

Executive – 17 June 2009

Present: Councillor Wedderkopp (Vice-Chairman) (In the Chair)
Councillors Coles, R Lees, Paul, Prior-Sankey, Slattery, Mrs Smith
and Mrs Wilson

Officers: Shirlene Adam (Strategic Director), Joy Wishlade (Strategic Director), Kevin Toller (Strategic Director), Tonya Meers (Legal and Democratic Services Manager), Tim Burton (Development Manager), Lizzie Watkin (Management and Financial Accounts Operations Manager), Ruth James (Performance and Client Lead), Emily Collacott (Acting Financial Services Manager), James Barra (Chief Environmental Health Manager), Maggie Hammond (Strategic Finance Officer), Phil Sharratt (Economic Development Manager), Erin Taylor (Scrutiny Officer), Adrian Priest (Asset Holdings Manager) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Bishop, Cavill, Mrs Court-Stenning, Critchard, Edwards, Farbahi, Gaines, Hall, Hayward, Ms Herbert, Horsley, House, Mrs Lewin-Harris, Meikle, Morrell and Williams.
Ian Franklin and Mark Green from Project Taunton.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

44. Apology

The Chairman (Councillor Henley).

45. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 30 April 2009, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

46. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Paul declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council. Councillor Prior-Sankey declared personal interests as a Member of Somerset County Council, the Somerset Waste Board and the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership. 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.

47. A Review into the viability of the Council providing increased funding to the Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton

Submitted for information and comment, the recommendations of the Task and Finish Review into the viability of the Council providing increased funding to the Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton.

Councillor Meikle, the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group explained that the Task and Finish Review had been set up to seek a solution to bridge the Brewhouse Theatre's budget gap.

At its first meeting, the Task and Finish Review had agreed that its terms of reference should be to recommend a sustainable future for the Brewhouse Theatre, with the role of amateur companies explored as one of the issues.

A series of meetings of the Task and Finish Review had been held and evidence had been collected from a number of sources including the Brewhouse Theatre, the amateur groups and the Arts Council.

In the past few weeks, the Task and Finish Review had discussed the recommendations it wished to make and these had been considered and supported by the Community Scrutiny Committee on 26 May 2009. These recommendations were as follows:-

Recommendation 1

That the Council should alter its grant to £200,000 per year, subject to the following conditions:-

- The Section 151 Officer was satisfied with the Business Plan;
- The Amateur Groups had a greater involvement (including choice of theatre dates);
- The Trustees moved towards further numbers of volunteers to assist in the reduction of staff costs; and
- The Tourist Information Centre be removed from the budget for the forthcoming year.

Recommendation 2

That the Brewhouse Management engaged and actively worked with Taunton Deane to encourage and provide new links to other cultural organisations.

Recommendation 3

That the Board of the Brewhouse accepted the re-introduction of a Taunton Deane Monitoring Panel to meet with them monthly. Such information to be effectively transmitted to all Councillors.

Although the Executive strongly supported the provision of a further grant of £50,000 to the Brewhouse Theatre in the current financial year, Members felt unable to guarantee the same level of funding in 2010/2011. Although there would be a presumption that a similar amount would be made available to the theatre in Year 2, it was agreed that this should form part of the Council's overall budget considerations before a final decision was made.

On this basis, Councillor Mrs Smith proposed the following amendment to replace the three recommendations of the Task and Finish Group. This

amendment was seconded by Councillor Coles:-

“That:-

- (1) An additional grant of £50,000 be provided in the current financial year to the Brewhouse Theatre funded from vacancy savings in Theme 1 of the Core Council Review (£10,000), unallocated Local Authority Business Growth Initiatives funding (£10,000) and an interest policy change (£30,000);
- (2) The management of the Brewhouse Theatre be required to engage and actively work with Taunton Deane to encourage and provide new links to other organisations;
- (3) In particular, the management of the Brewhouse Theatre be required to work with the Youth Service to find a solution within the building for joint location. An agreement to be in place by September 2009;
- (4) Works with Taunton Deane in connection with the joint location of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) be progressed, together with works to enable Taunton Deane to formulate a robust business plan for the possible move by September 2009;
- (5) Arrangements be put in place to enable the amateur groups to have a greater involvement in the Brewhouse Theatre;
- (6) A plan for the further use of volunteers be developed;
- (7) A monthly reporting mechanism to Taunton Deane be agreed; and
- (8) The management of the Brewhouse Theatre be required to move the staff car parking off site permanently so that the works to the area to the side and at the front of the theatre could be upgraded.”

This amendment prompted considerable discussion and calls for the details contained in the confidential appendices to be debated.

Prior to considering the Outline Projections submitted by the theatre for the period 2009-2014 and the Council’s Section 151 Officer’s comments in response, the Executive **resolved**:-

“that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting because of the likelihood that exempt information would otherwise be disclosed relating to Clause 7 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.”

The Section 151 Officer, Shirlene Adam, confirmed that the business plan submitted by the Brewhouse, which included the proposed £50,000 additional grant was robust.

Despite further discussions in connection with the Year 2 funding, the Executive agreed that the proposed wording of the amendment was appropriate. The amendment was put and was carried.

The substantive Motion which is set out below was put and was carried.

Resolved that:-

- (1) An additional grant of £50,000 be provided in the current financial year to the Brewhouse Theatre funded from vacancy savings in Theme 1 of the Core Council Review (£10,000), unallocated Local Authority Business Growth Initiatives funding (£10,000) and an interest policy change (£30,000);
- (2) The management of the Brewhouse Theatre be required to engage and actively work with Taunton Deane to encourage and provide new links to other organisations;
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- (6) A plan for the further use of volunteers be developed;
- (7) A monthly reporting mechanism to Taunton Deane be agreed; and
- (8) The management of the Brewhouse Theatre be required to move the staff car parking off site permanently so that the works to the area to the side and at the front of the theatre could be upgraded.

48. Review of Parish Delegation Procedures

Considered report previously circulated, concerning Taunton Deane's Parish Delegation Scheme which had been set up in the early 1990s. It remained the only scheme of its type in the country.

The agreements with the eight parishes involved (Wellington, North Curry, Burrowbridge, Stoke St Mary, Milverton, Pitminster, Bishops Lydeard and Ruishton) had now expired and it was appropriate to consider whether new agreements should be negotiated.

Whilst the original motivations behind the scheme, which were to enable decision making at a very local level and to improve communication between Taunton Deane and the Parish Councils remained valid, a number of concerns and issues had been raised. These included:-

- Changes to the scheme introduced in 2002, in an attempt to reduce the resource implications and speed up decision making, had unfortunately led to a situation where Parish Councillors could fetter their discretion by considering applications without a Planning Officer being present or having all the relevant facts available. The possibility of the Parish Councils being left vulnerable to challenge was not an acceptable situation to be in;
- The operation of the scheme created additional resource implications for the Development Management Team at a time when all advice was

suggesting that resources should be redirected away from minor proposals towards major developments that delivered the growth agenda;

- The operation of the scheme had an adverse impact upon performance against the relevant national indicators; and
- Improvement in Information Technology meant that the benefits from Parish Clerks notifying neighbours of proposals no longer applied.

This matter had previously been reported to the Planning Committee on 30 March 2009. Representatives from the Parishes had addressed the Committee and all those who had spoken said that they appreciated the scheme and wished it to continue.

The Planning Committee had made a number of observations for consideration by the Executive including the following:-

- (a) It was wrong to have a system that applied only to eight parishes and could not be extended due to resource implications. There should not be a two tier system;
- (b) The scheme was resource hungry, particularly when officers had to attend meetings that did not even start until 8pm;
- (c) Concern over the ability and training of Parish Councillors. The provision of additional training would only add to the resource implications of retaining the scheme;
- (d) Whether the scheme continued or not, Parish Council opinions remained important;
- (e) Parish Councillors should not be put in a position where they might fetter their discretion leading to decisions being challenged;
- (f) Parish Councils generally did a good job and the scheme should continue. However, there were things that needed to be tightened up; and
- (g) Due to changes in appeal processes, Parish Council minutes would need to be very full.

Reported that if the scheme was to continue it could only practically do so if all relevant applications were considered with a full report and a Planning Officer present. To do this would mean Planning Officers attending more meetings (with associated additional costs) and would also restrict opportunities for further improvement against the relevant national indicators.

The question that also needed to be asked was whether this scheme was actually providing value for money to the Taunton Deane Council Tax payer.

It was therefore suggested that the cost of supporting the scheme (which primarily involved the cost of sending officers to meetings) should be met by the Parish/Town Councils themselves. The Development Manager, Tim Burton, informed Members that the cost of attendance by a Planning Officer to each meeting where applications were going to be determined had been calculated at £90 per appearance.

The administrative procedures associated with the scheme resulted in additional tasks for Parish Clerks without adding value to the process and irrespective of any changes to the decision making aspects, it was also suggested that the requirement for Parishes to carry out notification should be deleted from the agreements.

Prior to discussing this matter, Members heard from representatives from Pitminster and North Curry Parish Councils. Written representations had also been submitted by Milverton and Stoke St Mary Parish Councils.

Whilst fully accepting that the scheme did need “tightening up”, Members were concerned about the introduction of charging for the attendance of Planning Officers at a time when all Parish Precepts had been agreed.

In the circumstances, it was felt that charging should not be implemented until 1 April 2010. This would give the eight parishes in the scheme ample time to decide whether they wished to continue to participate in the determination of planning applications and if they did, to make the necessary financial arrangements.

Resolved that:-

(1) The scheme should continue in respect of the decision making elements only, but with the cost of supporting the decision making process being met by those Parish/Town Councils involved;

(2) The agreements be amended to require those Parish/Town Councillors determining applications to undertake appropriate levels of training. The agreements to also contain additional requirements relating to minute taking and timing of meetings; and

(3) The introduction of the £90 per meeting charge be deferred until 1 April 2010 to enable those Parish/Town Councils who wished to continue to participate in the scheme to amend their budgets accordingly.

49. **Pioneer Somerset – Moving Forward**

Reference Minute No 5/2009, considered report previously circulated, which set out proposals for programme management arrangements for the Pioneer Somerset Programme and the associated resource requirements.

Pioneer Somerset was a programme of work, supported by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programme (REIP), designed to radically transform and enhance the system of two tier local government across the County. It had three aims which were:-

- To achieve annual revenue savings arising from enhanced two tier working of £20m, by 2012/2013 (base year 2007/2008);

- For every principal authority in Somerset to achieve levels of overall resident satisfaction in the National top quartile by 2013; and
- To achieve a marked improvement in the perception, reputation and recognition of Somerset and each of its local authorities, including positive Direction of Travel and Use of Resources ratings in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment of level 3 or above by 2013.

A recent assessment by SOLACE Enterprises Limited had been carried out to review progress with the programme; identify barriers to future delivery and assist the Pioneer Somerset Board to develop solutions to move the programme forward. This had culminated in a workshop on the 17 April 2009 which involved the Pioneer Somerset Board, Deputy Leaders, Chief Executives and key officers from the Directors Group.

Significant progress had been made in a number of areas, including the following:-

- Re-affirmation of the vision and outcomes of the Programme;
- Re-affirmation of the previously agreed priority work streams as part of the Phase 1 report - customer access, shared services and community leadership. An additional fourth priority work stream had also been added;
- Identified a number of 'first priority' shared service proposals which officers had produced for consideration by the Pioneer Somerset Board; and
- Agreed programme management arrangements considered essential to build and maintain momentum with the programme. Each Leader would ensure that any necessary approvals were obtained in their Council in order to put the resources in place to establish the programme management arrangements.

The budget difficulties that the public sector and in particular local authorities would be likely to face in forthcoming years were discussed. National indications suggested that the original efficiency savings target applied to Pioneer Somerset would be insignificant, alongside the likelihood of more substantial public sector budget reductions in the future. Radical action was required by the six councils to prepare the sector for the impact of this level of budget reduction and this was added as a fourth priority work stream.

The Pioneer Somerset Board had a rolling programme of shared service schemes which signalled their future intent. A workshop to discuss forward budget planning and how Councils could support each other in achieving the level of savings was planned for July 2009.

In order to provide a greater level of clarity and impetus to the shared service options under the priority work stream, officers had been instructed to bring

forward proposals as a matter of urgency in four key areas which offered potential for shared services:-

- the virtual 'majors' team proposal;
- operational Housing / Strategic Housing functions;
- Equalities and Diversity functions; and
- Legal Services.

The Pioneer Somerset Board had also asked the Somerset Waste Partnership to actively market the partnership to neighbouring authorities beyond the County boundary. It was clear from research into two-tier 'pathfinders' that in the area of 'waste' Somerset was well ahead 'of the game' and the Board considered that there was potential to benefit from this.

The unexpected loss of the appointed Programme Manager in June 2008 had stalled delivery of the programme. If the momentum now being achieved was to be maintained, additional dedicated officer capacity for the programme would be essential. This re-affirmed the view of the Joint Scrutiny Panel. Various options had been considered but the Pioneer Somerset Board had 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.

Further RIEP funding was not available to support these appointments. The Leaders had therefore agreed to seek the necessary resources from their respective Councils up to a total budget of £350,000 (full year estimated costs) and 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.

The programme management appointments were considered essential if the potential benefits of Pioneer Somerset were to be achieved.

The proposals contained within the report had been considered by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 8 June 2009. Members had expressed considerable concern and had decided not to support this suggested way forward, recommending that Pioneer Somerset found alternative ways of creating meaningful savings without investing additional money. The Committee also took the view that there was no need for an additional layer of management, particularly in the light of the original Unitary bid which stated that the Council's had excessive senior management.

Despite these views, Members agreed that Pioneer Somerset had to move forward and that the proposals outlined appeared to be acceptable. It was also noted that all of the other Districts and the County Council had already agreed to meet their proportions of the additional costs involved.

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

50. **Treasury Management Outturn 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 Update**

Submitted report previously circulated, which detailed the treasury management activities for 2008/2009 and the current position to date for the 2009/2010 financial year.

The Council's Debt, as at 31 March 2009, stood at £15,000,000 following restructuring.

It was noted that the Bank of England had reduced rates seven times during the year from 5.25% to the current all time low of 0.5% as at 31 March 2009. This had been in response to the well publicised 'credit crunch' which had led to the current recession. Fixed rate borrowing of £12,000,000 had been repaid. £6,000,000 of this was replaced with one year variable rate borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). It was anticipated that the remaining £6,000,000 would be borrowed in 2009/2010. This would take advantage of the expected long term lower cost of this debt.

Noted that the average consolidated rate of interest on the total portfolio for 2008/2009 was 5.01%. Investments had partly diminished due to the repayment of PWLB borrowings.

Reported that the level of investments outstanding at 31 March 2009 amounted to £5,300,000. The average range of interest rates achieved during 2008/2009 was 0.6% - 6.38%. Interest earned on these investments amounted to £914,000 of which approximately £735,000 was allocated to the General Fund, and the balance to the Housing Revenue Account and some internal reserves and funds.

Further reported that for the current year interest rates were likely to remain unchanged and that it was not envisaged that any additional borrowing would be undertaken other than the completion of the debt restructuring.

The short term variable rate loan of £6,000,000 would be repaid to the PWLB in November 2009. As at 3 June 2009, sums totalling £14,500,000 had been invested at interest rates ranging from 0.30% - 1.33%.

Resolved that the treasury management outturn for 2008/2009 and the position to date for 2009/2010 be noted.

51. **Proposal to move Standing Order 29(1)**

With the three hour limit having been reached, **resolved** that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to allow the meeting of the Executive to be extended by an additional 30 minutes.

52. Performance Monitoring – Outturn Report on 2008/2011 Corporate Strategy, 2008/2009 Financial Outturn and 2008/2009 Performance Indicators

Reported that the monitoring of budgets, the Corporate Strategy Objectives and Performance Indicators was an important part of the Council's overall performance management framework. Submitted report previously circulated, which outlined the final data for 2008/2009.

In respect of budget monitoring, the General Fund Revenue outturn showed an underspend of £46,000 or 0.33% when compared with the current budget.

The General Fund Capital Programme expenditure for the year amounted to £8,508,000 against a total budget for the year of £6,361,000. This overspend was due to Project Taunton which had been funded externally. This had left a genuine underspend of £697,000 which would be rolled forward into the 2009/2010 budget.

The Housing Revenue Account outturn showed a working balance carried forward into 2009/2010 of £2,757,000 which was £10,000 or 0.34% less than predicted in the most recent budget monitoring report. Members noted the reasons for this variance.

The Deane Helpline had made a surplus of £10,000 which was above budget monitoring projections. The balance on the Deane Helpline Trading Account at 31 March 2009 amounted to £12,664.

Housing Revenue Account Capital expenditure amounted to £5,366,000 against the current budget of £6,085,000. This underspend had been identified via budget monitoring and would be slipped into 2009/2010 increasing the programme available.

During the year, the Deane DLO made an overall trading surplus of £95,000. The balance on the DLO Reserve as at 31 March 2009 would be £507,000. A summary of performance for both 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 was submitted.

With regard to the Corporate Strategy 2008-2011, the Objectives of the Council together with the Key Actions to attain them had been listed within the Corporate Strategy which had previously been approved by the Executive.

Progress for the year against the 21 objectives was good and details were submitted. 52% of the Corporate Strategy objectives were on course with 38% either partially completed or with action pending.

Also reported that 50% of 24 statutory and local Performance Indicators for 2008/2009 were also on target.

The progress being made with the Local Area Agreement National Indicators and the Southwest One Performance Indicators were also reported.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The draft outturn positions on revenue and capital for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account for 2008/2009 be noted; and
- (2) The performance against targets for both the Corporate Strategy and national and local indicators for 2008/2009 be noted.

53. **Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook and Related Policy Issues**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the review, renewal and consolidation of a number of existing hackney carriage and private hire driver policies.

The Licensing Department had been working with the local taxi trade to review and consolidate a number of previous decisions and practices undertaken by the Council. The purpose was to draw all the recommendations, policies, practice and conditions into one document. The document would be named the "Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook" and once approved, would be the definitive source of information for those in the trade, officers and other agencies. The draft of this handbook was submitted.

Previously the Council had removed the restriction on the number of Hackney Carriages in Taunton Deane. In response to Government Policy in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, a resolution was made that all new licensed Hackney Carriages would need to be wheelchair accessible. A period of protection until 2005 was granted for the existing saloon fleet. This date was then extended to 2012. The Department for Transport (DfT) had launched a consultation document on 'Improving Access to Taxis' which had raised the following points:-

- Disability Discrimination Act compliance could not be seen as just providing wheelchair accessible vehicles;
- There was a recognition that disability could take many forms and therefore different types of vehicle could provide the best response to this; and
- The current make up of the Taunton Deane fleet compared favourably with the national statistics in terms of proportion of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

There were currently 140 Hackney Carriages in Taunton Deane, of which 86 were wheelchair accessible. There were 54 saloon vehicles and a total of 60 of plates 1 – 63 were currently occupied.

Until there was clear direction from Government, it was proposed that the number of saloon vehicles would be set at a maximum of 65. 65 plates would be specifically allocated as saloon plates which would be allocated to existing users of such plates. Any remaining saloon plates would be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

The Council had previously agreed that any newly licensed vehicle would have to comply with a standard livery requirement. However, this had never been implemented. The imposition of any new scheme would have to include a considerable lead time of 5 years, so that any consequent vehicle change could be planned by vehicle operators.

Reported that there was no evidence to suggest that any potential benefits outweighed the considerable outlay to the trade in implementing a livery scheme.

The Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook had been developed to consolidate information in relation to the Council's approach to taxi licensing.

The Handbook would be an evolving policy document for use by all in the trade. The Handbook would be sent out with every new application and would be available on the Council's website for viewing, or downloading.

The more important issues contained in the Handbook were detailed. In addition it was intended to remove the requirement for vehicle engines to be at least 1400 cubic capacity. This would allow the trade to explore smaller engine and/or alternate fuel vehicles to address environmental concerns.

It was intended that future minor amendments to the Handbook would be made in agreement with the Principal Licensing Officer and the Chairman of the Licensing Committee. Major changes would be referred to the Licensing Committee for agreement.

Extensive consultations had been undertaken in developing the handbook with the local taxi trade. Comments from the consultation had been included in the Handbook. There appeared to be broad support for the principle and contents of the Handbook from the trade.

Consultation had also been undertaken with the Access Officer from the Taunton Deane Disability Forum. The Forum supported maintaining the fleet balance of saloons and wheelchair accessible vehicles as currently existed. The Forum reported a lack of available Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles between 8 and 9am and 3 and 4pm. However this was due to bookings related to taking children to and from school which was a problem for all styles of vehicles and customers.

The Forum had also reported more concerns about allegations relating to taxi driver behaviour in that some taxi drivers were sometimes unwilling to take wheelchair users and excuses were made or wheelchair users were allegedly blatantly ignored. This type of behaviour was contrary to existing drivers conditions and would be investigated separately.

The Licensing Committee had considered this matter at its meeting on 28 April 2009 and had fully supported the recommendations.

Resolved that:-

(1) The resolutions 4 and 5 of the Environmental Services Committee of 17 November 1998 (Minute No. 50/1998 relating to vehicle livery) be repealed;

(2) The previous Executive resolutions 1 and 2 of 19 December 2001 (Minute No. 136/2001 relating to wheelchair accessible vehicles) also be repealed;

(3) The Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook, with the policy implications that this entailed; including the issue of two unallocated saloon plates to new operators be adopted;

(4) Any future changes to the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook be undertaken with prior consultation with the taxi trade through the Taunton Deane Taxi Association and Taunton Deane Disability Forum and that any future changes be approved by the Licensing Committee at the discretion of the Chairman of the Licensing Committee; and

(5) The following conditions contained within the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook, under the provisions of Part II of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, be adopted:-

- Standard Conditions for A Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Driver's Licence;
- Standard Conditions for Private Hire Operators Licence;
- Standard Conditions for a Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licence;
- Standard Conditions for a Private Hire Vehicle Licence;
- Conditions for vehicle testing and Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Test Criteria.

54. 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 9 of Schedule 12A 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.

55. Potential Purchase of Capital Asset, Taunton

Considered report previously circulated, detailing the proposal to purchase a capital asset.

An opportunity had arisen for the council to consolidate the ownerships of an area of land in Taunton. This would not only ensure that a key employment site was brought back into use but would also be a valuable asset for the Council opening up a number of options for future uses.

A valuation of the site and its potential for income generation had been undertaken and this was submitted for the information of Members. This document also contained a full description of the site and the buildings.

Taunton was short of employment land and the purchase would safeguard employment use on this site. It was also adjacent to some of Taunton Deane's own housing and it would be possible to use some of the site for affordable housing, if the Council wished.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The purchase of the site as a key investment for the Council be approved in principle;
- (2) Following the provision of the full survey report and further financial analysis, the decision as to the purchase of the land be fully investigated by the Leader and Portfolio Holder together with the Chairman of the Corporate Scrutiny Panel and the Shadow Portfolio Holder, with the final decision being made at a special meeting of the Executive;
- (3) Borrowing be approved for costs that could not be met from other public funding available up to a sum to be agreed by the Executive. The borrowing strategy to be developed but initially should be on as short term a basis as possible with the payment of the debt from the sale of other assets;
- (4) A report on the potential for the disposal of those and any other relevant assets mentioned be prepared with the view that the income be used to replace any borrowing incurred;
- (5) A small group of officers and Members be set up to develop a strategic plan for the use of the site;
- (6) Should the site be purchased, commercial agents be engaged to market the site to potential occupiers; and
- (7) The income from the site be used in the following priority order:-

- (a) To service any debt arising from the purchase;
- (b) To replace the current annual income to the Council;
- (c) To support the delivery of regeneration (currently Project Taunton) post 2010/2011; and
- (d) To support the General Fund.

(The meeting ended at 10.10 p.m.)