

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 13 December 2016 at 7.00 p.m.

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

Mrs A Elder – Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

1. **Apologies**

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Prior-Sankey) and Councillors Cossey, Davies, Edwards and Wedderkopp.

2. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of Taunton Deane Borough Council held on 4 October 2016, copies having been sent to each Member, were signed by the Mayor.

3. **Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest in agenda item No. 8 as she knew someone who was closely connected to the C.O.A.C.H. Project. Councillor Farbahi declared a personal interest in agenda item No. 9 as the owner of land in Taunton Deane. Councillor Wren declared a personal interest in agenda item No 11 as his wife was a tenant of a Council-owned garage.

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

4. **Public Question Time**

(a) Messrs. Mike Ginger and Matt Day of the Taunton Area Cycling Campaign (TACC) wished to raise questions under the following three headings:-

- The need to recognise the strategic transport, regeneration and health importance of cycling in the Taunton area and to take action to exploit this potential;

- The need to work with Somerset County Council (SCC) to address 15 particular hotspots mentioned most frequently by local cyclists in a recent the survey conducted; and
- The need for better information and publicity to encourage more cycling.

With regard to the strategic case, levels of cycling in Taunton were some of the highest of any non-university town, but were still relatively low by the standards of many countries on the Continent. There was a need for significant investment in the provision of new cycle facilities and the maintenance of existing ones.

If cycling and walking was doubled in Taunton, the impact on traffic flow and congestion would be marked. Taunton had all the ingredients to become a 'beacon' cycling town, so

- (1) How would the Council work in a concerted way to achieve a high quality cycling network for the town?
- (2) Would the Council establish a regular dialogue and working arrangements with SCC and ourselves to work towards this?

As to the 15 hotspots, these were the missing cycle links such as the Taunton to Wellington route and locations where the road layout was cycle unfriendly or the road surface was poor or where there was a lack of lighting such as along the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal between Creech St Michael and the town - due to lack of lighting for winter commuting and a poor quality surface in places. Would the Council work with others to address this?

Turning to publicity, the town had some attractive routes though the Green Wedges, thanks to earlier work by the Council. But knowledge of these is not always high especially when the Taunton Cycling and Walking Map was now out of print. Would the Council work with SCC and ourselves to update and publish the map, with a view to launching it in Bike Week in June 2017?

In response, Councillor Habgood stated that he was pleased that TACC had formed and his answers to all the questions asked was 'yes'. It was his intention to set up regular meetings with SCC to discuss the issues that had been raised, particularly with regard to the routes through the Green Wedges. The time was right for the local authorities and TACC to work together and he looked forward to this happening.

- (b) Mr John Hunt referred to the absence of a Christmas Light 'Switch On' in Taunton Town Centre this year and the lack of decorations. This had proved a real disappointment to many people he had spoken to and a Facebook campaign he had started had indicated a large measure of support for a switch on event to be reinstated in the County Town in future years. Could the Council reassure him that this would happen?

Mr Hunt went on to say that he understood the Council had an Events Group which he would be more than happy to become involved with, if this was possible.

Councillor Williams thanked Mr Hunt for his question. Whilst the Council was always willing to support and assist with things like the Christmas decorations, it does need local business people and input from individuals such as yourself to motivate people to become involved. In the current financial climate, he did not believe in the wider taxpayer having to fund the Christmas lights and events as much for the benefit of the traders in the town than anyone else.

Councillor Williams added that he would ask the Economic Development Team and the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Edwards, to make contact with Mr Hunt to enable him to discuss any ideas he might have with the Events Group.

(c) Mrs Dorothea Bradley asked the following questions:-

(i) Please may I request that all Councillors who Chair meetings undergo obligatory training within the next three months in order to receive their allowance as Chairmen?

(ii) Register of Interests: The reason for this Register is for the public to be aware of the particular situation and possible influences upon each Councillor. While there is no suggestion that a figure be included, please might exact sources of support be listed which can run from a totally independent private income from investments/salary/private pension to total income support? Could the names of those Councillors who are Freemasons be also provided?

(iii) Could the percentage attendance rates of each Councillor at the Committee meetings, panels and briefing sessions that apply to each Councillor's particular situation be made available, given that they are paid a basic allowance regardless of attendance or otherwise?

(iv) If the Council really believes in the importance of culture and the arts in regenerating Taunton and moving it forward, please could this point be reflected within the title of the relevant Portfolio Holder?

(v) Would the Council consider deferring the adoption of the Site Allocations and Development Management Plan? Only the process had been considered by the Planning Inspector, not the substance. As the Core Strategy was out of date, the Council appeared not to be in a position to take further sound decisions on proposed major development sites in the area.

Councillor Williams thanked Mrs Bradley for her questions. It appeared that most of these would need input from the Monitoring Officer, Bruce Lang and a full written reply would be sent to her in due course.

(d) Mr Paul Partington drew attention to the unsatisfactory lane ropes and turning flags currently used at both the Taunton and Wellington Swimming Pools. These unsatisfactory facilities made training for events more difficult than it should be and also risked swimmers banging their heads at the end of lengths particularly when swimming backstroke.

Mr Partington also commented on the new LED lighting that had been installed at the Wellington Pool which now meant that swimmers could not see the Speedo Timing Clocks.

Taunton Deane had spent almost £7,000,000 on swimming facilities in recent years. Would the Council spend the extra insignificant sum to provide turning flags and better lane ropes at the swimming pools and the repositioning of the Speedo Clocks at Wellington.

In reply, Councillor Mrs Herbert agreed with the points that were raised by Mr Partington and promised to follow these up with Tone Leisure.

- (e) Sue Levinge stated that there were masses of new housing developments in and around Taunton and Wellington. As an observer, it seemed extraordinary that money intended to provide new, and improved, infrastructure via the New Homes Bonus should be borrowed for a number of years, to do something entirely different, such as supporting the Transformation as to the way the Council conducts its business and interacts with its users.

With regard to Transformation, it seemed that many people had been unable to separate out in their minds, the costs and benefits of the Plan and the proposed formation of a new Council to serve the current Taunton Deane and West Somerset Areas.

The projected annual savings of £3,100,000 related mainly to the implementation of the Business Plan and an annual figure of only £500,000 per annum would be attributable to the 'merger'- and this saving would not commence until 2021/2022. She referred to the spreadsheet she had circulated prior to the meeting commencing.

The reason given by Councillor Williams not to continue with the current joint working is that West Somerset could no longer afford to pay their share. So what evidence is there, that they will be able to pay the correct proportion when the Councils are merged? The indication were that the merger would lead to Taunton Deane residents subsidising those of West Somerset.

We all know that in the opinion of the neighbouring MP and of many others, the Transformation plan is flawed, that it is not going to provide what the people of this town want and that it may not work at all.

Are Councillors 100% convinced that the upfront costs will have been recouped and, in particular the relevant amounts paid back into the funds from which they are being borrowed, within the 2.29 years promised in the Transformation Plan? If you are not sure, or if you think the money should be kept for what it was originally intended anyway – I hope you will vote to support the Motion to be considered later.

Councillor Williams responded by stating that there was no confusion over the figures relating to possible future savings. It had been widely published that the Transformation would generate £2,600,000 in savings, with a further £500,000 from the joining of the two Councils.

When the Council had considered the next stage towards Transformation he had been strongly against Option 1 on the basis it was not viable or sustainable. Option 2 though offered sufficient savings into the future to enable both Councils to operate together. This was backed-up by a clear Business Plan.

With regard to the spreadsheet that had been circulated, Councillor Williams said he would not directly address the figures presented, but would pass these to the Finance Team for any further comment.

- (f) Councillor Doug Lowe, the Chairman of Ruishton and Thornfalcon Parish Council drew attention to the fact that neither of the Councillors elected to represent the Ruishton and Creech Ward had attended a meeting of the Parish Council since November 2015.

The Parish Council was very active and there were currently lots of issues where the support of the Borough Councillors was needed. He gave various examples of important meetings such as those relating to the Junction 25 employment site and the A358 where neither Councillor had turned up. There were comments too about responses not being made to parishioner concerns about housing, speeding, enforcement or flood gates.

The Parish Council had contacted the Leader of the Council for advice on this matter but had been told that they would have to wait until the next Local Government Elections in 2019.

Both Councillors had been elected to represent the local community - something that they were clearly not doing. As a result he had therefore asked them both to resign their seats.

On another issue, Mr Lowe provided an update on the success of the local programme to re-settle Syrian Refugees into Somerset.

In response, Councillor Williams confirmed that he was aware of the issues between the Parish Council and the Ward Councillors and the difficulties that had been caused where Parish meetings had been confrontational rather than the Parish and Borough Councillors trying to work together.

He had written to the Parish Council about this matter and had attended one of their meetings and had said that if there was anything that required Borough Councillor guidance or assistance, he was only too happy to provide help. He certainly did not recognise Mr Lowe's statement about the Parish Council having to wait until 2019 for a solution to the situation. It was something he certainly would not have said.

Councillor Williams went on to say that he was delighted to hear how well the four refugee families were settling into the local community.

- (g) Mr Stephen Cook of Cooks Commercials explained that he currently operated his business from a site he leased from the Council in Frobisher Way, Taunton.

He made reference to the decision made by the Executive last August that further engagement with him should be undertaken with the aim of using best endeavours to reach a solution over the sale of the land that met the Council's aspirations for Economic Development.

However, four months later the Council's Asset Strategy Surveyor had informed him that he was now instructed to negotiate with a third party who had expressed interest in acquiring the Frobisher Way site.

Mr Cook therefore sought assurance that the jobs of his 19 employees would not be put at risk and that that Council would stick to the decision it had previously made.

In reply, Councillor Williams stated that he was unaware of the current situation described by Mr Cook. He undertook to investigate the situation and come back to Mr Cook in the New Year.

5. Motion – The Proposed Use of the New Homes Bonus

Moved by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Nicholls.

“The New Homes Bonus (NHB) was introduced in 2011 by the Coalition Government following political pledges to allow communities to gain more visible benefit from new development, such as minimising loss of amenity, traffic congestion, disruption during building and countering resistance to housing growth. NHB is currently paid over six years. It is very likely that this will be soon be reduced to four years, following negotiations taking place between Whitehall and the Local Government Association.

It was introduced as an inducement to Councils to replace their reliance on the diminishing Rate Support Grant, by increasing the tax flow of domestic rates through an increase in the number of new dwellings in the respective Council areas and the widening of the Tax Base.

However, it was never earmarked for the above purpose. It is widely recognised that many Councils have used this grant to alleviate the pressures arising from the austerity measures that Local Government has experienced since 2011. Taunton Deane has so far largely avoided this means of balancing its budgets.

As we are all aware, the Core Strategy Plan adopted by the Council in 2012 has led to an unprecedented rise in the infrastructure needs of Taunton Deane. The introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy is likely to meet only some 25% of those needs. The property developers themselves are facing greater difficulties in obtaining a financial return on their investments. This in turn leads to lower numbers of affordable housing and difficulties in attaining all the District's needs in the fields of education, health provision, road provision, open spaces, cultural and leisure activities.

It is for this reason that we are setting out below recommendations to ensure that we ring fence all the present and future New Homes Bonus solely for infrastructure requirements.

The Council was therefore recommended to support

Part One

- (1) The return to the Capital Reserves of the sum of £1,218,000 identified in the paper tabled on 26 July 2016 to support the Transformation Case;
- (2) The withdrawal of the guarantee of a further £1,758,000 from the NHB towards the same Transformation Case, in the event of the Asset Management Strategy failing; and
- (3) That Taunton Deane Borough Council uses its borrowing powers to replace these funds (as they have done with the County Cricket Ground).

Part Two

- (4) Taunton Deane Borough Council should consult communities about how they should spend the money, especially communities where housing stock has increased. The NHB should be used to serve the needs of these residents thus ensuring they see the benefits of growth in their area, to help and support the delivery of employment land and affordable homes.
- (5) All current and future income from the NHB should be ring fenced/set aside to improve infrastructure such as schools, roads, doctors' surgeries, flood control, open space provision, cultural and leisure activities in the areas that have directly been affected by the new growth."

During the discussion of this Motion an amendment was proposed by Councillor Coles, seconded by Councillor Mrs Smith that (5) above be amended to read:-

"All current and future income from the NHB should be ring fenced/set aside to improve infrastructure such as schools, roads, doctors' surgeries, flood control, open space provision, cultural and leisure activities in all of Taunton Deane."

The amendment was put and was lost.

The motion was put and was lost.

6. Loan to the Centre for Outside Activities and Community Hub, French Weir Park, Taunton

Considered report previously circulated, which sought approval for a capital loan of up to £50,000 to be made to the Centre for Outside Activities and Community Hub (COACH), to enable the enterprise to enhance the facilities currently under construction in French Weir Park, Taunton.

The proposed COACH facility was both a building, including a floodable boat store, and a community facility. The intention was to provide a sustainable and functional permanent home for a wide variety of clubs and Community Groups.

The Trustees had received financial support for the construction of the new facility from Sport England and Taunton Deane. The original project was established with estimated costs of £850,000.

Noted however that the total build cost estimate had increased to £1,050,000 of which the Trustees had raised £950,000 to date. Details of principal reasons for the rise in building costs were submitted.

The Trustees had continued to raise funds and currently had bids in for £30,000 and a crowd funding campaign.

The Trust had therefore approached the Council and was seeking a loan to cover half of the funding gap – £50,000 – and had requested the option to repay this over an eight year period. The Trust was confident that it could raise the funding needed to fully complete the project, and the intention was for the Council to only advance the loans when it was clear the COACH trustees had raised all the match-funding necessary to complete the project.

As with any investment this was not risk free, however the risks were considered to be acceptable. There were financial benefits for the Council, particularly through increased investment income, as well as the community benefit for the completion of the overall scheme as per the final design.

Resolved that:-

- (a) The principle of an eight-year fixed rate loan to the Centre for Outside Activities and Community Hub of up to £50,000 at beneficial terms to the Council – with detailed terms to be determined through delegated authority by the Section 151 Officer and the Leader of the Council be agreed; and
- (b) A £50,000 Supplementary Budget in the Council's Capital Programme be approved in respect of the loan which was to be treated as capital expenditure, with the understanding that the principal payments would be treated as capital receipts and will offset the up-front expenditure.

(Councillor Mrs Adkins declared a personal interest during the item covered by Minute No. 6.)

7. Adoption of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed adoption of the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (SADMP).

The Taunton Deane Core Strategy had been adopted in September 2012.

This Plan provided an overarching framework for Taunton Deane and its long-term development over the period up to 2028. Whilst the Core Strategy established long-term requirements for growth and its broad distribution, barring a number of larger, strategic site allocations and some high level development management policies, it did not include smaller allocations or more detailed development management policies to guide decision-making.

The SADMP set out development management policies and further site allocations to ensure sustainable development was delivered consistent with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and adopted Core Strategy. The Plan included strategic urban extensions at Comeytrowe/Trull and Staplegrove as well as further allocations in Taunton and elsewhere in Taunton Deane in line with the adopted Core Strategy.

The SADMP was submitted to the Secretary of State and Planning Inspectorate in July 2015. Hearing sessions were held in early December 2015 and more recently between 30 March and 1 April 2016.

In order for the Plan to be found sound and capable of adoption it had to be 'positively prepared', 'justified', 'effective' and 'consistent with national policy'. To this end a series of 'main modifications' to the Plan were identified by the Council and confirmed by the Inspector. These modifications were subject to a six week consultation period which ran between the 3 June and 15 July 2016.

The Council was now in receipt of the Inspector's Report which confirmed that the Plan could be legally adopted by Taunton Deane subject to the main modifications outlined in his Report (which were consulted upon). At this stage the Council could not make substantive changes to the SADMP, it could either adopt the Plan with the main modifications or choose not to adopt.

An updated version of the SADMP had been prepared and circulated to all Councillors. Subject to Full Council agreement, the SADMP would be adopted as part of the development plan for the area. It incorporated the main modifications as well as some more minor changes to the Plan itself. Noted that the report contained a Council response to all of the additional modifications put forward through the consultation.

Upon adoption, the SADMP would complete the suite of Local Plan Policies which included the Core Strategy, Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan (TTCAAP) and a limited number of existing Local Plan Policies which had not yet been superseded. Together these policies formed the basis against which planning decisions would be made unless material considerations indicated otherwise.

Work would commence shortly on a review of the adopted Core Strategy and TTCAAP since all development plans needed to be regularly reviewed to ensure they remained up-to-date and fit-for-purpose.

During the discussion of this item a query was raised relating to the partial deletion of land south of Croft Way, Wiveliscombe from the SADMP.

The land had been proposed to be reserved for education purposes which was envisaged to enable the expansion of the Kingsmead School onto the existing playing fields with replacement provision to be found on the Croft Way allocation.

Unfortunately, the proposal was subject to an objection from Historic England over the impact the provision of playing fields in close proximity to Culverhay Farmhouse could have on the setting of this Listed Building.

In considering this objection, it had been felt that the Plan was unlikely to be found sound and capable of adoption without deleting this proposal - a view confirmed by the Inspector in his Report.

In the event that land was required for the expansion of the school and, subject to its availability, a proposal for the use of land south of Croft Way for playing fields could be considered as a planning application. In such circumstances there would be more information upon which statutory consultees and the Council, as decision maker, could make an informed decision. As such, if it were felt that a proposal accorded with the development plan or material considerations outweighed any conflict with it, planning consent could be granted.

Resolved that:-

- (a) The Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan incorporating the main modifications be adopted (and the Policies Map be updated accordingly); and
- (b) The response to the additional modifications attached as an Appendix to the report be endorsed.

8. **Land at Creedwell Orchard Housing Estate, Milverton**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposed further variation of an Option Agreement with S Notaro Limited for the purchase of an area of Council-owned land at Creedwell Orchard Housing Estate, Milverton.

The proposed change was almost immaterial but did contradict the decision previously taken by Full Council on 12 April 2016 (Minute No. 6 refers).

The variation was needed following further negotiation by S Notaro Limited as to when they would exercise the Option Agreement.

Resolved that the following amendment to the Option Agreement dated 27 February 2014 be approved, to be made by a Deed of Variation:-

Trigger Date – The option must be exercised within 120 days of the current planning appeal decision being made.

9. **Fees and Charges 2017/2018**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the proposed fees and charges for 2017/2018, full details of which were set out in the appendices to

the report.

Those services proposing an increase to charges included:-

- Cemeteries and Crematorium – It was proposed to increase the main cremation fee and make minor increases for other charges within the service. The income increase from this was expected to be £20,000. Of this, £10,000 was needed to support increasing costs in the service, the rest remained available to support the budget gap;
- Waste Services – The Somerset Waste Partnership proposed to make modest increases its charges for the Garden Waste Collection and Recycling Service. The price increases would allow the service to continue on a cost neutral basis in terms of the contract price paid to Kier. There remained a service subsidy in the bin costs, administration and postage associated with the respective services;
- Land Charges – Although the fees in some areas were to be increased, any surplus or deficit would be dealt with across a rolling three years such that the balance was zero on those fees which were set locally. There would be no impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- Housing Services – In accordance with the 30 year Housing Business Plan, it was proposed to increase housing (non-rent) fees and charges by applying Retail Price Index (RPI) inflation as at September 2016 (2%), with some exceptions. The increases were likely to generate £76,000 for the Housing Revenue Account;
- Licensing – Although the fees in some areas were to be increased any surplus or deficit would be dealt with across a rolling three years such that the balance is zero on those fees which were set locally. There would be no impact on the Medium Term Financial Plan;
- Planning - Previously advice on proposals which only required Listed Building Consent did not attract a fee. It was now proposed to begin charging for this service which was forecast to bring in additional income of £5,000;
- Environmental Health – The proposed increase in Pest Control charges could provide a potential increased income of up to £2,785;
- Promotional Rotunda Units – The increase in cost for this service would cover an increase in charges from the installation of banners and pennants. Any additional income would contribute towards the Visitor Centre staffing budget;
- Deane Helpline – The proposed increase in income from private customers would be in the region of £46,000 per annum. Although other costs had increased, the cost to the Council of the Deane Helpline would be reduced by £26,439;

- Open Spaces – The aim of this proposal was to formalise the charging structure for these areas. This system of charging had not been part of the annual fees and charges reports in the past. No surplus income was forecast at this stage for the Medium Term Financial Plan.

No increases to the fees charged by Building Control, Freedom of Information and Court Fees (Council Tax and Business Rates) were proposed.

Resolved that the fees and charges for 2017/2018 in respect of the Cemeteries and Crematorium, Garden Waste Collection and Recycling, Land Charges, Housing Services, Licensing, Planning, Environmental Health, Promotional Rotunda Units, Deane Helpline and Open Spaces be agreed.

10. **Appointment of External Auditors for 2018/2019**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the appointment of external auditors for 2018/2019.

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 had abolished the Audit Commission and required, from 2018/2019, local authorities to appoint their own external auditors.

Our current external audit function is provided by Grant Thornton under contract from Central Government. The external audit work currently costs in the region of £62,000 per annum.

By 31 December 2017 the Council was required to have arrangements in place for our external audit provision for the 2018/2019 financial year.

Essentially there were three options available to the Council:-

- i) Undertake an individual procurement exercise;
- ii) Conduct a joint procurement exercise with other bodies; or
- iii) Join a 'sector led body' arrangement where specified appointing person status had been achieved under regulations.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had approved Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) as a sector led body that could undertake this procurement as outlined in Option iii) above.

PSAA was a not-for-profit company established by the Local Government Association and administered the current external audit contracts on behalf of Central Government. The PSAA had established an advisory panel drawn from Local Government and Police bodies to assist in the design of the scheme.

Further details of the 'opt in' scheme proposed by PSAA were submitted for the information of Members. The costs of setting up and managing the scheme would be covered by the audit fees. Whilst the exact costs were unknown at this stage, PSAA anticipated them being lower than their current costs.

Whilst a detailed analysis of the various options had not been undertaken, it is clear that the scheme proposed by PSAA offers distinct benefits in terms of simplicity, cost, resources and time over procuring and managing a contract locally.

Resolved that the proposal to opt in to the Public Sector Auditor Appointments Scheme for procuring the Council's external auditor for 2018/2019 and beyond be approved.

11. **Recommendations to Council from the Executive**

(a) Financial Monitoring 2016/2017

The Executive had recently considered the latest Financial Monitoring Report for 2016/2017.

With regard to the General Fund Capital Programme, consideration was given to approving a supplementary estimate of £1,326,000 for grants to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) which would be funded by £624,000 from Section 106 Agreements, £572,000 from affordable housing capital receipts and £130,000 from the housing enabling earmarked reserve.

The 'Grants to RSL's' scheme was the capital funding ring-fenced for the provision of new affordable housing. These funds were allocated to specific schemes which needed additional funding to secure the delivery of affordable housing.

On most occasions these funds were paid to Housing Association Partners who also contributed funding through the Homes and Communities Agency and their recycled capital grant funding received through shared ownership and disposals.

On the motion of Councillor Williams, it was

Resolved that a capital supplementary estimate of £1,326,000 for Grants to Registered Social Landlords be approved.

(b) Review of Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/2018

On 1 April 2013 Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished and replaced with a locally designed "CTS" (CTS) Scheme. The Government provided each billing authority with a grant and expected Councils to design a CTS scheme to help those on low incomes to meet their Council Tax liability. Initially, 90% of funding previously granted by the Government for CTB was provided for localised CTS.

Whilst the Council had discretion on the rules for CTS for people of working age, the Government had stipulated that pensioners should be fully protected under the same criteria that previously applied to CTB. The Government had also stipulated that, as far as possible, CTS for vulnerable groups should be protected too.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) provided funding through the annual Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) to help meet the cost of localised CTS schemes. Each of the major precepting authorities in Somerset received the initial funding based on their share of Council Tax receipts.

In Taunton Deane, the initial grant for precepting authorities was £6,110,080, with this Council's share being £587,775 (based on a 9.62% share in 2013/2014). From 1 April 2014, funding for localised CTS had been merged into the Revenue Support Grant and Business Rates Funding Baseline and was not separately identified.

It was no longer possible to ascertain funding provided for CTS in the SFA. However, the approach taken by many authorities had been to assume the grant was being reduced at the same rate as the SFA. The SFA had reduced by 26.1% in cash terms in the two years up to 2015/2016 and by 16.2% from 2016/2017. In applying this methodology, the funding available for Localised CTS had reduced to £3,783,863.

In 2015/2016, the Councils had paid CTS of £5,476,457. This left a funding shortfall of £1,692,594. Based on the Council's precepting share of Council Tax for 2016/2017 of 9.63%, the share of this shortfall in funding for Taunton Deane equated to £162,997.

Therefore, the affordability of the current CTS scheme needed to be considered, as was the cost of the financial support provided against other service priorities and alternative options to address the overall budget gap.

The Local Government Finance Act 2012 stated that before making a scheme consultation with any major precepting authorities had to be undertaken, a draft scheme published and then consulted upon with other such persons who were likely to have an interest in the operation of such a scheme.

Consultation with the precepting authorities and the public had taken place in respect of the following four options:-

Option 1 - No Change. The Council to work out CTS in the same way as was done now. Any shortfall in the funding received and the CTS paid in 2017/2018 would need to be met from other Council budgets. Response - 41% in favour;

Option 2 - Reduce maximum CTS for working age recipients from 80%. This meant working age CTS recipients would need to pay more and the Council could reduce the funding required to support the scheme in 2017/2018 to assist in off-setting cuts in the Local Government Finance Settlement. Under the current CTS scheme the minimum contribution was 20%. Response - 41% in favour;

Option 3 - Increase maximum CTS for working age recipients from 80%. This would mean all working age CTS recipients could pay less Council Tax, but there would be an additional cost to the Council and precepting authorities. Increasing the level of support carried a high level of risk to the

Council in protecting front line services as resources would be diverted to support the CTS policy. This risk was increased in future years as the Council continued to see the funding available for services reducing. Response - 11% in favour;

Option 4 - Technical Changes. This would mean the Council could chose to align the CTS scheme for 2017/2018 with some or all of the changes the Government made to other welfare benefits. The changes known or expected to be implemented by the Government were as follows:-

- The maximum period for which the Council would backdate CTS for working age recipients would reduce from six months to one month.
- No longer include a Family Premium in the applicable amount for new working age CTS applicants, or existing recipients who would otherwise have had a new entitlement to the premium.
- No longer include the Work Related Activity component in the applicable amount for new claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).
- No longer award an extra allowance in the applicable amount for third and any subsequent children born after 1 April 2017. The Council would continue to include the amount for first and second children.
- Align the CTS scheme with changes made to the temporary absence rules in Housing Benefit and Pension Credit on 28 July 2016 to reduce the allowable period of temporary absence outside Great Britain from 13 weeks to 4 weeks.
- No longer award CTS to 18-21 year olds who were not in work.

Response - 64% in favour.

Any of the options to reduce or increase the level of support offered through CTS would have an adverse or positive impact on certain applicants or groups of applicants. If the Council needed to cut the support offered through our CTS scheme, a careful selection of options for our particular demographic would need to be considered unless additional funding could be raised through other Council initiatives or by cuts in services generally. The reality was that any revised scheme that had less funding, needed to establish which applicants were more able to pay an increased level of Council Tax with the reduction in their CTS.

There was no single option or change to the CTS scheme that could deliver sufficient savings to meet the predicted budget gap from the reduced LGFS in 2017/2018. The decision would be to choose what options were acceptable to the Council bearing in mind the overall level of finance available.

The above options had been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 20 October 2016. Members had recommended to amend the current CTS scheme for 2017/2018 to align it with changes made by the Government to other welfare benefits with the exception that applicants aged 18-21 would continue to be eligible.

Following careful consideration, the Executive decided at its meeting on 9 November 2016 to agree the proposed amendments to the CTS scheme.

A copy of the full, proposed Council Tax Support Scheme together with a copy of the report presented to the Executive on 9 November 2016 that included an Equality Impact Assessment was circulated to all Members of the Council to increase understanding of the issues prior to a decision being taken. An addendum relating to the Council Tax Support calculations to limit the number of dependants' additions to two for all children born on or after 1 April 2017 was also circulated to Members.

On the motion of Councillor Parrish, it was

Resolved that:-

- (1) Having regard to the consultation responses and the Equality Impact Assessment, the Council Tax Support Scheme be amended to that illustrated in Model 11 contained in the Council Tax Support Scheme – to align the CTS scheme for 2017/2018 with changes made by the Government to other welfare benefits with the exception that applicants aged 18-21 would continue to be eligible; and
- (2) The 2017/2018 Council Tax Support Scheme be recommended for 2017/2018 only.

12. **Reports of the Leader of the Council and Executive Councillors**

(i) **Leader of the Council (Councillor Williams)**

Councillor Williams's report covered the following topics:-

- Creating a New Council;
- Making a Difference Event – 22 November 2016;
- Welcome Return of Southwest One (SW1) Staff;
- Broadband Update;
- Budget Process;
- Deane DLO Depot;
- Longrun Meadow – New Bridge;
- Firepool, Taunton;
- Devolution Agenda;
- Relocation of 40 Commando and Closure of Norton Manor Camp; and
- Christmas Sparkle and Taunton and West Somerset Food Banks.

Due to the lateness of the hour, the Mayor suggested that rather than extend the duration of the meeting, responses to questions asked of the Leader of the Council should be made in writing outside of the meeting. Similarly, she suggested that questions for the other Executive Councillors could also be dealt with via e-mail. This was agreed.

(ii) **Housing Services (Councillor Beale)**

Councillor Beale's report covered the following issues:-

- Deane Housing Development – Creechbarrow Road, Taunton; Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington; Laxton Road, Taunton; 12 Moorland Road and 121-123 Outer Circle, Taunton; Oake; Offsite Manufacture; Development Pipeline; Photovoltaics; Extensions; Scooter Storage; and Car Parking;
- Affordable Housing Delivery;
- Welfare Reform – Welfare Reform Visits; Discretionary Housing Payments; and Universal Credit.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Service – Performance; and
- Deane DLO – Repairs and Maintenance.

(iii) **Environmental Services and Climate Change (Councillor Berry)**

The report from Councillor Berry drew attention to developments in the following areas:-

- Environmental Health – Infectious Diseases; Events; Environmental Health Reactive Works; Ongoing Noise Investigations; Food Hygiene Inspections; Private Water Supplies; Pest Control; Dogs and Dog Fouling;
- Licensing – Performance; Staffing; Immigration Act 2016; and Town Centre Licence;
- Deane DLO – Street Sweeping and Toilet Cleaning;
- Somerset Waste Partnership; and
- Crematorium.

(iv) **Economic Development, Asset Management, Arts and Tourism and Communications (Councillor Edwards)**

The report from Councillor Edwards covered:-

- Business Development and Inward Investment Marketing - Support for Digital Innovation; BREXIT Research; Taunton Deane Business Awards 2017; and Small Business Saturday 2016;
- Destination, Events, Retail Marketing and Visitor Centre – Destination Marketing, Events; Retail Marketing; and Visitor Centre;
- Town Centre Regeneration - Coal Orchard Redevelopment; and Wi-fi in Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe;
- Asset Management Service General Fund Activities - Estate Management Work; and Asset Data and Compliance Work; and
- Media, Marketing and External Communications.

(v) **Planning and Transportation (Councillor Habgood)**

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

- Planning Policy – Core Strategy; Site Allocation and Development Plan; Strategic Housing Market Assessment; Employment and Retail and Leisure Study; Local Development Scheme; and Local Development Order;
- Neighbourhood Planning – Trull and Staplehay; Three More Plans; and Community Council for Somerset Sessions;
- Placemaking – Garden Town Bid;
- Major Planning Applications – Firepool; Coal Orchard; Staplegrave; Planning Performance Government Proposal for Change;
- Heritage Training;
- Planning Staffing;
- Transportation – Car Parking Performance; Car Park Works and Updates – Orchard Car Park; Wood Street Car Park; High Street Car Park; LED Lighting; Signage; Re-lining; and Car Park Capacity – A Comparison; and
- Cycling.

(vi) **Sport, Parks and Leisure (Councillor Mrs Herbert)**

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

- Parks – Friends of Wellington Park; Tiverton in Bloom; Deane DLO Move; Vivary Park Flooding; and Fields in Trust;
- Play and Leisure – Focus on Petanque; and
- Tone Leisure (Taunton Deane) Limited Activities – Project Wellington; National Older People’s Day; Flexercise Training; Learning Disability Sessions in Partnership with Future4 Resource Centre, Roman Road, Taunton; Health Walks; This Girl Can Run; and Bumps and Beyond.

(vii) **Corporate Resources (Councillor Parrish)**

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

- Legal Services;
- Electoral Services;
- Democratic Services;
- Corporate Services – Corporate Strategy and Performance; Customer Contact Service; Facilities Management; HR and Organisational Development; ICT and Information; Southwest One Exit and SAP Replacement;
- Transformation Project;
- Finance and Procurement; and
- Revenues and Benefits Service; and

(viii) **Community Leadership (Councillor Mrs Jane Warmington)**

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

- Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- Anti-Social Behaviour;
- Team Around the School;
- Compass Disability;
- Local Lottery;
- Somerset School Mentors;
- The Value of Link Power;
- Lyngford Park Youth Shelter;
- Public Space Protection Order for Wellington;
- Somerset One Teams Information Booklet;
- Collaboration between Health and Care Services; and
- Christmas Tree Decorations.

(Councillor Stone left the meeting at 8.48 p.m. Councillors Miss Durdan and Coombes left the meeting at 9.44 p.m.

(The meeting ended at 10.00 p.m.)