudently. Secondly, the District Auditor's letter to the Chief Executive states "...whilst stronger processes in these areas might have resulted in bringing matters to a head earlier, *it is unlikely that the end result would have been different*" (my italics).

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I draw some solace from this. Firstly it illustrates that if there is to be a “blame” culture about what went wrong, it should lie fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the contractor. Fortunately the courts are seeing it that way on the few times we have had adjudication so far. Secondly it means that we can concentrate on getting the project finished.

It is without pride that I say the stakeholders have been let down. We are going to be two years behind delivering the sports centre and it is way over its original budget. The end is in sight and I believe that we will be no further contributions from the tax payer.

That is an achievement in itself and whilst recognising that we have had to use reserves which could have been identified for other projects, the consummate skill in which we have managed the affairs of the council and kept the Council Tax down to 2% is a tribute to years of good financial management by this Executive. I would remind councillors, too, that we will still be claiming strongly against the contractor for non-performance and failure to complete as well as for the rectification work to be undertaken.

What I am proud of is the extraordinary work that has gone on to bring together the proposal that was sent to Sport England on 13 February. To draw in our partners such as the County Council, Ladymead School itself and start the dialogue with Sport England as well as working with our consultants Symonds to get the maximum price identified was real hard work and dedication on the part of our hard-pressed team of officers. The Council will get an early opportunity to discuss the final position once Symonds have received the final tenders on behalf of Bluestone plc our appointed contractor.

3. VISION FOR TAUNTON

I am including the relocation of the livestock market under this heading as we cannot separate it from the redevelopment potential of the Firepool area we are working on with the RDA.

The Executive has agreed to explore further the suitability of Junction 26 as a possible site for a regional agricultural centre. The Council’s costs of this will be minimum as they are likely to be split between the auctioneers and the RDA.

At a time of agricultural decline, and with markets closing nationwide, it was right to explore with Sedgemoor the possibility of merging Taunton and Highbridge livestock markets. That this is unlikely to go ahead means that we must explore elsewhere.

Junction 26 makes a lot of economic sense and can probably be delivered quickly and cost-effectively. It may not have the lure of Junction 24 for ancillary businesses which makes it more likely to be closer to a relocation. There could be an opportunity to attract tourist interests there.

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In the meantime, it frees up the use of Firepool, combining our land with neighbouring Network Rail land to start the regeneration of north Taunton. The Master Plan approved in the budget will enable us to be most flexible in what use we put this land to. We have added the County Cricket Ground and the Coal Orchard site to this study which gives us tremendous scope to put together ideas that will enhance Taunton's role as a regional centre of significance and influence in the future.

The Vision is dynamic. It will influence people's lives for generations to come. We need to seize this chance to drive on the very prosperity that this district has achieved over the past twenty years.

We need infrastructure improvements. We need better public services. We need to protect the environment. We need to care for our people. We need relief from flooding. We need more affordable homes. We need excellent education on hand. We are working in harmony with the private sector to help deliver this. We need to talk Taunton up and aim high.

JEFFERSON HORSLEY

(b) REPORT OF COUNCILLOR STONE - HOUSING SERVICES

New affordable housing in the Deane.

We expect to see the completion of 108 affordable houses for rent during the current year, 2002-2003. This includes 15 units at Lisieux Way, 12 at the former rugby ground, 10 at Cory Road, Eastwick Road and 10 at Milson Road, Cotford St Luke.

Projections for 2003-2004 shows a target of approximately 100 houses, the larger sites being at Tonedale, Cotford St Luke and at Wellington United Reform Church.

Given the limited amount of funding available from Government grants for new housing these figures represent a good performance from the enabling team.

The housing waiting list however is still standing at over 1,400 households and we badly need additional funding from Government to enable increased provision. The South West suffers from high house prices, relatively low wages and is not being given the special allocation of social housing grant recently awarded to the South East.

Plans for housing funds to be allocated at a Regional level will not help the position unless the total allocation for the South West is significantly increased and the differing needs within the region are recognised and addressed.

Councillor Phil Stone

(c) **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR BULGIN – PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION**

The Government has indicated that the proposed change to the planning system is a high priority. Parliamentary time is being sought that could result in introduction of the new system to replace structure and local plans in 2004/5. However the Government wants structure plan making work to continue pending legislation and it would be sensible to carry it out with a view to a smooth transition to the new system. Detailed transitional guidance is likely to follow any Government announcement.

In the light of this, Somerset Strategic Planning Conference has given great thought to this and has produced a draft Memorandum of Understanding embracing the District Councils of Somerset, Somerset County Council and the Exmoor National Park concerning development arrangements arising from enactment of the Planning Bill. This memorandum seeks to pre-empt some of this issues, such as involvement of members of the business community and other agencies in the system, and sets down a process to ensure the adoption of new procedures happens as smoothly as possible.

This process is being looked at by other local authorities, we seem to be in the fore front on this.

I am pleased that the Lloyds/TSB building issues have now been resolved and that we shall soon see it brought back into use. Members will no doubt be pleased that it will not be yet another late night watering hole, but we are assured, a high quality retail outlet. I am thankful to the Town Centre Manager, officers of the Planning, Licensing and Conservation sections of TDBC, Somerset C.C. Highways and Planning sections for the effort put in to resolve the access issue with this property. We held a joint officers meeting to thrash out the issues and to reach common corporate agreement on what could be achieved. Thus we were all ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’. A following meeting with Lloyds/TSB cleared the air on the same issues, together with exploring options within the building. The outcome was what we see now, a relatively speedy outcome to the problem that had been dragging on for two years. A flagship building being brought back into use in the centre of Taunton.

Councillor Roy Bulgin

(d) **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR COLIN CROAD - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND COUNCIL BUILDINGS**

At long last we seem to have addressed the staffing problems that have beset Economic Development for the last 12 months. We have appointed Stephen Vinson from Caradon to head this critical area. Steve will report directly to the Director of Development, and will join us on 19 May. He will operate at an S.U.M. level. We have also appointed a new Tourism Officer, David McCribbin and we are about to shortlist applicants for the post of Business Development Officer, to replace Jasmine Nelson. Although remaining staff have struggled hard to fill the gaps, there is no doubt that our effectiveness has been reduced by our lack of resources.

Economic Development.

We have recently been advised of Sovereign/Heritage/Fortis reluctance to sign the Heads of Terms for the development of The Crescent Car Park site. The developers wish to undertake a thorough review of the scheme and this will take two to three months. This also means that the developers are not prepared to make any further contributions to the Council's Consultants costs until the Heads of Terms are signed.

Our consultants C Hillier Parker have been asked to provide potential options for consideration by the Council. These will be reviewed by the all-party Members Panel before the next full Meeting of the Council, but after this report is submitted.

The fourth and last Rural Workshop is about to take place as I write this report. They have been well attended and many stimulating ideas have emerged. I would like to record my thanks to Cllr David House for the way he has lead these workshops. They are very much in line with the thrust of the Government's Rural White Paper. The outcome will be a Rural Charter which sets out this Council's statement of intent. They will also inform the Best Value cross cutting review, now taking place, on Economic Development and Community Regeneration.

The Way Forward Tourism Group have continued work on developing a strategy for Somerset. The vision we have defined is "Working together to promote Somerset as a premier tourist destination". The strategy will be based on the following themes:

Marketing Somerset

A Quality Destination

A Dynamic Cohesive Public/Private Partnership

Making the Best Uses of our Combined Resources

Seeking funding from outside agencies

Spreading the benefits of Tourism among the local economy

There is no doubt that both the RDA and SW Tourism recognise that the formation of sub regional groups based on county boundaries, is an essential requisite for delivery of a high quality tourism product. It is clear that only those groups who can demonstrate that an effective private/public partnership exists will receive funding for their initiatives.

Councillor Colin Croad

(e) **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR HENLEY - LEISURE**

The work to convert two of the outside tennis courts at Blackbrook Pavilion from an acrylic surface to a porous macadam surface is complete. The colour coating is taking place in the spring and floodlighting has gained planning permission. and will be installed by the end of March.

Designs are nearly complete for the replacement of the golf pavilion burnt down last summer in Vivary Park. It is hoped that the replacement will be completed by the end of summer.

The works to replace the St James Swimming Pool roof have been completed and tiling works in the small pool are nearing completion.

The Deane is also looking at ways of cutting vandalism in Wellington Playing Field by means of shutters for the football stand.

The Leisure Department are encouraging the BBC. to possibly hold a major Children In Need concert in November in Taunton.

Councillor Ross Henley

(f) REPORT OF COUNCILLOR RICHARD LEES - COMMUNICATIONS

Although I am the member with responsibility for Communications much of my attention since our last Council meeting has been turned to financial concerns; as have other members of the Executive.

For the first time major consultation events have been held to learn the concerns and interests of the public about the shape of the Council's Budget for the next financial year.

Our corporate publication the Deane Dispatch played a part in this. You will remember that the front page of the December edition explained the context of Council's Budget setting difficulties for the next financial year and invited residents to tell us what they thought our top three priorities should be.

We were delighted to receive from this invitation over 220 replies and every one was read and considered. Many of the slips returned from the Deane Dispatch had letters attached with serious contributions to the debate on budget priorities. Every respondent has received a personal letter thanking them for their involvement.

Another new idea in production is a booklet that will go out with the Council Tax bills at the end of March. The clearly written booklet will set out what can be a mass of information in a coherent and organised way.

This work is directly in line with my determination to ensure the Council communicates early and communicates well to reflect the good work that is done, and also to report at the earliest stage our future plans.

Finally I have been continuing my research about access for all within the Borough of Taunton Deane in this European Year for the Disabled.

Executive Councillor Richard Lees
Communications

(g) REPORT OF COUNCILLOR LISGO – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

1. Introduction.
 - 1.1. I am pleased to be able to report to Council that good progress is being made in a number of important areas of the Community Leadership portfolio.
2. Equalities Best Value Review.
 - 2.1. This piece of work will be completed by the end of March. Many partner agencies have been involved in this review and have helped to develop the action points that comprise the improvement programme for the future.
 - 2.2. My thanks go to everyone who has been involved in this crucial area of work.
3. Community Strategies.
 - 3.1. The Community Strategy for Taunton Deane will be published by the end of April following consideration of the final draft by the Local Strategic Partnership at their next meeting on 13 March.
 - 3.2. The local strategy for West Deane will be published in May following involvement and views given by hundreds of local residents. The Wiveliscombe Area Partnership are to be particularly congratulated on the success of their consultation process.
4. Taunton Surestart Programme.
 - 4.1. This is a new government funded programme aimed at working with the 0-4's and their families in order to achieve a good start in life. The scheme in Taunton covers Taunton North and Taunton East.
 - 4.2. Taunton Deane Borough Council is an active partner in this scheme and proposals are to be further considered by the Executive on 12 March.
5. Grant Giving.
 - 5.1. Following changes to the way Taunton Deane Borough Council operates their grant giving, Service Level Agreements are being developed with a number of local organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Service, Citizens Advice Bureau, relate etc. This will achieve more stable funding regimes for the organisations involved as well as enhancing the Councils procurement strategy for the purchase of services from the voluntary sector.
6. "Hear by Right."
 - 6.1. Taunton Deane Borough Council has adopted the "Hear by Right" standard, providing a framework to ensure that the views of young people are considered in all that we do as service provider and policy maker.

Councillor Libby Lisgo.

(h) **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR MULLINS – ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

- **Licensing**

At a recent council meeting concern was raised that the new licensing bill included a proposal that churches would be charged for a Public Entertainment Licence (PEL), following these concerns letters were sent from the council to Adrian Flook MP and Tessa Jowell MP (Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport) expressing TDBC's concerns.

The Government has now announced that secular entertainment in places of worship shall be allowed without a licence once the new Licensing Bill comes into force.

Tessa Jowell has announced that the Government has tabled an amendment to include secular as well as religious music within the Bill's exemptions. This reflects the current position outside of London, and will generally deregulatory measures of the proposed legislation.

The Government has also signalled its intention to exempt church halls, chapels, halls, other places of public worship, village halls, community halls, and other similar buildings from the fees regime under the new laws, due to come into force in 2004.

- **Waste Services**

In addition to the introduction of the kerbside collection of dry recyclables to 38500 properties before the end of March there are further developments in waste and recycling.

The SWP has been successful in bidding for £363,000 from the second round of the DEFRA Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to provide a service for blocks of flats in Taunton Deane, Mendip Sedgemoor and South Somerset. The proposal includes the purchase of two specialist vehicles together with the purchase of various types of containers that will enable fortnightly collections of recyclables from 75 "micro recycling sites" in each district. The funds for this service will be available from April 2003.

The subsidised provision of home composting equipment will be available from Monkton Elm Garden centre or delivered direct to households. This initiative will commence in early March! (Containers available from just £5!!)

The organic (garden waste collection service commences again at the beginning of March and this year has been extended into Stoke St. Gregory, North Curry, Hatch Beauchamp, Stoke St. Mary, West Monkton, West Buckland and Bradford on Tone.

- **Food Safety, Health and Safety**

The food safety team is on target to complete its inspection programme by 31 March.

We recently had a successful prosecution of Northcott Catering, (Blackbrook Lay-by). Fined £3000 for on Hygiene issues.

Seminars on the new asbestos regulations and on accident investigation have been well received by the businesses attending

There is to be a H&S seminar for the hair and beauty trades on 17th February, in conjunction with SCAT.

- **Environmental Protection**

Air Quality Management Areas

The Orders declaring the Air Quality Management Areas in East Reach and Henlade have now come into effect.

A draft Project Plan has been produced combining the many deadlines that will lead to the publication of the Action Plan by June 2004. The Action Plan requires a significant commitment from stakeholders outside the Council and will involve wide public and specialist consultation.

Blagdon Hill Sewerage Scheme

Work by Wessex Water to provide first time mains sewerage to parts of Blagdon Hill and Pitminster has now been completed.

The Environmental Protection Team is continuing to identify properties that are causing pollution and whose owners have not yet connected to the new scheme. Attempts will be made to persuade remaining owners and, if this approach fails, enforcement action will need to be contemplated.

Housing Standards

Officers attended a Briefing by Clearsprings and follow up meetings with their management will be held at the end of this month to begin the process of joint working.

- **Flooding and Drainage**

TDBC continues to take an active part in the Parrett Catchment Project. At the well attended 3rd Annual Forum, Andrew Wilcox gave a brief resume of the work associated with sustainable drainage issues. Having secured funding from the European Union and with the full backing of Elliot Morley MP the Project is progressing on resolving the many problem drainage issues encountered within the catchment. It is encouraging to know that the format adopted by the PCP is being proposed to be adopted throughout England and Wales.

In depth (*no pun intended*), investigations are continuing at Creech St Michael, Bathpool and Lloyd Close Taunton.

Much work has been involved in liaising with local communities and their flood liaison groups, in setting up sandbag stores and in the promotion of the local Flood Wardens.

(i) **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR PARTINGTON - RESOURCES**

Members' Facilities

Every member of the Council has an important role in representing the electorate. Members have different circumstances, e.g. working, disabled, family commitments, carers, rural wards, urban wards, etc, and there are different roles of leaders, executive members, chairmen of panels and backbenchers. The council, the government and other organisations in providing information and consultation are increasingly using information technology. To establish what further facilities and training are required to assist Members, I intend to carry out a consultation exercise with Members on Members' facilities.

Councillor Paul Partington