

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 14 July 2009 at 6.30 pm.

Present The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Horsley) (In the Chair)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Beaven, Bishop, Cavill, Coles, Mrs Copley, Mrs Court-Stenning, Critchard, Denington, D Durdan, Ms Durdan, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Govier, Guerrier, Hall, Hayward, Henley, Ms Herbert, House, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, Mrs Lewin-Harris, McMahon, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, O'Brien, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-Thorn, Thorne, Watson, Mrs Weymouth, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh, Williams, Mrs Wilson and Woolley.

Also present : Mrs Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Committee

1. **Minutes**

The minutes of the Annual Meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 13 May 2009, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Deputy Mayor.

2. **Apologies**

The Mayor (Councillor Bowrah) and Councillors Brooks, Edwards, C Hill, Mrs Hill, Paul and Stone.

3. **Communications**

(a) Councillor Mrs Whitmarsh reported that she had recently visited Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Acting as an "ambassador", she had met the Mayor, Mr Dean Fortin and had handed over a letter containing greetings from Taunton Deane's Mayor, Councillor Bob Bowrah and a Taunton Deane plaque.

Mayor Fortin had responded in kind and had also sent a number of small mementos of Vancouver Island for the Mayor.

(b) The Deputy Mayor reminded Members of the dates of the Climate Change Workshops that had been arranged over the next couple of months. He hoped as many Councillors as possible would take the opportunity to attend one of these very informative sessions.

4. **Receipt of Petition**

Councillor Govier handed in a petition containing several hundred signatures in support of the provision of a Wellington Northern Relief Road.

The Deputy Mayor assured Councillor Govier that the petition would be forwarded to the appropriate Executive Councillor/officer.

5. **Public Question Time**

- (a) Mr Roger House referred to the uncertainty over the future of the Saturday Produce and Stall Market off Priory Bridge Road/Canal Road, Taunton following the decision by the market organiser to step down.

He had previously asked the Council to consider the use of the space outside The Deane House as an alternative venue for the produce and stall market and asked again whether consultation with traders in Station Road could be undertaken on this possible solution.

During the last 18 months, the Town Centre Manager and the Council had promoted all markets that had taken place within the town centre except the Saturday Market. He added that the number of traders had now reduced to the point where they could all fit into the space outside The Deane House.

Such a small community market would continue to highlight the important features of the Station Road Area without being a threat to the main town centre.

Mr House handed in a petition of over 100 signatures from concerned customers who valued the market and its traders and wished to see it continue within the same area of Taunton.

In response, Councillor Mrs Smith stated that planning permission would be required to change the use of the area in front of The Deane House. It would be for a new operator or the traders to decide whether to make an application. Such action would also result in consultations being undertaken with both local traders and residents.

- (b) Mr Greg Garner asked the following questions in relation to the Housing Revenue Account:-

- What did you believe was the minimum financial level that the working balance should be maintained at?
- What measures would you undertake to ensure that the minimum balance was maintained or exceeded?
- What was the current working balance?

Councillor Prior-Sankey promised Mr Garner a full written answer to his questions.

- (c) Mrs Dorothea Bradley asked the Council to embrace the “rural city” concept outlined in Professor Hepworth’s report titled “Envisioning the Future of the

Taunton Economy". She fully supported the report and felt the Council needed to act as quickly as possible.

Councillor Mrs Smith thanked Mrs Bradley for her support and, subject to receiving a full copy of her statement/question, would respond to her appropriately.

6. **Declarations of Interest**

- (a) Councillors Henley, McMahon, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Waymouth and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mullins and Slattery declared personal interests as Members of the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Slattery also declared a personal interest as an employee of Sedgemoor District Council. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Viridor. Councillors Mrs Court-Stenning and Mrs Smith declared personal interests as employees of Somerset County Council. Councillors Henley and Mrs Wilson declared personal interests as employees of Job Centre Plus.

The Strategic Finance Officer, Ms M Hammond declared a prejudicial interest and left the meeting during the discussion of Minute No. 9.

- (b) Formal Apology by Councillor Stone – An investigation had recently been undertaken by the Council's Standards Committee into a complaint made against Councillor Stone who had not withdrawn from a meeting of Full Council last year despite declaring a prejudicial interest. Part of the sanction imposed on Councillor Stone was a requirement to attend the next scheduled meeting of Full Council to apologise to Members for his actions. Councillor Stone was however not in attendance at the meeting having submitted his apologies beforehand.

The Chairman of the Standards Committee, Mrs Anne Elder, felt that Councillor Stone's absence appeared to demonstrate complete contempt for the Standards Committee's findings. She added that the complaint made against Councillor Stone was a serious matter for which he could have been suspended.

Mrs Elder hoped the Council would back its Standards Committee by authorising a suitably worded letter to be sent to Councillor Stone by the Monitoring Officer, Mrs Meers. This was agreed.

7. **Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Economy**

The Deputy Mayor introduced Professor Mark Hepworth of the company Geoeconomics to the meeting.

Professor Hepworth had been commissioned to develop a fresh and challenging vision for Taunton's economy based on a stakeholder consultation exercise undertaken during March 2009.

He considered that Taunton's Growth Challenge from now until 2026 could be summarised as follows:-

- **Growth Point** status meant becoming 30% bigger by 2026 – new homes and new jobs;
- **Recession** meant 'one step back, two steps forward' – jobs and businesses needed replacing (turning point in 2010); and
- **High Skill Business** had to grow 60% faster than the rest of the economy – for workplace earnings to catch up with the South West average (200% for Great Britain).

There was a real need –

- to grow;
- for economic diversity;
- to look outwards; and
- for leadership.

His recommended vision for Taunton was:-

By 2026 Taunton would be one of Europe's most successful and sustainable towns with a dynamic knowledge economy and a high quality of life.

Professor Hepworth stated that key opportunities had been identified for certain areas of Taunton's economy. These needed to be addressed in a concerted, connected and strategic way by engaging the energy, commitment, resources and ingenuity of the private, public and third sectors – and the community itself:-

- **Creativity and Culture:** A dedicated organising infrastructure for connecting and promoting Creative Taunton; on-going, stable funding for creative projects; growing creative industries; space for creativity and culture.
- **Digital and Green:** Southwest One and the IBM Partnership; a dynamic 'green economy' town; a telework strategy for public employers.
- **Health and Education:** A physical central place for higher education in Taunton; building 'knowledge communities' – green, creative and health innovation; retaining and attracting talent.
- **Production and Construction:** Modern industrial estates; a green building programme; engaging with employers; a buy local programme.

The public sector drivers behind Taunton's economy would be weak for at least a decade in Professor Hepworth's view. He therefore recommended a bottom-up approach to economic development with 'knowledge communities'

delivering the technological, organisational and social innovations needed to make Taunton a green, healthy and creative town.

Governance appeared to be Taunton's 'Achilles Heel' – the most vulnerable aspect of economic development. It therefore needed strengthening by establishing:-

- (1) **New strategic alliances between the private and public sectors** which gave Taunton's economic development strategy a strong business flavour and helped to network Taunton with other towns and cities in the United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of the world;
- (2) **New commitments with Taunton's communities** which encouraged public engagement in economic development and gave the Council a mandate to make big decisions – for example on employment land issues;
- (3) **New corporate governance in the Council**, with economic development becoming a strategic level function which mobilised commitment, knowledge and resources both internally and externally.

Taunton's economic development strategy had to be underpinned by evidence which was relevant, timely and carefully researched. This was essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes as well as for engaging and motivating 'knowledge communities' – the building blocks for a more innovative and mobilised Taunton.

After a brief question and answer session, The Deputy Mayor thanked Professor Hepworth for his very interesting presentation and he left the meeting.

8. **Comprehensive Area Assessment for Somerset**

The Deputy Mayor introduced Mr Tony Johnson, Somerset County Council's Corporate Performance Manager, who gave Members a presentation on the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

The focus for CAA was demonstrating how well Councils and local partners worked together in partnership to deliver better outcomes and improve the quality of life for local people.

There were two types of assessment for CAA:-

- (1) Area Assessment for Somerset – an assessment as to how well public services were addressing the issues that mattered most in the area, as expressed in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and Sustainable Community Strategy. The Inspectors from the Audit Commission would also assess whether the issues that mattered most were likely to improve. This assessment would evolve over time and would concentrate on what had changed year on year; and
- (2) Organisational Assessment for Taunton Deane Borough Council – this was scored on Managing Performance and Use of Resources. The

scores for these would be combined into an overall score for the Council.

The key questions the CAA would expect Taunton Deane to answer were:-

- How well did local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
- How well were the identified outcomes and improvements being delivered? and
- What were the prospects for future improvement?

Mr Johnson stated that the Audit Commission would assess how well the Council was dealing with the key area challenges affecting Somerset. Evidence would be gathered from many sources including continuing engagement with Taunton Deane and its partners and information from the website.

Taunton Deane's contribution to improving LAA outcomes across the County would be reflected in the Council's Organisational Assessment. Progress in achieving local outcomes would be assessed alongside the Council's resources in doing so.

He reported that Taunton Deane's Managing Performance inspection by the Audit Commission would take place on 21-22 July 2009. Work with the Auditors on the Somerset Area Assessment would occur on a continuing basis.

Mr Johnson concluded his presentation by reporting that the Organisational Assessment and CAA results would be announced on 19 November 2009. There would be no overall "star" rating but the Council's Organisational Assessment would be scored between 1 and 4, whilst the CAA results would comprise a narrative with either 'green' or 'red' flags.

The Deputy Mayor thanked Mr Johnson for his presentation, the contents of which would be noted.

9. Interim arrangements for Section 151 Finance Officer

Submitted report concerning proposed interim arrangements for filling the Section 151 Finance Officer post, to cover maternity leave by the present post-holder, Ms Shirlene Adam.

It was proposed that Ms Maggie Hammond, who was the Council's Strategic Finance Officer should be appointed as the interim Section 151 Officer until further notice.

Resolved that the appointment of Ms Maggie Hammond, Strategic Finance Officer, as interim Section 151 Officer be approved.

10. Recommendation to Council from the Executive

Pioneer Somerset – Moving Forward

Proposals for programme management arrangements for the Pioneer Somerset Programme and the associated resource requirements had recently been considered by the Executive.

Pioneer Somerset was a programme of work designed to radically transform and enhance the system of two tier local government across the County. It had a number of aims, principally to achieve annual revenue savings arising from enhanced two tier working of £20,000,000 by 2012/2013.

Over the past few months, a number of meetings had been held to agree how best the Pioneer Somerset Programme could be moved forward.

One of the main conclusions reached was that additional dedicated staff capacity would be a necessity to achieve this and the Pioneer Somerset Board had therefore agreed to the appointment of the following:-

- a dedicated independent Chief Executive for the Programme;
- a dedicated Programme Manager; and
- additional dedicated professional and administrative support necessary to support the above appointments.

The full year estimated cost of these appointments was £350,000 and it was proposed that the costs should be proportioned across the six Councils as invest to save bids. The apportionment to Taunton Deane was £13,400.

It was expected that funding beyond 2009/2010 for the remainder of the programme would come from savings made by the programme.

On the motion of Councillor Henley, it was

Resolved that an allocation of £13,400 from reserves to cover Taunton Deane's part of the Pioneer Somerset project management costs be approved on the basis of invest to save.

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

The following reports were made to the Council on the main items of current and future business.

(i) Leader of the Council (Councillor Henley)

Councillor Henley's report covered the following topics:-

- Pioneer Somerset;
- Core Council Review;
- The Brewhouse Theatre;

- Free Swimming;
- Budget Priorities.

(ii) **Economic Development and the Arts (Councillor Mrs Smith)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Smith covered:-

- Envisioning the Future of the Taunton Economy;
- Employment and Skills;
- Recession Support for Businesses and Communities;
- Arts and Culture;
- Somerset Tourism Partnership;
- Taunton Tourist Information Centre (TTIC);
- Rural Development.

(iii) **Sports, Parks and Leisure (Councillor R Lees)**

The report from Councillor R Lees dealt with activities taking place in the following areas:-

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

(iv) **Environmental Services (Councillor Slattery)**

The Report from Councillor Slattery drew attention to developments in the following areas:-

- Environmental Health;
- Food Safety and Health and Safety;
- Environmental Protection;
- Environmental Health Support Team.

(v) **Housing Services (Councillor Prior-Sankey)**

Councillor Prior-Sankey submitted her report which drew attention to the following:-

- Another New Housing Minister;
- Negative Subsidy Task and Finish;
- Tenant Services Authority;
- Special Executive and Full Council – 11 August 2009;
- Choice Based Letting;
- Free Event for Private Sector Landlords.

(vi) **Resources (Councillor Mrs Wilson)**

The report from Councillor Mrs Wilson provided information on the following areas within her portfolio:-

- Southwest One Human Resources Service for Taunton Deane Borough Council;
- SAP Implementation;
- Revenues and Benefits;
- Performance and Client Team;
- Southwest One Transformation Projects;
- Corporate Performance;
- Customer Contact Highlights;
- Democratic Services.

(vii) **Community Leadership (Councillor A Wedderkopp)**

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

- Pioneer Somerset;
- Taunton Deane Local Strategic Partnership;
- Community Partnerships;
- Community Safety Agenda;
- Equalities and Diversity Agenda
- Healthy Living (Cutting Carbon and Congestion).

(viii) **Communications (Councillor Paul)**

Councillor Paul's report covered the following topics:-

- Pioneer Somerset;
- Newsletters;
- Press Releases;
- The Weekly Bulletin.

(ix) **Planning Policy and Transportation (Councillor Coles)**

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

- Regional Spatial Strategy;
- Local Development Scheme;
- Design Leadership Training Day;
- New Building Conservation Officer;
- New Local Nature Reserves;
- Southwest One;
- Congratulations.

(Councillors Mrs Floyd, Mrs Stock-Williams and Govier left the meeting at 7.55 pm, 8.15 pm and 9.10 pm respectively.)

(The meeting ended at 9.28 pm.)

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 30 April 2009 at 7.17 pm.

Present The Mayor (Councillor Bowrah)
Councillors Mrs Allgrove, Beaven, Bishop, Brooks, Coles, Critchard, Denington, D Durdan, Farbahi, Mrs Floyd, Gaines, Guerrier, Hayward, Henley, Miss James, R Lees, Mrs Lees, McMahon, Meikle, Morrell, Mullins, Murphy, O'Brien, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Mrs Smith, P Smith, Mrs Stock-Williams, Stuart-Thorn, Watson, Ms Webber, A Wedderkopp, D Wedderkopp, Mrs Whitmarsh and Mrs Wilson.

1. Apologies

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Horsley) and Councillors Cavill, Ms Durdan, Edwards, Govier, Ms Herbert, C Hill, House, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Slattery, Stone, Thorne, Mrs Waymouth, Williams and Woolley.

2. Communications

The Mayor announced that Mr Charles Crowley, The Mayor of Taunton, Massachusetts, USA had paid a two day unofficial visit to Taunton Deane on 7 and 8 August 2009. He had been able visit a number of venues in the area including the Flower Show and had greatly appreciated the welcome afforded to him.

Councillor Meikle reminded Councillors of the Brewhouse Young Company's production of "Romeo and Juliet" which was being staged at the theatre on Thursday, 20 August 2009. He hoped as many Councillors as possible would attend this performance.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brooks, Henley, McMahon, Paul, Prior-Sankey and D Wedderkopp declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillors Mullins declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Waste Board. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Miss James declared a personal interest as an employee of Viridor. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Morrell declared a personal interest as the owner of leasehold properties. Councillors Brooks and Stuart-Thorn declared personal interests as Council tenants.

4. Rent Increase Decrease

The Executive had given detailed consideration as to whether to reduce the rent increase of 6.2% for Council tenants which was agreed by Full Council earlier in the year, to a local average of 2.95%.

Shortly after the Council had set its budget, the Government made a surprise announcement which sought to enable Councils to reduce their rent to a national average of 3.1%.

The Government had indicated that it would fund the reduction in the rent increase by increasing the Council's subsidy. In practice this meant the Council would pay less in Negative Subsidy.

The average rent for a Taunton Deane Tenant had been set at £63.96, but this would reduce to £62.10 if the rental increase was reduced.

There would be no significant impact on service or investment because the loss in income would be compensated through the subsidy determination. However, there would be additional IT and administrative costs, estimated at £15,000, which would slightly reduce the Housing Revenue Account Working Balance.

On the motion of Councillor Prior-Sankey, it was

Resolved that the rent increase agreed by Full Council on 17 February 2009, be reduced to a local average of 2.95%.

5. **Tenant Empowerment in Taunton Deane**

The Executive had also given detailed consideration to proposals to increase tenant empowerment in Taunton Deane.

During the past year, a small group of tenants had examined the opportunities available for tenants to have more say in the way in which their homes were managed. Following a series of meetings, a report had been prepared titled "Tenant empowerment in Taunton Deane : Next steps".

This Report provided an opportunity for the Council to make a significant difference by taking Tenant involvement to a level not seen before in Taunton Deane. It suggested the creation of a Tenant Service Management Board of ten tenant representatives and two Councillors, one from each of the main parties. The Board would be non-political and charged with the responsibility for ensuring the best possible standards of service delivery to tenants.

The Board would also have a key role in self-assessment of the landlord service against the new standards and regulatory framework being developed by the Tenant Services Authority.

To progress the work involved in the creation of a Tenant Services Management Board, it would be necessary to employ a specialist officer on a temporary basis.

On the motion of Councillor Prior-Sankey it was

Resolved that a supplementary estimate of £20,000 from the Housing Revenue Reserves be approved to enable the appointment of a temporary consultant Tenant Empowerment Officer.

(The meeting ended at 7.28 pm.)