

Executive – 16 September 2009

- Present:** Councillor Henley (Chairman)
Councillors Coles, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith,
A Wedderkopp and Mrs Wilson
- Officers:** Penny James (Chief Executive), Joy Wishlade (Strategic Director),
Brendan Cleere (Strategic Director), Maggie Hammond (Strategic
Finance Officer), Emily Collacott (Acting Financial Services
Manager), Ruth James (Performance and Client Lead), Richard
Sealy (Client and Performance Manager), Simon Lewis (Strategy and
Corporate Manager), Paul Rayson (Cemeteries and Crematorium
Manager/Registrar), Paul Harding (Principal Revenues Officer),
Martin Griffin (Retained HR Manager), Paul Carter (Financial
Services Manager), Phil Sharratt (Interim Economic Development
Manager), David McCubbin (Tourism Officer), Lesley Webb (Housing
Enabling Manager), Erin Taylor (Scrutiny Officer) and Richard Bryant
(Democratic Services Manager)
- Also present:** Councillors Bishop, Cavill, Mrs Court-Stenning, Critchard, Farbahi,
Hayward, Horsley, Meikle, Morrell, O'Brien, Mrs Stock-Williams and
Williams.
Mr Graham Love, Chief Executive, Taunton Town Centre Company

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

69. Apology

Councillor R Lees.

70. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 August 2009, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

71. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Henley, Paul and Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as Members of Somerset County Council. Councillor Prior-Sankey also declared a personal interest as a Member of the Supporting People Commissioning Body. Councillor Coles declared a personal interest as a Director of Southwest One. Councillor Mrs Smith declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor Meikle declared a prejudicial interest as a Board Member of the Taunton Town Centre Company and left the meeting during the discussion of Minute No. 79.

72. Mercury Abatement – Taunton Deane Crematorium

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the purchase of mercury filtration equipment for Taunton Deane Crematorium.

Tenders sought for filtration equipment had varied in both price and quality. The most favourable manufacturer quoted £551,214 plus optional extras for all three cremators to be filtered for mercury and an additional £100,000 for an extension to house the equipment.

Taunton Deane Crematorium carried out over 2000 cremations per annum and was a great asset to the Council. It was built in 1963 and had been listed due to its architectural interest.

The Crematorium's catchment extended beyond Taunton Deane and attracted business from Bridgwater, Chard and Minehead.

The Crematorium was equipped with three Joule cremators installed and maintained by Furnace Construction.

Emissions from crematoria had been regulated under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) since 1991, but this legislation did not cover emissions of mercury. In recent years, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had sought to address this issue and had consulted with the industry on the introduction of gas cleaning equipment to remove mercury emissions.

A compromise had been reached that 50% of cremations would be abated for mercury by 2012.

The current cremators were working within the present legal requirements for emissions. If these remained, the EPA equipment on each machine would need to be replaced at a cost of £13,000 per machine. Servicing and maintenance costs were also submitted.

Cost comparisons had been made with neighbouring crematoria and this information was submitted.

The installation of new cremators and filtration equipment would be a long-term investment and was estimated to cost in the region of £1,000,000. It was proposed to finance this project from savings and borrowing which would be paid back from the cremation fee income. If the Council decided to re-tender the project, a wider and more selective response from manufacturers was likely to be received.

There was an opportunity to replace the existing equipment and install new cremators and filtration equipment without extending the building, saving building costs.

There were currently savings of £35 per cremation towards this project with £230,000 already in an earmarked reserve. This left a requirement for £770,000. The estimated life of the asset would be between 15 and 20 years. Submitted details of the estimated cost of borrowing over this period.

Resolved that:-

- (1) A re-tendering exercise for mercury filtration equipment and three new cremators be authorised; and
- (2) The proposal to finance the project cost through the earmarked reserve and borrowing be agreed and the capital programme be adjusted accordingly.

73. **Task and Finish Review into Employment Land in Taunton**

Resolved that this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Executive.

74. **Non-Domestic Rates – Section 49 Hardship Relief Policy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a proposal to introduce a procedure which gave the Council, under Section 49 of The Local Government Finance Act 1988, discretion to reduce or remit the payment of rates.

There were around 3,800 non-domestic properties within Taunton Deane who were liable to pay rates of roughly £33,000,000 a year.

As a billing authority, Taunton Deane had to be satisfied that the ratepayer would suffer hardship if it did not agree to reduce the payment of rates. Additionally it must be reasonable for the Council to do so, having regard to the interest of its Council Tax payers.

Central Government had provided guidance to help billing authorities decide whether to grant relief, details of which were reported. It was clear that the reduction or remission of rates on grounds of hardship should be the exception rather than the rule.

75% of the cost of any reduction or remittance of rates could be offset against the Council's payment into the National Non-Domestic Rate pool. The other 25% would be borne locally by Council Tax payers and met from the authority's General Fund.

Historically the Council had received very few applications for hardship from ratepayers. However, it was expected the number of hardship applications would rise significantly as the economic downturn started to bite.

The recommended policy for the Revenues and Benefits service to deal with applications in a proper and consistent way was set out in detail in the report.

It was clear that each complete application would be considered on its merits and the Head of Revenues and Benefits Service would make a written recommendation to the Section 151 Officer whether to reject the application or whether to make an award.

In making either recommendation, a number of factors would be taken into account including whether local employment was provided by the applicant, the causes of the hardship, the applicant's attempts to mitigate the hardship, the impact of Rates as a percentage of overall business expense and whether the business was viable.

Where a recommendation to reject an application was made, adequate reasons would be made to the Section 151 Officer to whom it was recommended should be granted delegated authority to decline applications.

Where a recommendation to approve the application was made, the recommendation should detail:-

- The period to be covered by the award;
- The social benefit to the Council Tax payers in the award being made;
- The amount of the award; and
- The sum to be met by the General Fund and the Non-Domestic rating pool respectively.

If the Section 151 Officer decided there was sufficient merit in awarding hardship relief a recommendation would be made to the Executive for a decision to be made. In circumstances where the Section 151 Officer's recommendation was supported, the Executive would also need to make the necessary budget arrangements to meet the commitment.

Details of how an unsuccessful applicant could appeal against to refuse to grant hardship relief were also submitted.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the proposals contained in the report be supported; and
- (2) Full Council be recommended to adopt the proposed policy for considering applications for Section 49 Reductions.

75. Proposals for improving Performance Management

Considered report previously circulated, concerning proposals to improve and strengthen how Taunton Deane monitored and managed the performance of all Council services.

Ensuring the right things were being measured was an essential part of any effective performance management arrangement. Systems had to be in place to ensure performance against measures could be calculated and collated regularly, as well as being reported in a timely and appropriate manner.

Reported that in future, Performance Reports would be produced using the "exception principle" namely, only providing detail on those areas of concern

(poor or deteriorating performance) but also highlighting areas of excellent performance and summarising positive outcomes which were being delivered for the community.

It was also proposed to introduce a Performance Dashboard of not more than two sides of A4 which would provide a simplified summary of performance across a particular service area. The appendices would provide the detailed information behind the Dashboard and summarise issues and actions as necessary.

The Performance Report would be summarised into three main areas:-

- **Corporate Strategy** – detailing delivery and progress of the Corporate Strategy. This would include progress towards aims, objectives and key activities as well as results against performance indicators identified in the strategy;
- **Operations** – measuring the performance of business areas and operations critical to the effectiveness of the organisation. Included within operations would be the monitoring of National Indicators which fell within the scope of the service; and
- **Finance** – detailing the current financial position including revenue spending against budget, capital position and levels of reserves.

The performance of key partnerships would be detailed within these sections.

Further reported that where possible, performance information contained within the report would be based on a forecast of what was likely to be achieved at the end of the year, based on current levels of performance. Actual performance could be measured within the Service Performance Reports.

Indicators would be measured in a number of ways: by comparing forecast with target; by assessing progress since the previous year (direction of travel); and how performance compared relative to others (this could only be done annually).

It was proposed that a four band traffic light scheme would be used to summarise performance. This would allow for a better assessment of performance exceptions and would show quickly where resources could be reallocated to provide improvement in underperforming areas. The performance bands proposed were as follows:-

- ★ 10% or more above target (green star – solid colour)
- ☆ on target and up to 10% above (green star – outline)
- ▽ up to 5% below target (amber triangle – outline)

▼ more than 5% below target (red triangle – solid colour)

Where performance against any measure was shown to be an issue, commentary in the form of key messages setting out the reasons behind current performance levels as well as actions being undertaken to improve performance, would be provided.

It was anticipated that the performance monitoring of key partnerships such as Southwest One, Somerset Waste Partnership, Tone Leisure and South West Audit Partnership would form part of the monitoring report during 2010/2011.

As well as producing the Quarterly Report, the Performance and Client Lead and Performance and Client Officer would seek to develop a closer working relationship with each of the new Theme Managers and the relevant Portfolio Holders. Meetings would be held before each Quarterly Report was drafted to discuss the performance of the service and budget monitoring and relevant actions to tackle performance and finance issues would be agreed.

Further reported that in future the Quarter One Report would be a highlight report, only summarising those areas where services were not on target for meeting set indicators and summarising the reasons why and actions to be taken to remedy the situation.

The Quarter Two Report would be a more in depth report, focusing on areas where performance was not being achieved, highlighting excellent performance and outcomes which had been delivered as well as summarising any predictions for the end of the year. The Quarter Three Report would also be a highlight report, summarising progress and areas for concern, whilst the Outturn Report would again be a more in depth study of performance over the year which would feed into the development of the next Corporate Strategy.

The suggested timetable for introducing the new performance reporting system was submitted for information. Essentially, it would come into effect from April 2010.

Reported that at its meeting on 3 September 2009, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had suggested a couple of improvements to the proposals. Firstly, that the performance statistics were provided next to the traffic light scheme and secondly that efforts were made to try and make the Performance reporting cycle tighter.

In respect of the latter, it was pointed out that the cycle was determined by the speed at which services provided the necessary information and the preset Committee timetable.

Resolved that the proposals for improving performance management be supported.

76. Performance and Financial Monitoring – Quarter 1 Report

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an overview of service and financial performance for Taunton Deane Borough Council between 1 April and 30 June 2009.

As the Outturn Report had very recently been approved by the Executive, it was proposed to focus only on the progress with performance on an exception basis. A more in-depth report would be provided for Quarter 2 in November 2009.

The Objectives of the Council, together with the Key Actions to attain them, had been listed within the Corporate Strategy 2008 – 2011 which had previously been approved by the Executive. So far, the Council was on track to deliver all the Objectives in the Corporate Strategy.

At Quarter 1, the only local indicators which were not on target were BV 9 and BV 10. These related to the in-year collection rates for Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates. Full details as to the reasons why the targets were currently being missed were reported together with the actions proposed to address the situation.

The remaining performance indicators were either on track or were not collected every quarter. A more in depth update would be provided as part of Quarter 2 monitoring in November 2009.

In respect of budget monitoring for the period April to June, the General Fund was showing a potential overspend of £299,000. The variations from the planned budget were reported and related to a reduction in income from Land Charges (£40,000), off street car parking (£30,000), Planning (£250,000), Investments (£13,000) and recycling/refuse (£66,000). A possible underspend on Concessionary Travel of £100,000 was also reported

Reported that agreement had now been reached in respect of the inflationary increase for staff pay. The 2009/2010 budgets had included a cost of living increase of 2.5% on salaries, but the increase had been limited to 1%. This would result in a saving of £120,000 meaning that the forecast overspend now stood at £179,000.

The General Fund Reserve was forecast to stand at around £1,580,000 at the end of 2009/2010. This took into account the supplementary estimate of £148,000 for the Core Council Review approved by Full Council in April 2009.

Budget monitoring of the Housing Revenue Account in the first quarter showed a potential underspend of £60,000. This was mainly due to further slippage in asbestos works due to compatibility with the Academy computer program.

The Housing Revenue Account Working Balance was forecast to stand at around £1,800,000 at the end of 2009/2010. This took into account the

supplementary estimates of £13,400 for the Core Council Review and the £20,000 approved earlier in the year.

Reported that no budget monitoring variance for either the General Fund or Housing Revenue Account Capital had been reported.

Resolved that the report be noted.

77. **Full or Partial Flexible Retirement Policy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning proposals to introduce a new policy for full or partial retirement to meet the requirements under the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

The scheme was a statutory pension scheme with rules laid down by Act of Parliament. However, the regulatory framework had never been rigid and had allowed scope for regional and local variances and accountability.

From 6 April 2006, Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs had allowed pension schemes to facilitate flexible retirement. As a result, flexible retirement provisions had been written into the LGPS.

This flexibility was introduced to assist Local Government in managing the impacts of the ageing population which would see a greatly increased retired population being dependant on a reduced active workforce. This would be achieved by creating conditions where gradual or phased retirement would be possible and would allow for paid work during retirement without financial penalty.

Reported that there were a number of discretions within the LGPS (75 in total) some of which were the responsibility of the employing authority and some the administering authority. Some of these discretions were also subject to the requirement to have a written policy.

In relation to full or partial flexible retirement, these discretions were contained in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefit, Membership and Contributions) Regulations 2007, details of which were reported.

These discretions allowed for a scheme member who had attained the age of 55 (or in certain circumstances 50) to draw all or part of their retirement benefits (both pension and lump sum) even though they had not retired providing that:-

- the employer consented, and
- there had been a reduction in hours or a reduction in grade.

With regard to a reduction in hours, it was normal for this to be at least a minimum 20% reduction and, to meet the financial business case, usually in the region of 50%.

Local Government generally, and Taunton Deane in particular, was undergoing significant changes to meet both the financial and service delivery pressures that needed to be faced. In undertaking restructuring it was important that the Council had a range of options that could be used to satisfy these pressures.

The ability to provide full or partial flexible retirement would allow the Council to work with staff to provide an alternative to 'cliff edge' retirements which could see the retention of key skills at the same time as securing cost reductions. This would facilitate succession planning and business continuity.

Reported in detail on the financial implications of introducing such a policy. It was clear that the proposed procedure required the proving of a business case which was based on the need for the proposals to demonstrate a saving over a three year period although the requirements of the service and other non financial benefits had to be taken into account.

If the payment of benefits occurred before age 65 the benefits would be reduced in accordance with guidance issued by the Government Actuary. The Council, however, had the power, on compassionate grounds, to waive any actuarial reduction that the employee might incur and this provision had been included within the proposed policy.

Consultations had taken place with the Taunton Deane UNISON Branch who were supportive of the proposals.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the proposed policy on Full or Partial Flexible Retirement as set out in the report be agreed; and
- (2) Full Council be recommended to formally adopt the policy.

78. **Possible relocation of Taunton Tourist Information Centre (TIC) to the Brewhouse**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the possible relocation of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) from its current site in the Library, Paul Street, Taunton to within the Brewhouse Theatre building at Coal Orchard, Taunton. The report had been produced to give a high-level feasibility study and identification of the various options.

The report had been produced in consultation with the Brewhouse Theatre as one of the conditions agreed by the Executive on the 17 June 2009 in connection with its decision to award the theatre a further £50,000 in funding.

The study had considered a range of options ranging from renting space within the Brewhouse building to relocation with full integration of the Box Office activity.

Members also considered a report which had been commissioned in October 2008 titled "Review of Taunton Tourist Information Ticket and Travel Centre" which had been written by Buckley Young Associates Limited.

Some broad indicative possible costs and impacts had been calculated. If approval was given for this work to progress, a job task would be raised with Asset Management to produce a full report with detailed costings.

Tourism played a vital role in the economy of Taunton Deane and the vibrancy of Taunton Town Centre. The 2007 Value of Tourism Report produced by South West Tourism showed that the tourism industry was worth £167,000,000 per annum, supporting 3,123 jobs with 284,000 staying visitors and 1.7million day visitors. The tourism function and Taunton TIC contributed directly to this.

Taunton TIC transferred to the full control and funding by Taunton Deane Borough Council on 1 April 2005. Since then, the TIC had developed three main areas of operation:- (1) Tourist Information; (2) Ticket Centre for many local, regional and national events; and (3) Travel Centre, acting as booking agent for a number of companies including National Express, Berry's Coaches and Brittany Ferries.

In the past year it had a throughput (footfall) of almost 100,000 people with over 37,000 counter enquiries and 21,000 travel centre enquiries.

Noted that in the 2008 – 2011 Taunton Deane Borough Council Corporate Strategy the identification of a suitable site for the relocation of Taunton TIC was listed as a priority due to the forthcoming redevelopment of the existing site as part of the Project Taunton developments. This was no longer listed in the Corporate Strategy as Project Taunton had confirmed the demolition of the multi storey car park was unlikely to happen in the next three years.

Two locations within the Brewhouse had been considered as part of the feasibility study. The first option was the space in the current Box Officer / Foyer area. The second was the 'Green Room' within the building. The advantages and disadvantages of each location were reported.

It appeared that the space offered by the Green Room could provide greater opportunities to both parties, whether as a separate TIC or a combined operation. This unit would allow for a larger TIC to be established (than if the service was located within the current box-office). Being in a separate part of the theatre building, the TIC would be able to secure and lock its facility when the service was closed.

Further reported that the study had also considered the service options a relocation to the Brewhouse would offer. Again there appeared to be two options:-

- Relocate the TIC operation in isolation from the Brewhouse box office operation; or

- Relocate the TIC operation with a full merger of box office services – all run by Taunton Deane.

Although the latter option for a one-stop shop approach was the most attractive and user-friendly, a number of drawbacks had been identified including the merger of two teams with specialist knowledge and the need to harmonise opening hours.

Where possible, the early costs of relocation were submitted which included an indicative cost of £30,000 to refit the Brewhouse to accommodate the TIC. The other major costs such as the rent were unable to be calculated at this stage.

If agreement to progress exploring the options was eventually given, the following further matters would require detailed investigation:-

- **TIC Location within the Brewhouse Building**

Further exploration and a decision as to whether to locate in the current box office area or Green Room would need to be made.

- **TIC Market Research**

Ensuring that the relevant people had access to the TIC was fundamental. The TIC remit was to improve the visitor experience to Taunton Deane and to provide products and services to improve the economy of Taunton.

Visitor and statistical research relevant to the potential TIC market was required, especially footfall figures for the 'Coal Orchard' area would need researching as there were no current figures in existence.

The annual Library footfall figure was in excess of 500,000. The current location of the TIC limited its operations, as it was located in a tertiary shopping area. This was a sufficient distance away from the primary shopping streets which meant only those pedestrians using the Library, Paul Street and the nearby Multi Storey Car Parks passed the current TIC. In practice, if the TIC was to relocate it needed a location with higher footfall / passing trade. The Brewhouse location did not appear to provide this at this time.

Noted that the report produced by Buckley Young Associates had identified that if Taunton TIC was to move to a more prominent town centre premises the visitor traffic would increase substantially.

- **Replacement Box Office System**

If a merger of box office operations occurred a new box office system would be required. The Brewhouse had stated that a new system would be required and that sharing this cost would be cost effective for both organisations.

- **Box Office Commission**

As part of any negotiations should a box office merger be considered, there would be a need to negotiate the level of income Taunton Deane would gain from running this service.

- **Income Projections**

It was difficult to forecast income projections other than stating what was currently achieved in terms of income and expenditure and reviewing that against footfall levels and marketing and promotional activity to raise awareness of the new service and location. Income from the revenue generating activities of the TIC did not cover all operating costs.
- **Rent and servicing costs**

Until detailed negotiations were undertaken between Asset Management and The Brewhouse Theatre it was not clear what level of rent the TIC would be required to pay. As a result this could impact upon the overall cost of the TIC compared to current rental expenditure.
- **Personnel Issues (box office merger)**

At this stage, the Personnel issues could not be quantified. Dependent upon the outcome of this process the advice of HR through Southwest One would be sought should some form of merger be agreed.
- **Hardware**

The TIC till and telephone systems would need replacing.
- **Security**

Both locations within The Brewhouse had no CCTV coverage. As part of negotiations with caterers and the Youth Service the Brewhouse was reviewing security procedures to enable shared use of the building. A new CCTV system would be a part of this, and the Brewhouse would be keen to share these costs.
- **Service Level Agreement (SLA)**

Both Taunton Deane and the Brewhouse would require the setting up of an SLA if it was agreed that TIC would run the box office service. The SLA would define the level of service provided and set out responsibilities and priorities. It would cover issues including staffing, income and commission.
- **Publicity and Marketing**

Taunton TIC had been in its current location for 13 years. For users of the service, there would be a need to promote the fact that the TIC had relocated in conjunction with promoting the products and services that it would then offer. This could be achieved through PR in local media, Parish Magazines, community newsletters, leaflets and signage at a cost.

When this matter had been discussed at the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2009, Members had unanimously decided not to support the recommendation. The Executive had been particularly requested to ensure that:-

- the current footfall at the Brewhouse site was understood to ensure that any relocation of the TIC retained its viability;
- any decision on the relocation of the TIC had to take account of other possible locations within the town as set out in the Buckley Young report of 2008; and
- the options identified in Section 4 of the Buckley Young report were fully considered.

Resolved that:-

- (1) the comments of received from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee be noted; and
- (2) further work to explore the full cost implications of relocating the Tourist Information Centre to the Brewhouse Theatre be progressed on the following phased basis:-
 - Phase One - relocation to the Green Room in isolation to the Brewhouse Box Office Activity.
 - Phase Two - identify synergies and ways of increasing collaborative working
 - Phase Three - possible full integration of box office activity at a future date.

79. Proposed funding support to Taunton Town Centre Company for Business Improvement District (BID) Administration Costs

Considered report previously circulated, concerning a request for further funding from Taunton Deane towards the Business Improvement District (BID) administration costs.

Taunton Town Centre's BID was a five year programme of investment by local business rate payers to bring enhanced service improvements in support of retail, commerce and public areas across the town centre.

The BID was developed by Taunton Town Centre Company (the BID body) in close partnership with the Council (the billing authority) and the South West Regional Development Agency (SWERDA).

The five year programme of investment commenced on the 1 October 2007 and would conclude on the 30 September 2012.

During its lifespan the BID would invest over £1 million in service enhancements funded by the levy paying business community. In the first two years of the programme, this investment had been enhanced through

additional funding contributions from the private sector, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Taunton Deane.

As the billing authority, the Council issued demand notices to all rateable value properties within the designated BID area in October each year. The Council charged the BID body reasonable costs for the collection of the levy.

In Years 1 and 2, aggregate receipts totalled £455,706. Collection rates remained high at over 95%. However, there had been a dramatic shift in the economy during this initial two-year period.

Due to a reduction in the total number of businesses trading within the BID area there had been a small but significant reduction in levy income when compared to the BID Business Plan agreed in 2007. This was estimated at over £30,000, most of which was thought to be non-recoverable.

In planning for Year 3 of the BID, it was estimated by the Council's Collection Team that the value of total recoverable receipts would drop by a further £20,000 and, dependant on the business attrition rate, could be significantly more.

In the first two years the Council had contributed £30,000 for each of the two years from the Local authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) fund in support of the BID. From this funding £20,000 had been allocated towards 'Shop Front Improvements' of which only around £5,000 had been drawn down to date allowing for the existing contribution made to be extended across the balance of the BID contract. The other £40,000 had been ring-fenced to meet the BID administration costs, ensuring the levy collected was directed towards physical service delivery.

The reduction in levy would result in adjustments to service delivery going forward. The Town Centre Company had embarked on an internal restructure and further cost savings measures to limit the impact on services were reported.

In order to protect service delivery under the BID, and negate deeper service cuts, the Council had been asked to reaffirm its funding support to the BID over the next three years.

When this item had been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2009, Members had felt the request for continued funding from Taunton Deane should be supported.

Noted that payment of the requested £20,000 would reduce the available LABGI Reserves, currently earmarked to seed-fund future economic development initiatives identified within the Economic Development Delivery Programme, to £68,810.

Also noted the possible requirement for future funding of £20,000 per annum for each of the years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 to be considered for decision

each year prior to commencement of the BID operating year on 1 October and that projected future income values of the LABGI grant would not be able to support these payments.

Resolved that the payment of an additional grant of £20,000 from LABGI Reserves to support the Taunton Town Centre Company in providing administration for the BID contract during Financial Year 2009/2010 be agreed subject to the following condition:-

That the Chairman of the Taunton Town Centre Company submits a quarterly report in January, April, July, and October of each year remaining of the BID contract on actual and forecast BID finances and activities to a new Taunton Town Centre Economic Advisory Board, comprised of the following:-

Economic Development Portfolio Holder;
Shadow Economic Development Portfolio Holder;
Interim Economic Development Manager;
Project Taunton Project Manager;
Chairman of the Taunton Town Centre Company; and
The Chief Executive of the CEO the Taunton Town Centre Company.

80. **Redevelopment of three sites in Taunton to provide Affordable Housing in perpetuity**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the provision of Affordable Housing in Taunton.

The Council had fallen behind in the delivery of affordable homes. There were potential sites in Taunton that were owned by the Council that were 'land hungry' and in need of updating or replacement. With careful planning, these could provide up to 270 new affordable homes.

The proposals reflected the Core Council's Review, the Council's commitment to providing Affordable Housing and complimented Project Taunton.

Scheme One – Garage site behind Priorswood Shops

This scheme would entail the demolition of 20 garages and the redevelopment of an area of land with six family homes, with plenty of on site parking. It would also replace at least six garages.

A public consultation had been held and invitations had been sent to all interested parties who might be affected by the proposed development. A number of concerns/comments were raised and details were reported.

The scheme proposals would be discussed with Development Control with a view to moving forward.

Scheme Two - Redevelopment of Ruskin Close

This included the relocation and provision of a new play area and would include a small piece of land currently leased to Thales. Included in the scheme was the development of 22 flats which was under negotiation between Knightstone Housing Association and Gadds.

At least 90 homes would be achieved by the redevelopment of this area, which included 1 and 2 bed flats, 2, 3 and 4 bedroom family homes, as well as homes for the disabled and move on accommodation.

Ruskin Close was in a quiet area and close to all amenities. There was a wide age range of tenants occupying these flats providing an effective mixed use community.

The existing flats on the site were no longer fit for purpose due to the following reasons:-

- The buildings were dated and unsuitable for people in need of supported living. Noise emitted from adjoining flats in the form of door banging, walking around overhead, and footsteps on the concrete stairs; and
- Each flat had outdated storage heaters. One of the major sources of complaint was the long, open walkways across the front of the flats. These walkways were served by a concrete stairwell which is very dark and cold where vagrants are sometimes found sleeping.

In addition to redeveloping Ruskin Close there was a current children's play area that needed urgent attention.

An indicative scheme would enhance this area, making better use of the land available.

Further reported that there was an adjacent site in Wordsworth Drive which was owned by Gadds Developers. The site had planning permission for 11 apartments and had been offered to Knightstone Housing Association for affordable housing. Knightstone was currently looking to redesign the block with 16 one and two bedroom flats for affordable housing and a new planning application was imminent.

On completion of these new apartments, residents of Ruskin Close would have the opportunity to choose which of the new flats they wanted to move into, should they wish to stay in the Close, as the First Phase of the overall redevelopment.

The Statutory Home Loss Payment with associated displacement compensation would be available to those residents of Ruskin Close who qualified.

Ruskin Close could be redeveloped in three phases which meant that existing tenants could move directly into their new homes.

A public consultation had been held and interested parties invited. There was much discussion about the existing play area and it was agreed that no one wanted the play area in the centre of the development. The architect was looking at alternative uses for this area.

Residents were also concerned that the new development could increase anti social behaviour and would prefer more parking and a landscaped area.

Scheme Three – The redevelopment of Victoria Gate and associated area

There were currently 30 elderly person's flats in two separate locations, remote from one another on the site. The redevelopment would double the number of homes if the "no mans land" nearby was included.

The Supported Housing Manager had stated that Victoria Gate was an ideal location to provide a mix of general need and accommodation for older people with easy access to local services. The existing accommodation would benefit from refurbishment/replacement.

The area of "no mans land" was landlocked and future access could be achieved over Council land. The land was unregistered with no known owner. If secured, this land could be used for the development of affordable housing.

The Council would need to secure the "no mans land" through its Compulsory Purchase, with no cost to this Council. The land could then be sold to Knightstone Housing Association. The proceeds of the sale would be invested and Trustees appointed. The land could then be developed and tenants would be given the option of moving into the new flats in the area or to other appropriate accommodation in Taunton Deane.

It was proposed to transfer the existing flats to Knightstone Housing Association who would then demolish and redevelop the sites.

The present tenants in the flats at Victoria Gate would receive the Statutory Home Loss payment and compensation for displacement issues.

A public consultation had been held and details were submitted.

Noted that details of a fourth scheme at Parmin Close had also been submitted. However, as the public consultation had only taken place the evening before it was agreed that for the sake of openness and transparency this scheme should not be considered until the next meeting of the Executive.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The principle of progressing the redevelopment and regeneration of the three sites outlined above be agreed;

- (2) The land concerned be transferred to the appropriate Registered Social Landlord (Housing Association);
- (3) It be agreed with the appropriate Housing Association that the disposal of this land, should in return, give letting priority to Taunton Deane residents through the Homefinder Somerset Scheme;
- (4) On disposal of the land it be legally agreed with the Housing Associations concerned that the land could never be used for anything other than for the provision of affordable housing;
- (5) The Compulsory Purchase of the “no mans” land at Victoria Gate at NIL cost to Taunton Deane Borough Council be progressed;
- (6) Tenants’ aspirations for relocation be met, where possible; and
- (7) The Council would work closely with all the residents in each of the above locations and keep them informed.

81. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following item because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 1 of Schedule 12(A) to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

82. The Future of the Home Improvement Agency and Handyperson Services

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the impending changes to the funding and delivery of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in Somerset.

HIAs provided a service to vulnerable Client Groups, supporting applications for Disabled Facility Grants and discretionary repairs across the private and public housing stock. They provided case-workers to assess need, liaise with contractors and ensured work was undertaken and completed to the client’s satisfaction. HIAs also administered Handyperson schemes to provide a basic home repair service to vulnerable clients at a subsidised cost across all housing tenures.

Supporting People had decided that the current provision of HIAs across Somerset was no longer appropriate and were working with the other Somerset commissioners (including Taunton Deane) to commission a County-wide service from June 2010, which would include a Handyperson Scheme.

Submitted full details of the proposed new arrangements and how they would affect Taunton Deane.

Reported that under the new arrangements, Supporting People would be required to provide funding for a County-wide handyperson service. This gave the Council the option to withdraw our funding and rely on the HIA provided Handyperson service, or to add our funding into the 'pot' for an enhanced Taunton Deane Handyperson service.

Noted that any additional funding we chose to provide for a Handyperson Scheme would be paid to the new Home Improvement Agency to 'top up' the standard service. It would be counterproductive to run an additional scheme with different contact details and pricing models as this would prove confusing to customers and would compete directly with the new HIA.

The proposed funding commitment to the County-wide HIA was also reported.

When this item had been considered at the Community Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2009, Members felt unable to support the proposal on the information that had been supplied. The Committee was concerned that there could be a deterioration in the Handyperson Scheme for the people of Taunton Deane. Accordingly, it was agreed to inform the Executive that the Handyperson Scheme should remain at Taunton Deane until proven to be unnecessary.

The Strategy and Corporate Manager, Simon Lewis, reported a communication from Ms Viv Streeter of Supporting People which confirmed that a series of performance targets would be set to ensure that current levels of service received under the Handyperson Scheme were maintained.

Members of the Executive also felt that it would not be economic to continue funding Taunton Deane's own Handyperson Scheme alongside one provided by the HIA.

Resolved that the proposed funding commitment to Supporting People for the County-wide Home Improvement Agency be agreed.

(The meeting ended at 8.14 p.m.)